



7th War Loan, Now · · All Together. Artist, C.C. Beall, poster, U. S. Government Printing Office for the Department of the Treasury, 1945. In the final version of the poster for the “Mighty 7th” War Loan campaign, artist C.C. Beall heightened the drama of AP Photographer Joe Rosenthal’s famous photograph by zooming in on the men and using color to unify them as a collective unit striving to raise the red, white, and blue flag. Strank’s arm is visible between the second and third men.

Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-3352.

They Also Serve Who Buy War Bonds, The Mighty 7th War Loan. Artist, C.C. Beall, concept drawing, Office for Emergency Management, Office of War Information, 1945. Multiple variations of artwork featuring the Iwo Jima flag raising were tested before Beall developed the final version of the poster.

National Archives and Records Administration.



Poster, *7th War Loan. Now · · All Together,* U.S. Department of the Treasury, 1945.

By Leslie Przybylek, Curator of History

Local organizers billed it as the biggest parade in Pittsburgh’s history. Nearly 40 bands, dozens of floats, and units from all branches of the Armed Forces marched from the North Side, through downtown, and out to Forbes Field to launch the “Mighty Seventh” war loan drive on May 9, 1945. The day ended with a military performance called “Here’s Your Infantry” at Forbes Field. Guests of honor included Pennsylvania Governor Edward Martin and Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Charles E. “Commando” Kelly.

It was exactly the kind of patriotic kickoff that the U.S. Treasury Department urged, and with good reason. The war in Europe was winding down when plans for the new loan drive started. By the time it began, the nation was celebrating “Victory in Europe” (VE) Day on May 8, 1945. With the war half won, bond program organizers worried: would Americans falter in their support?

In response, the Treasury Department turned to one of the most inspirational images of the war, creating a poster that underscored the great collective effort still needed. That poster, based on Joe Rosenthal’s immortal photograph of a flag raising on Iwo Jima, is currently featured in the History Center’s exhibit, *We Can Do It! WWII*. On loan from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, the Seventh War Loan poster emphasized that victory in the Pacific had yet to be won, and that it would take an all-out effort to make it happen. Americans needed to summon the same spirit shown by those six resolute young men lifting the flag skyward on the lonely summit of a sulfurous volcanic island. Artist C.C. Beall took Rosenthal’s image and increased the drama at close focus, bathing the soldiers in golden sunlight and highlighting the red and white of the flag against a dark blue sky.

The Treasury Department knew a good thing when they saw one, and set about identifying the flag raisers to act as war bond spokesmen. Just three survived—Marine Private Rene Gagnon, Marine Private Ira Hayes, and U.S. Navy Pharmacist’s Mate Second Class John Bradley. Gathered up and returned stateside, they toured the country, hitting major cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago. But for Western Pennsylvania, the story that mattered most wasn’t about the survivors. It was about one of the men who was not there.

U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Michael Strank is barely visible in the photo and the poster of Iwo Jima, a sliver of torso and arm glimpsed between the straining forms of the second and third men in the foreground. To the Marines who served under him, including three of the other flag raisers, Strank was anything but invisible. He was their squad leader, their big brother, their mentor: the key member of the platoon.

His sense of responsibility and family came from his upbringing in Western Pennsylvania. Strank immigrated to America from Czechoslovakia as a child, brought from the village of Jarabina by parents who sacrificed much to give their children a better life. Raised in Franklin Borough, near Johnstown, he faced the same challenges as most of the region's young men during the Depression. After graduating from high school, he served 18 months with the Civilian Conservation Corps, and then worked briefly as a highway laborer before enlisting with the Marines in October 1939. He did well, progressing from Private to Corporal by April 1941, and receiving a promotion to Sergeant by the end of January 1942. Serving as a Marine Raider in the Pacific, the toughest of all Marines, Strank was no stranger to combat. The Bougainville campaign in November and December 1943 was the worst, two months of unremitting combat in malarial jungles that friends and family said had changed Strank when he came home on leave. It would be his last visit. He told his friends as much, admitting that didn't think he would survive the war.

After returning to service, Strank underwent further training at Camp Pendleton in California and at Hawaii's remote Camp Tarawa—a desolate spot filled with volcanic rocks and sharp ridges—before shipping out again to the Pacific. On February 19, 1945, Strank's Company E, 28th Regiment of the 5th Marines, landed at Iwo Jima. Days later, on February 23, Michael Strank became part of the visual iconography of America, captured on film in Joe Rosenthal's photo of the flag raising, actually the second flag planted on Mt. Suribachi that day. But Strank's deep misgivings about his own fate proved true. His "Easy Company" members were devastated when six days later, Strank was killed by a shell on the northern part of Iwo Jima. Two of his fellow Company E flag raisers would also fall before the bloodiest battle in U.S. Marine Corps history had been won. Only one of the members of "Easy Company" depicted in the photo survived: Ira Hayes. The other two survivors, Gagnon and Bradley, had been pulled into the effort from other units.

Back in Franklin Borough, Michael Strank's mother, Martha, didn't want to hear the news when the Western Union telegraph appeared at her door. She insisted that the deliveryman read it, which he finally did. Once the family learned of their son's role in the famous photo, it must have been doubly hard to watch as the plans for the Seventh War loan rolled out. While Pittsburgh, along with other cities across the country, kicked off its regional campaign with parades, speeches, and appearances by local war heroes, a more moving recognition of the role played by a Western Pennsylvania son occurred in New York City on May 11, 1945, when—in front of posters showing the celebrated image of Iwo Jima—Ira Hayes met Michael Strank's mother during a ceremony on Wall Street.

U.S. Marines of the 28th Regiment, 5th Division cheering atop Mount Suribachi after the flag raising. Sergeant Michael Strank is visible as the fourth man from the left, with his hands in his pockets.

AP/Joe Rosenthal.

Portrait of Michael Strank, c. 1941-1945. Strank was brought to the U.S. by his parents from Jarabina, a small village in the unified nation of Czechoslovakia. He enlisted in The U.S. Marine Corps in 1939, prompted both by financial need and possibly by watching Hitler's annexation of his former nation in the spring of that year.

History Division, U.S. Marine Corps.

