

G/Sgt. John Basilone stamp drive petition

Angela Calabro

The rainy season has come to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands in the Pacific.

It is October 24, 1942. The U.S. Marines of the First Marine Division wait quietly in the jungle for the command to begin their battle with enemy Japanese forces they expect will shortly attack.

Among these brave marines of the First Division, First Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, is Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone of Raritan, NJ. John and the men of his heavy machine gun platoon are among the Marines whose task is to form a perimeter around Henderson Field. If the airfield falls to the enemy, Guadalcanal will be lost.

This battle to hold Guadalcanal is the first U.S. Marine assault in the Pacific and the Marines know that failure is not an option. They know that they are outnumbered by a fanatical enemy and are critically low on food and ammunition, but they must hold the island at all costs.

The order is given to commence firing and about 3,000 enemy Japanese assault the Marine position. Sgt. Basilone, always concerned for his men, races alone through enemy lines to the command post to bring back much needed 100-pound sacks of ammunition for his gunners. He often does so barefoot so as not to be heard by enemy troops. While separated from his men with only his heavy machine gun to accompany him, John finds and annihilates almost a whole



regiment of the enemy. For John's heroic effort, he is the first enlisted Marine to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

John was sent home where he was acclaimed a war hero. A large number of family and friends honored his homecoming with a welcome home gathering. The mayor of Raritan, NJ, awarded John with a \$5,000 savings bond in gratitude for his heroic efforts on behalf of the community.

John was ordered to go on a 10-state war bond tour with some celebrities of the day such as John Garfield, Martha Scott and Frederic March. Later, John was sent to Washington, D.C., and was offered a second lieutenant's commission, which he promptly turned down. John


was a very humble young man who found honors and praise something he preferred to give to his men.

In 1944, John married a lady Marine sergeant named Lena Riggi of California. He could have looked forward to a new life with his wife and his dream of opening his own restaurant. Yet, his mind was always focused on his men and the war that still raged in the Pacific. John's only desire was to return to his men in combat and so John was assigned to the newly-formed 5th Marine Division.

John landed on Iwo Jima on 19 Feb 45. That very morning he personally guided a trapped tank away from a minefield and destroyed a Japanese blockhouse with a satchel (dynamite) charge. While advancing with three of his men to set up their machine guns near Montoyama Airfield #1, an enemy mortar shell exploded, killing John and his men.

For John's heroic efforts that day, he was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

Since the 1980s an annual parade is held every September in John's honor in his hometown of Raritan, NJ. Recently, a 17-mile portion of I-5 outside of Camp Pendleton in California has been renamed the John Basilone Memorial Highway. Sgt. Basilone is buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, VA.

Please join in the nationwide effort to have a postage stamp issued in John Basilone's honor. If you are interested in adding your name to the petition, please visit www.petitiononline.com/USMC0300. 

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