



The Stories that Flags Can Tell Us Primary Sources from WWII

A Lesson from
the Education Department

The National WWII Museum
945 Magazine Street
New Orleans, LA 70130
(504) 528-1944

www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education

The Stories that Flags Can Tell Us

Primary Sources from WWII

The American flag is an important part of our lives as United States citizens. It is a symbol that we encounter almost daily in schools, in front of government buildings and as a prominent part of parades, sports and military events. Many people have strong feelings about the American flag, and there are rules which guide us on how the flag can be displayed and what it can be used for.

Flags can also be primary sources that tell us stories about the past. In this lesson, three WWII flags from The National WWII Museum's collection will be introduced, along with supporting documents. Students will analyze them as historic sources to learn more about the role that each played in WWII and the people and stories that surround them.

- OBJECTIVES:** Students will be able to:
- Define primary and secondary sources and identify examples of each.
 - Discuss the American flag as a symbol and identify the different meanings and roles that the flag has in society today.
 - Use observation and critical thinking skills to analyze three WWII flags as primary historical sources about the WWII experience.
 - Reflect on their personal connections with the flag.

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

STANDARDS: **Common Core ELA Standards for Writing & Literacy in History/Social Studies (6-8)**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

National Center for History in the Schools

Historical Thinking Standard 2: the student comprehends a variety of historical sources and can identify the central historical questions and perspectives of a narrative, and draws upon visual sources.

Historical Thinking Standard 3: the student engages in historical analysis and interpretation.

TIME REQUIREMENT: 60-75 minutes

MATERIALS: Copies of primary source set handouts (three separate flag images & supporting documents)
The American Flag as a Symbol worksheet
"Flag Detective" Groups Source Analysis worksheet

KEY TERMS:

- **Patriotism:** love for or devotion to one's country.
- **Primary source:** an original or first-hand document, story or object that was created by someone during the time period under study.
- **Secondary source:** an account, object, or interpretation of an event which was created by someone without first-hand experience of the time period under study.
- **Symbolism:** the use of an object or image that represents a larger idea or concept. Ex: a bald eagle represents the United States of America.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Review the terms/concepts of **primary and secondary historical sources** with students. Ask them for a few examples of each and introduce the idea that many types of objects can be primary sources if they are made during the time period being studied, such as art, music, or everyday items like flags. These items can be analyzed to reveal meaning about the people who created them, as well as the time in which they were made and used. Today, the students will be hands-on history detectives by exploring three different flags from WWII to see what they can tell us about people and their lives during the war.
2. Before dividing the students into their assigned "flag detective" groups, take a few minutes to have a class discussion about the characteristics of the American flag and the different ways that it can be used. First, hand out the *American Flag as a Symbol* student flag worksheet and project the image of the current American flag on a screen to use as a reference (or use the flag in your classroom if you have one). Give the students **one minute** to study the flag closely and to take notes on their worksheet before reconvening for a larger class discussion.

Suggested discussion questions/prompts:

- What does the American flag look like? Describe it. How many stars and stripes does it have and what do these represent?

Answer: 50 stars for fifty states; 13 stripes to represent the 13 original British colonies before the United States became its own country after the American Revolution.
 - The American flag is an important symbol of our country which means a lot of things to a lot of people. A **symbol** is an object or an image that represents a larger idea or concept. An example of this is the use of a bald eagle to represent America. Why: because this bird can only be found in North America, it is a brave and strong predator bird, and it can fly very high in the sky (representing freedom).
 - Where/how do we see the flag used today? (Ex: classroom for the Pledge of Allegiance, parades, etc.)
 - What types of things do we think of when we think of the American flag? How does it make us feel? (nouns, adjectives, etc.)
3. Tell the students that they are going to be divided up into *at least three* history "flag detective" groups to study a flag from WWII that was used for a special purpose during the war. They will work together as a team to figure out where the flag is from, when it was used, who made or used the flag, and how it was used by studying their source clues. Tell them that once they have had an opportunity to study the sources and complete their worksheet, the class will reconvene and each group will report out and tell the story of their flag.

Note: It is up to the teacher to decide how much time should be allotted for the primary source detective activity but a minimum of 20-25 minutes is recommended.

- First, **ONLY give each team their flag picture and their worksheet.** Students will have **two minutes** to study their flag image and record their information, as well as note what additional questions they have about their flag.
- Next, **give the students the rest of their flag's related sources.** They are going to work together as history detectives to solve the mystery of their flag and will have the remainder of the activity time to analyze these sources and complete the questions/story of their flag.

“Flag Detective” Source Groups:

Flag Group 1: Landerneau Flag

- Image of the Landerneau flag
- Excerpts from an oral history with one of the flag's makers, Pierre Duhot
- Image of Allied flags flown in France, WWII
- French liberation photograph with American soldiers

Flag Group 2: Blum Flag

- Images of the Blum flag (outside and inside the box)
- Portrait of Murray Blum in his Merchant Marine uniform
- Burial flag message
- United States Maritime Commission letter
- Quote from the flag's donor, Robin Blum

Flag Group 3: Oram Flag

- Image of the Oram Iwo Jima flag
- Portrait of B. J. Oram in his Navy uniform
- Excerpts from Oram's letters
- Image taken of Iwo Jima landing

4. Reconvene the class after the primary source detective activity and have each class report out on their flag. The teacher will project the image of each group's flag in the classroom and take notes on each flag on the board. Their classmates can also take notes in their notebooks as the teacher records responses on the board. Ask the students at the end of each report out: **“What important story does your flag tell you about WWII?”**
5. Conclude the class by asking them to reflect on and share their answers to these two questions:
How can the American flag be an important symbol during wartime?
What types of meanings can the flag have for people, both soldiers and civilians?

Take Home Reflection Activity:

Now that students have had an opportunity to learn about the important stories that historic flags can tell us about WWII, they must write a one page reflection or creative response (poem, mind map, etc.) about what the American flag means to them. How is their personal connection to the flag similar to or different from the meaning of the WWII flag that their flag groups studied in class today?

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the student “flag detective” group source analysis activity and related worksheets, classroom discussion, and take home written reflection activity.

ENRICHMENT: Have students continue to research the historical context of their specific flags beginning with the following resources. Then, have them compose a 2-3 page story about the history of their flag that is told from the flag’s perspective.

❖ *Landerneau Flag and the D-Day Invasion of France at Normandy:*

The National WWII Museum

- [D-Day fact sheet](#)
- [The National WWII Museum’s Digital Collections site](#)

WWII Oral Histories:

- [Harold Baumgarten](#): Army, 29th Infantry Division, Omaha Beach
- [Donald Malarkey](#): Paratrooper, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division
- [Marvin Perrett](#): Navy, USS Bayfield. Piloted LCVP at Utah Beach and Iwo Jima

Rare Flags website: [Collection of Liberation Flags](#)

❖ *Blum Flag:*

The National WWII Museum

- [Featured Artifacts, U.S. Merchant Marines](#)

American Battle Monuments Commission

- [“Never Forgotten: Lt. Murray M. Blum,”](#) interview with Blum’s family members

❖ *Oram Flag, USS Bayfield and The War in the Pacific:*

The National WWII Museum

- [The National WWII Museum’s Digital Collections site](#)

WWII Oral Histories:

- [Marvin Perrett](#): Navy, USS Bayfield. Piloted LCVP at Iwo Jima
- [David Severance](#): 28th Marines Division which participated in both flags raisings during the Battle of Iwo Jima
- [Herschel “Woody” Williams](#): 3rd Marine Division, Iwo Jima, Medal of Honor recipient

- [Focus On: The Battle for Iwo Jima](#)

- *The Stories that Flags Can Tell Us* lesson can also be used in conjunction with observances of patriotic holidays like Flag Day, Veterans Day or Memorial Day, or to introduce or enhance a pre-existing WWII unit. To find additional information about how some of these national holidays were observed during WWII, visit The National WWII Museum’s [Featured Artifacts](#) and [Fact Sheets](#) pages.
- As a longer-term research project, have students research other iconic American flags and symbols in U.S. history, such as the Marine flag raising at Iwo Jima during WWII, and present their findings to the rest of the class. Then, students

can submit an image of their flag or symbol and write a brief label for their picture for inclusion in a classroom exhibit about important flags and symbols in United States history.

RESOURCES:

The National WWII Museum

- [The Digital Collections of The National World War II Museum](#)
- [Education: For Teachers](#) webpage
- Lesson Plans and Fact sheets: [D-Day and the War in Europe](#)
- Lesson Plans and Fact sheets: [The War in the Pacific](#)

Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center

- [USS Bayfield entry](#)

National Archives and Records Administration

www.archives.gov

- DocsTeach.org, [Documents from The Great Depression and World War II Eras](#)
- [World War II Photograph Collections](#)

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History

- [Star Spangled Banner website](#)

The American Flag as a Symbol

Student Worksheet

Directions: The American flag is an important symbol which means many things to many people. Study the projected image of the flag. Using your prior knowledge of U.S. history and powers of observation, complete the chart and following questions.



1. Describe the flag. How many stars and stripes does it have? What do the stars and stripes represent? _____

2. What is a symbol? _____
3. Why is the flag a good example of a symbol? _____
4. What is another good example of a symbol? _____
5. Complete the following **American flag chart**.

What types of things do you think of when you think of the flag? (nouns, adjectives)	Where can we find or see flags on display?	What are some of the ways that the flag is used today?

“Flag Detective” Group Source Analysis
Student Worksheet

Directions: Your flag group must work together as detectives to solve the mystery of your flag. Using your source “clues,” your powers of observation, and your knowledge of U.S. history, work as a team to determine why your flag is important and what it can tell us about WWII.

Before you begin, select one person in your group to be the **recorder** who writes the group’s answers on this worksheet. Select another person to be the **reporter** for the group. This person will share the group’s answers with the rest of the class during the larger class discussion. As a group, study your flag and its related sources and complete the following questions together.

Part One:

1. Study the picture of your flag closely. Based on what you see, **take notes on only what you observe first in the Observation column below**. Now look again and write about what you think these characteristics mean in the Interpretation column below.

What flag do you have/what is it called? _____

Observation	Interpretation

What questions do you still have about your flag and its story? What information do you still need to know? List 2-3 questions that you still have below.

- a)
- b)
- c)

Part Two:

2. Look at your flag’s related sources. List each source or “clue” below and record what information it tells you about the story of your flag. Then, use the information from all of your sources to complete “The Story of My Flag” section.

Source:	What information does this source tell me about my flag?	Is this a primary or a secondary source? Why?
a.		
b.		
c.		
d.		

The Story of My Flag

- **When** was the flag made or used? _____
- **Whose** flag was it? _____
- **How** was this flag used in WWII? _____
- **Where** was this flag used in WWII? _____
- **Which** source did you think was the most helpful? Why? _____

- **What** can this flag tell us about the WWII experience? _____

Flag Detective Group 1: Landerneau Flag (Sources A-D)

Source A:



Caption: Flag donor John MacDougall (far left) hold the Landerneau flag with one of the flag's original makers, Pierre Duhot (far right). The children are two of Duhot's younger relatives. August 2008. Gift of John MacDougall, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2009.350.

Source B:

Excerpts from an oral history interview with 83 year old Pierre Duhot, August 8, 2008. During the Summer of 1944 when the flag was made, Pierre was 16 and his town of Landerneau in Northwestern France was still under German occupation.

Translated from the French. Gift of John MacDougal, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2009.350.

“[According to Pierre, the summer of 1944, when the flag was made and displayed] were very dangerous times. At that time, the possession of an American flag might have been punished by immediate execution by German occupiers...American forces had landed in June in Normandy and were fighting to advance as hard as possible...”

“In my town [of Landerneau, France], the German Gestapo arrested and killed anyone suspected of participating in the [French] Resistance. Three of my older friends were shot by the Germans when caught participating in Resistance activities...The Germans controlled our town and every night we could hear squadrons marching around in military formations so that people would feel their presence from the sounds of their boots on the pavements....”

“At one point in April 1944, we were aware that Allied forces would soon be arriving to save us. In our minds, we knew that the Allied forces included the Americans, English, Canadians and the forces of the Free French, but in our hearts, it was the Americans who were in command. We talked together about being freed by the Americans. We did not know exactly what would happen to us before that but we knew our saviors were coming. We were deeply moved. We decided that we had to be prepared to greet them...”

“My older sister, Helene was then in high school...She was 18 and I was 16. We decided to make an American flag to welcome the American soldiers. Our four person team included a friend of my sister, Andre Tanguy, and a neighbor-friend, Helene Lebert. We first obtained a dictionary to see exactly what an American flag looked like...As our work on the flag progressed, our parents learned of our efforts but they did not discourage us. They warned us to be careful and not to tell anyone about it. After years of war, it was difficult to find the textiles needed to make the flag. Our first goal was to obtain red, white, and blue textiles; they were not easy to find. It took us about three weeks to make it. When we carried it around, the girls hid it under their dresses. At night, we hid it under our beds. During the day, we hid our operations in a shed behind the house. When not working, we hid the cloths and the sewing kit under the wooden floor.....”

“...In August 1944, my father...told us that the Americans would soon be here. We took the flag out of hiding....and we greeted them [the American soldiers] as long planned with our American flag and invited them into our home.”

Translator's note at the end of the interview:

After Pierre had completed his story, he opened the package that he had carried from France to America and gently unfolded it. He and others wept. As he got older, he said, he had thought of finding some way—as a Frenchman wanting to express his thanks to all Americans for their liberation of his land and people in World War 2—to give this flag to the Americans who had given so much to him...Now he [has].

Source C:



Caption: Liberation flags in France, 1944. Gift of Carl Baches, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2003.330.009.1.

Source D:



Caption: “French partisans celebrate [the] taking of Marseille [by the Americans] with ‘V’ for Victory sign.” 23 August 1944. U.S. Army Signal Corps photograph, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2002.337.921.

Flag Detective Group 2: Blum Flag (Sources A-E)

Source A:





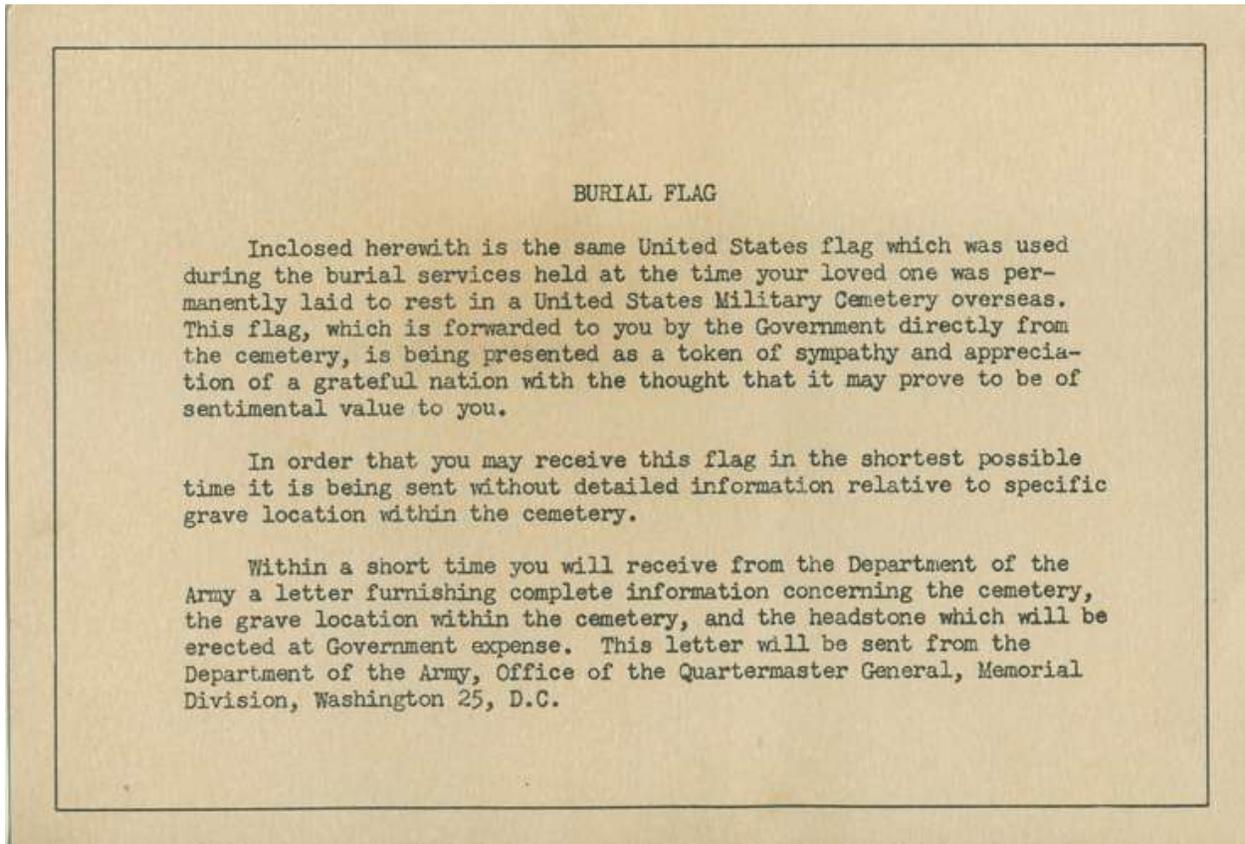
Caption: Two photographs of the Murray M. Blum flag. Gift of Robin Blum in Memory of Murray Blum, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2013.267.

Source B:



Caption: Photograph of Murray M. Blum in his United States Merchant Marine uniform. Location unknown. 1940s. Gift of Robin Blum in Memory of Murray Blum, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2013.267.

Source C:



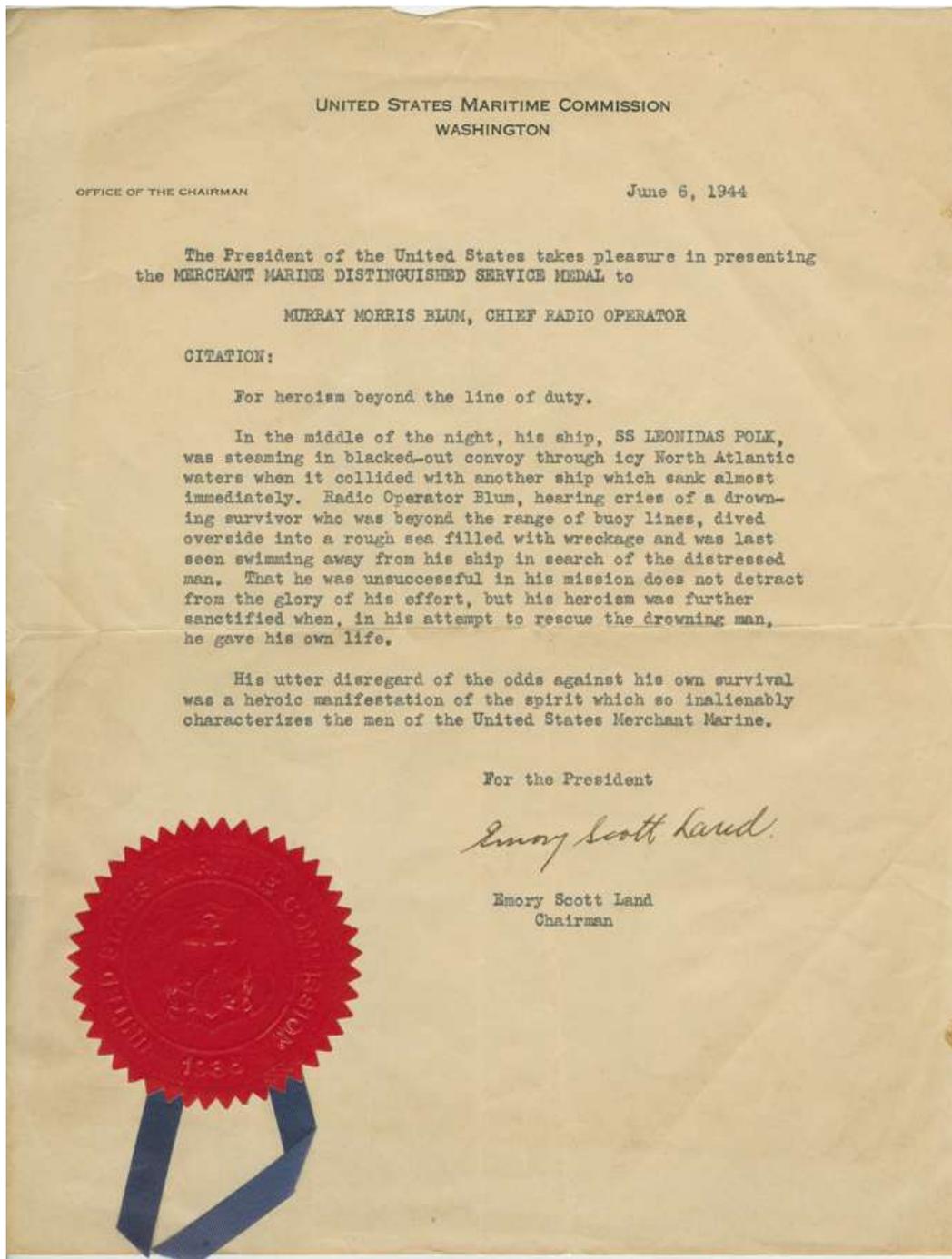
Caption: Burial flag message that was enclosed in the box with Blum's burial flag. Gift of Robin Blum in Memory of Murray Blum, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2013.267.

Source D:

Excerpt from a letter written by Robin Blum, Murray Blum's niece, donating the flag to The National WWII Museum. Gift of Robin Blum in Memory of Murray Blum, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2013.267.

"His parents couldn't bear opening the box (now 70 years old) that his casket flag was shipped in to Brooklyn."

Source E:



Caption: United States Maritime Commission letter, presenting the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal to Murray Morris Blum, Chief Radio Operator. June 6, 1944. Gift of Robin Blum in Memory of Murray Blum, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2013.267.

Flag Detective Group 3: Oram Flag (Sources A-D)

Source A:



Caption: Oram Flag, currently on display in The National WWII Museum's Pacific Gallery. Gift of Bernard J. Blum, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2000.204.002.

Source B:



Caption: Photograph of B. J. Oram in his Navy uniform. 1940s. Oram was a Signalman, 3rd class who participated in the invasions of Normandy, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Gift of Bernard J. Oram, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2000.204.002.

Source C:

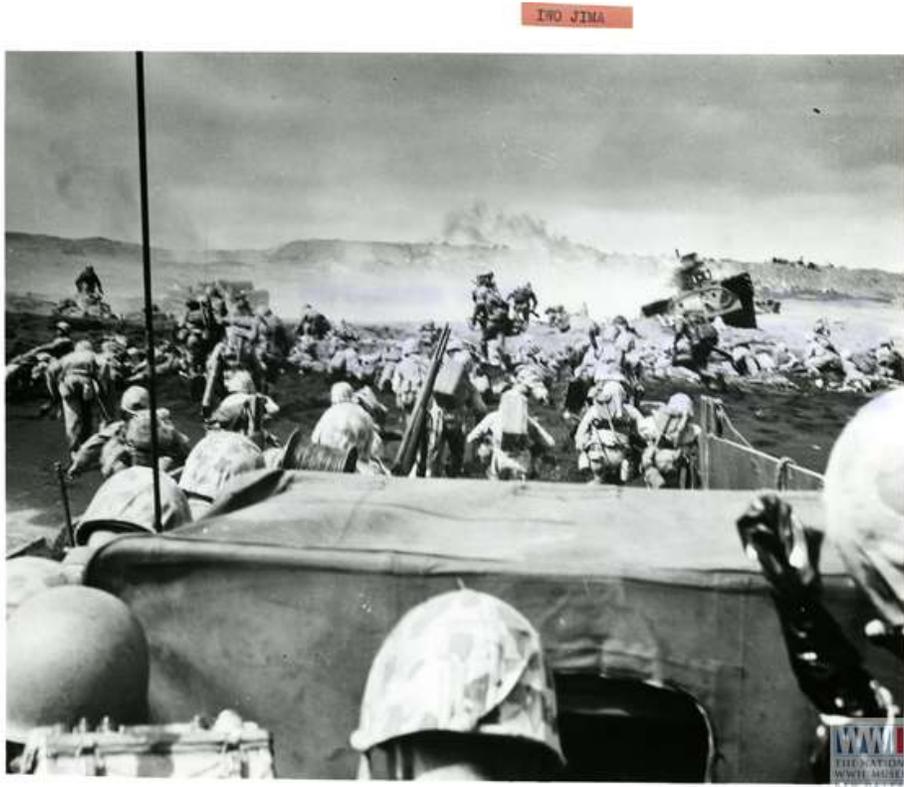
Excerpts from a letter written by B. J. Oram to The National WWII Museum when he donated his flag to the Museum. Gift of Bernard J. Oram, from the collections of The National WWII Museum, 2000.204.002.

“This flag flew in the invasion of Iwo Jima [in] February 1945. It flew from D-Day H-Hour through to the capture of the island from the Japanese....from the mast of a U.S. Navy ship, the U.S.S. Bayfield APA 33 (Attack Transport and Flotilla Command ship) [as part] of approximately 30 [ships that were in an] amphibious flotilla that transported U.S. Marines to assault and capture this important island in the chain of islands leading to the home land of Japan and final conquest....”

“The Bayfield brought the Marines from an area near Guam and delivered them by smaller amphibious boats to this island [of Iwo Jima] and then anchored just offshore of Mount Suribachi where the glorious flag raising took place. We were close enough to take small arms fire but did not suffer any casualties or critical damage; however, our gallant U.S. Marines did have large numbers of casualties and injuries and we could act as a nearby medical and surgical center as well as supply....

“This flag is well worn and tattered and dirty from the ships’ stacks with diesel fuel smoke.”

Source D:



Caption: “An attack begins—A wave of charging Fourth Division Marines begins an attack from the beach at Iwo Jima on D-Day, February 19, [1945] as another assault boatload of battle-tested veterans is disgorged on the beach by an invasion craft.” U. S. Navy Official photograph, Gift of Charles Ives, from the collection of The National WWII Museum, 2011.102.559.

Source E:

Excerpt from an letter from B. J. Oram, undated. Gift of Bernard J. Oram, from the collections of The National WWII Museum, 2000.204.002.

“At H-Hour on D-Day [on Iwo Jima], we used all of our smaller landing craft....and other larger landing craft to place the Marines on Iwo Jima...It was a brutal battle for these young Marines and we could see them falling as they were hit. Our vessel was also equipped with medical facilities for the wounded and dead Marines...It was horrible to see a landing craft coming back with young [wounded] American men...The surgeons had a big problem because when these bloody wounded men fell[on the beach] the wounds would be[come] a sticky mess with the Iwo Jima sand, which was not sand but black volcanic ash.”