

# **Raritan's Hero**

## **The John Basilone Story**

**By Bruce W. Doorly**  
Edited by Jim Foohey and Chris Enny  
Major Contributions by  
John Pacifico and Peter Vitelli

The date was September 29th, 2002. It was the 21st annual *John Basilone Parade*. The parade is held in my hometown, the small town of Raritan, New Jersey, whose population is around 6000. The parade is extremely popular, with thousands of spectators attending each year. It is the only parade for a war hero in the country.

It is a tribute to the town of Raritan's hero, John Basilone, who served in *World War II*. In 1942, he was awarded *The Congressional Medal of Honor* for his heroics at Guadalcanal and was later killed in action at *Iwo Jima* in 1945. For his actions at *Iwo Jima*, he was posthumously awarded *The Navy Cross*, the military's second highest honor. As a resident of Raritan since 1983, I feel a sense of pride, as I am sure others do too.

I have noticed that there are several short articles about John Basilone in the local papers days before the parade. After reading these articles, my curiosity moves me to ask more. What house in Raritan did John Basilone live? I ask some of the people at the parade. No one around me knows. So to help find my answer, I move onto more official sources. First, I ask a candidate who is running for the Borough Council, surely I will find my answer here. But the response I get is "that is a good question". Later, I see a member of *The Raritan Chamber of Commerce*, so I ask her the same question, but she is stumped as well. And later, I refer my question to a retired police officer from our town. He says he thinks it may be one particular house. However, this proved to be wrong, but he came close, as he identified the house that John's sister Mary had lived in.

I soon discover that while our local hero is admired and celebrated, he "personally" seems far removed from his home town today. There is a statue of him in town, and many local things are named after him, such as the Bridgewater/Raritan High School Football Field, an overpass bridge, a street, an American Legion Post, and a pool. *The New Jersey Turnpike* even named a bridge after him that goes over the Raritan River. But where he lived, worked, went to school, and what he was like, appears to have been forgotten. The reason is that John Basilone died in 1945, 58 years from the time of this writing. The number of people who knew him are now very few and ever dwindling each year.

To find out more about him, I visit the Raritan Library, which contains a room called *The Basilone Museum*. Here I find many photos and artifacts, including his uniform. There are many books about *World War II* here, but I do not see a biography about him (and I later discover that there is no biography that is more than five pages). I find in a hidden drawer some old newspaper articles dated 1943-45 scattered about. I proceed to read these and discover that John was some character in his youth. As a soldier, he was truly a hero - as well as a leader who inspired others. And his heroics were well celebrated locally and even nationally during the challenging days of *World War II*.

There is a fascinating and inspiring story to tell, one that expands on the "War Hero" image. However, this story is hidden on pieces of crumbling old newspaper and magazines, and in the memories of senior citizens who will not be around in future years.

My first reaction is that "someone" should gather this information together along with interviews from those who knew him, then write a biography that would be available to the local community. This way, John Basilone would be remembered as an individual who lived, worked, and went to school in this small town of Raritan. After thinking about it, I decided that the "someone" to tell the story will be me.

Before I started my initial research, I feared that a closer look into the life of our local hero would shatter the heroic myth and expose some dark side to his personality as many biographies of famous celebrities have done. But what I discovered was that the details only make him more interesting and heroic. Here was a man who at home, was a dedicated family person, in town, he was described as "everyone's friend", and in battle, a true leader. He was a boxer, a ladies man, and a "Marine's Marine".

The citation for his *Congressional Medal of Honor* is well known to the local community, but little else is. The citation is often printed. It even appears beneath his statue. In this book, his citation can be found on page 37.

To complete this biography, I will need some resources that I hope are available to me. I wonder if his surviving family members will talk with me. Also, can I get access to the photos in



**John Basilone Parade  
Photos from 2002 & 2003**

Mayor Phil Possesky  
Recites John Basilone's  
*Congressional Medal of  
Honor Citation*

*The Basilone Museum* so they can be included. And finally, I wonder if issues of the local newspapers from the 1940's are available on microfilm. I soon find all these resources are available.

Some research about *World War II* in general will also be needed. This includes reading about the war and watching videos. I find many of these books and videos on the shelves at The Raritan Library and The Somerset County Library.

One obstacle to completing this biography is that this author has never written any kind of biography or book. Only term papers in route to my M.B.A. in business. But this should not stop me, since this is America - the land of the free - where people can do what they choose - and set out to live their dreams, whether they are an inexperienced writer or not.

I hope this biography brings John Basilone to life for today's community.

## **The Basilone Family**

John Basilone's mother, Dora Bengivenga, grew up in Raritan. She was born in 1889, to parents Carlo and Catrina, who had recently immigrated to America from Naples, Italy. Carlo was a mill-worker.

In 1901, Dora's parents purchased a house in Raritan at 113 First Avenue for \$500. This would later be the house that John Basilone would live in. The house was built in 1858, and in 1901 was a single family home, but later additions would be added, making it a two-family house.

John's father, Salvatore Basilone, had come to America from just outside Naples, Italy in 1903 when he was 19. He went to work in Raritan and made friends among the other Italian Americans. He went with his friends to church parties and neighborhood gatherings. There, he met Dora, the girl of his dreams, someone who fitted all his ideas of what the perfect wife should be.

Salvatore and Dora dated for three years. After saving some money, they got married and settled at Dora's childhood home at 113 First Avenue.

Salvatore worked as a tailor's assistant. But from the beginning of his career, he was always working for the day when he could own his own tailor shop. He often struggled with poor health, but he still always worked, as he had a family to support.

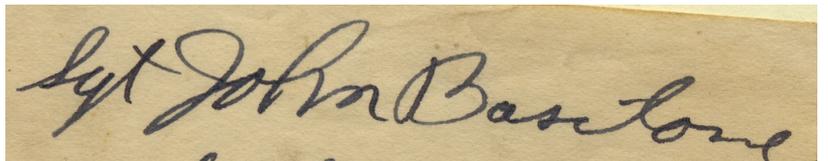
They started their family in Raritan, initially having 5 children there. But making a living proved to be hard, so the family tried living outside of Raritan, moving out for a while to Buffalo. It was there that Salvatore became an American Citizen. Then, on November 4th, 1916, while still in Buffalo, they had their 6th child, the future hero, John Francis Basilone. Like other children in that era, John was born at home, not in a hospital. Eventually Sal and Dora would have ten children, six boys and four girls. John's older siblings were Phyllis, Angelo, Catherine, Mary, and Carlo. John's younger siblings would be Alphonse, George, Dolores, and Donald.

The Basilone family returned to Raritan in 1918. They first lived on Anderson Street. But they soon moved back into Dora's childhood home at 113 First Avenue in Raritan. By this time, the home was a two-family house. Dora's parents would move out to another home in Raritan, and Dora's brother John and his wife Josephine, lived in the other half. Both sides of the house were small by today's standards. Downstairs the Basilonos had a living room, kitchen, and one bedroom. Two bedrooms were upstairs. There was only one bathroom. Their children would share two bedrooms. The boys would share one room and the girls another. While they had ten children, the most children who lived at home at one time was eight, as the older children had moved out before the younger ones were born. To sleep numerous kids in one room, instead of bunk beds, two or three kids would share a bed.

After a few years back in Raritan, things started to go right for the Basilone Family. Salvatore's health improved and he was soon able to open up his own tailor shop in Somerville - the next town over. His initial location was at 10 East Main Street. He would later move around the corner to 13 South Bridge Street.

For family fun, John's brother Carlo recalls that the entertainment center in the house was the *Philco* radio. The family would gather around together to listen to their favorite shows.

Their house initially was surrounded by a country setting, but as time went by, the local roads changed. What was once two dirt roads evolved into two of the main roads in town. Thus, with the house more centrally located, much neighborhood traffic passed by the house.



Since Sal and Dora believed in education, they sent John to parochial school even though this was tough financially. Salvatore did have his own business, but raising a family of ten during the depression was a difficult task.

Salvatore was proud of his adopted country. He often said “This is the greatest country in the world”. He was described as a peaceful man. John once stated in a letter “I don’t know of a single instance where Dad hurt or offended anyone”. Yet Salvatore would speak out if he thought someone was downgrading this country.

## John as a Youth

John Basilone was the child of the family who was different than the others. He was restless and had a sense of adventure from his beginning. While he was not a troublemaker, he could get himself in trouble. He was often a challenge to both his parents and the nuns at *St. Bernard’s Parochial School* - whom he often drove crazy.

Many stories have been told of John as a youth. Times were different in the 1920’s and 1930’s. Children played freely in their neighborhood, even many streets away. John often wondered off, thus his parents had trouble keeping track of him.

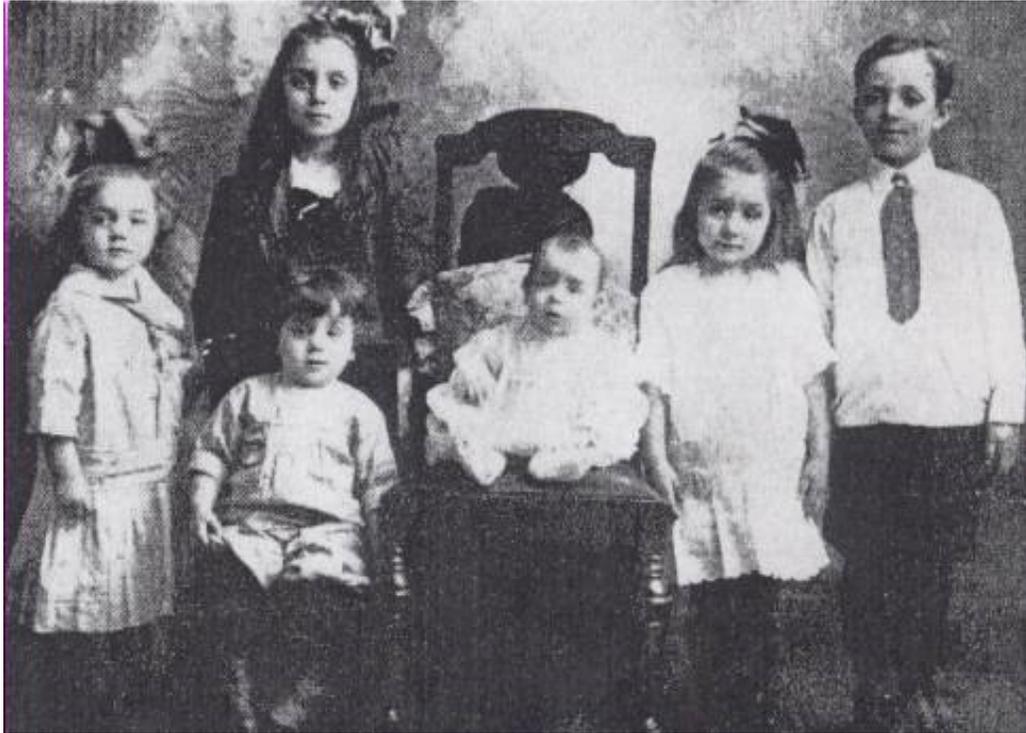
Clashes with death for John began early. One story goes that at age seven on a farm, while John was watching a bull through the safety of a fence, young John decided to jump the fence and see if he could “tame the bull”. Luckily the bull reacted to John as if he was just a minor annoyance and knocked him down. Just hitting him hard enough to scare him, but not hurting him seriously.

At times John would take an unauthorized swim in the Raritan River, but so did many other kids. The local river, which could get up to six feet high, was supposed to be off limits to swimming. However, with no local community pools and air conditioning decades away, on hot days, the river was a popular hangout. Kids knew the various parts of the river. Some spots had ropes hanging from trees so kids could swing out into the water. Charles Franchino recalled that many locations along the river were given unique names to serve as an identifier, so the kids could say meet let’s meet today at the *New Damn* area. Many kids did not have bathing suits. So if only the boys went swimming, which was the usual case, they swam in the nude. The boys called this the *Bare Ass Beach* or B.A.B. The town’s three policemen, who were on bicycles then, occasionally would chase the boys away from the river, but usually the police did not bother them.

On Saturdays, John and his friends would attend the local dime movie theatre. The theatre was on Anderson Street, just a half mile from John’s house. It was called *The Empire Theatre* in the 1920s. Later in the late 1930s it closed, but reopened in the early 1940s, renamed *The Raritan Playhouse*. The top shows for boys of their age were cowboy movies and serial adventures. The screen names of the heroes of that era were Tom Mix, Tim McCoy, and Bud Jones - all nearly forgotten today. While these movies are now referred to as “silent”, John Basilone’s cousin Carl Bengivenga who attended with John, recalls the movie theater was far from silent. Johnny and his gang would provide their own sound track of boos, hisses, and cheers. Throwing popcorn was common as well. The popcorn had to be purchased outside of the theatre, as there was, believe it or not, no snack bar. The rowdy behavior led the theater to be nicknamed “The Madhouse”. The admission was 10 cents, but many kids still could not afford the dime. So to help out their friends, the kids who paid to get in would often open the side exit door for their awaiting buddies, allowing them to sneak in.

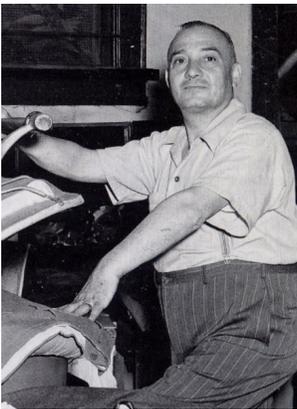
The silent movies always had a piano player. The piano player was initially added to all movie theatres so that the background music would help drown out the distracting noise made by a room full of people. But soon the movie makers realized it would enhance the mood and excitement of the film, if certain musical pieces were played at particular parts of the movie. The films would arrive in the movie theatres along with sheet music and instructions for the piano player. In the theatres, the awaiting kids knew the movie was about to begin when the piano player walked out toward the piano. This brought cheers from the crowd as the show was about to begin. *The Empire Theatre’s* piano player, Miss Traynor, became a local celebrity in Raritan.

Never one to back down, and always one to help his buddies, John got his first black eye at



**John as a baby in 1917 - seated on the chair  
with his older brothers and sisters.**

Left to right, Mary, Phyllis, Carlo (seated), John in chair, Catherine, and Angelo.



**Salvatore  
Basilone  
(John's Dad)  
At his Tailor  
Shop 1943**



**Salvatore Basilone's old Tailor Shop  
is still a Tailor Shop !**

It is at 13 South Bridge Street in Somerville.  
(Currently it's overhead sign is removed for  
renovations — and it is instead displayed in  
the window.)

**It is called *Continental Tailoring*.**



**John's Mom,  
Dora, grew up  
in Raritan**

age 10 when two toughies jumped a friend of his. John did not stand by and he jumped into action to help his friend.

For one period, throwing rotten tomatoes became a favorite pastime for a young energetic John. But once he pushed this trick too far, and some local girls decided to turn the tables on John and his pals. In military style, they ambushed John and his friends with a “taste of their own medicine” or should we say, a taste of their own rotten tomatoes.

In addition to tomatoes, apples had their own special appeal. Johnny and his friends learned how to steal apples and cherries from local growers. They perfected the art of the “lookout” and “quick getaway”. When they became bored with the local orchards, they hitch hiked to farther more promising orchards. On one occasion, they went several miles, but struck out on a hitched ride home and had to walk back the entire distance.

John’s parent’s had to battle to control him, for discipline they used good old fashioned spankings (as opposed to today’s politically correct “time outs”) to teach John and the other children how to behave. The occasional spanking came from mom. Dora even described John’s first spanking to the newspaper *The New York Journal* in 1943. She stated “He had been stealing apples and I smacked him good.”

In the 1920’s and 1930’s, kids usually entertained themselves, as it was years before video games and even television. John’s brother Carlo, who was just one year older, recalled that he, John, and many other kids played mostly outside. There was a field across from their house on 1st Avenue which served as their playground. (An office and jug handle for Route 202 are there today where the field once was.) Carlo said they played there many hours per day for many years. Carlo’s and John’s favorite activity was hitting golf balls. Other sports played were baseball and football. Kids made their own rules and played without any formal leagues or adult supervision. Organized youth sports like those that exist today were rare.

In school, the catholic school discipline of the time was too much for energetic John. Teacher punishments were quite different from today’s detention or letter’s sent home to one’s parents. *St. Bernard’s Parochial School* graduate Angelo Bernabe remembers receiving discipline by having to hold out his hand and getting whacked on the knuckles with the nun’s wooden pointing stick.

One newspaper (*The Sunday Daily News*) described John’s school days, “Conduct was always his lowest mark, and it was low, hovering with nice consistency around the zero mark.” Classmate Vicky Melitsky, who still lives in Raritan on Gaston Avenue, remembers John’s antics well. Often the nun would threaten misbehaving kids by saying that they were going to “take ten points off” their school grade for that week. John’s favorite expression in response to the nuns threat was to say back “take them all off” .

But John was not really all that bad at school, he was a little wild, yet likeable. His yearbook described him as “the most talkative boy in his class”, but also that “he had quite a winning way and delighted in taking part in all the classes (special) activities.” He was described as jolly - always laughing and talking. He had many friends. Always a little different, his hobby listed in the yearbook was said to be “chewing gum” - and his ambition was “to be an opera singer”.

As a young teen, John was called the town’s biggest soda drinker. In those days, getting a soda was a special treat, and often required a trip out of the house to a place like Raritan’s *Candy Kitchen* which was located on the main strip of downtown Raritan, Somerset Street, in the building where *Trend Setters*, a hair salon, is today. *The Candy Kitchen* had a large display of “penny candies” which could overwhelm the kids who had to make that tough decision what to get with the few cents their parents could afford to give them. Here the local kids were encouraged to hang out, even play cards, provided they purchased a soda, candy, or ice cream. This ice cream was “hard” ice cream, as “soft” ice cream machines were rare back then. It was here that John, as a young teenager, first began to socialize with the girls. His dark and handsome looks would always attract them.

John’s lust for adventure at times put him in dangerous situations. The road in front of his house, First Avenue, had a large hill. When the road was covered with snow, kids could sled for over a 1/4 mile by starting at the top of the hill on First Avenue and head down the hill crossing over Route 202 (which was then called Route 29). One winter in his young teens, John, his cousin

## John Basilone lived at 113 First Avenue in Raritan.

The house is no longer there. It was at the corner of First Ave. and Route 202



Here is the house that John Basilone lived in with his parents. This photo is from 1943.



Here in 1960 the Basilone house and a Gas Station exists on the same property.



Today a Mobile Gas Station sits where the Basilone house once stood.

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### What happened to the Basilone house ?

The house was first built in 1858. It stood at 113 First Avenue, and was once just a single family home at the corner of two dirt roads. It was purchased by John's maternal grandparents Carlo and Catrina Bengivenga in 1901. Over the years, this location and house changed dramatically. First, the house was enlarged to become a two family home. So in addition to John's family, John's mother's brother John and his wife Josephine along with their son Carl lived in the other side of the house. When the house owner, John's maternal grandmother Catrina Bengivenga died, it was her will that the house be left to someone with her last name, so she left the house to her grandson Carl Bengivenga, John Basilone's cousin.

**By 1950, the roads around the house had developed to the point that this location was now prime commercial real estate.** While the house faced First Avenue, it was on the corner of First and Route 202, and there was significant property behind the house that went along Route 202. Thus in 1950, Carl built a gas station along Route 202. It was called *Carl's Gulf Service Station*. For 12 years the house and the gas station existed together, but in 1962, the old house was knocked down in order to expand the gas station. In later years, when Carl retired, he leased the property to *Exxon* and later *Mobil*. Today, in 2003, Carl Bengivenga, still owns the property and leases it to *Mobil*.

Carl, and a local girl all started down the hill together for a sledding adventure. However on this trip, their speeding sled was on a collision course with a car that was moving across Route 29. The three kids initially froze as the sled was moving so fast they did not know how to react. Then John, showing his coolness under pressure, managed to take control, digging his feet into the ground and flipping the three of them off the sled, avoiding a possibility deadly crash into the car.

John graduated (by the skin of his teeth) from *St. Bernard's Parochial School* after 8th grade at the age of 15 in 1932. It was said that it was the patience and prayers of the nuns, including John's last teacher Sister Mary Cordula, who managed to get John eligible for the 8th grade graduation. The nuns order was called *The Sisters of Mercy*. They lived in a convent that was just around the corner from the school, at 8 Wall Street.

After his 8th grade graduation, John elected not to go to high school. This was the 1930's, and high school was optional for teenagers - similar to what college is today. This greatly concerned John's parents, who pleaded with him to go, but to no avail. He told people he was looking for adventure. However, after a few years, he had not yet found his adventure. The depression had hit New Jersey just like the rest of the country and jobs were scarce. During the summer, he was able to find work at *The Raritan Valley Country Club* as a caddy. But in the colder months, work was hard to find. John did eventually find a job, working as an assistant on a truck route for *Gaburo's Laundry* - which was just a block from his house. Laundry "pick up" and delivery was an important service in the 1930's, as most people did not have a washing machine. After a year, John was fired when he got caught sleeping on the laundry bags.

Even though the depression was a difficult time, John always had high spirits about life. He was described by (future mayor) Steve Del Rocco as "a happy go lucky kid, he enjoyed everything he did."

Since job prospects were limited, in the summer of 1934, John decided to join the Army. He still was a few months short of his 18th birthday, so his enlistment required his parents permission. His parents did not want to see their son leave home, but they agreed to sign, as they knew that this was a good match for John. He reassured his parents "I'll find my career in my Army".

## **John in the Army - stationed in "Manila"**

In 1934, John started his three year enlistment in the Army. He first served briefly at Governor's Island in New York, then he moved to the Philippines at the U.S. base located in the city of Manila.

The time of John's service in the Army, which was June 1934 – June 1937, was during peace time for the U.S. . While war clouds were brewing in Europe, no shots had yet been fired. Germany had started talking aggressively, but the Germans would not start *World War II* until September 1st, 1939, when they invaded Poland. In the Pacific, Japan had started war in China, but the U.S. had not yet sent troops to fight. It would be after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, that the U.S. would declare war on Japan and Germany.

During his enlistment in Manila, John got two tattoos, one on each upper arm. On his right arm, was a Wild West Girl - shown from the waist up. On his left arm, in bold marking there is a sword plunged into a heart. Around the heart there were stars and flowers with a ribbon containing the description that he lived by - "Death Before Dishonor".

It was through his stint in Manila that would later earn him his nickname "Manila John". It was a reference to his enthusiasm for a post that others wanted to avoid. Manila was hot and humid - many slept with mosquito netting to avoid the "out of control" pests. But John found the local girls a good reason to like Manila. The dark eyed Filipino girls looked a lot like the Italian girls at home. There were many bars to socialize in along Manila's Dewey Boulevard - the social center of Manila. John enjoyed Manila, and later during his Marine days, he often spoke of Manila, which led to him being given the nickname "Manila John".

It was during his tenure in the Army where John discovered a mechanical talent for guns, especially machine guns. He also learned to be a leader of men - with the ability to motivate and lead other soldiers. These traits would be put to use in the battles that lie ahead.

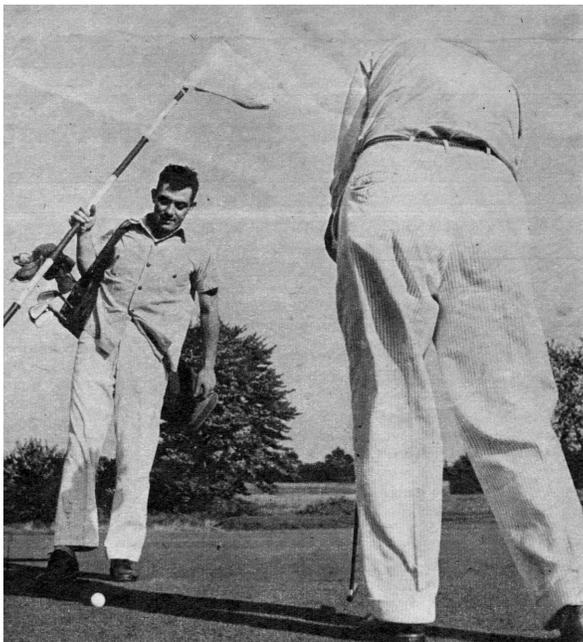
John was an excellent soldier, but he was not without his playful moments that had characterized his youth. On one occasion, his commanding officer stopped in front of the group



John Basilone worked as a helper on a laundry truck at *Gaburo's Laundry* (shown here in 1943) which was located on the corner of Farrand Avenue and North Gaston Avenue in Raritan.



Here is the same building in 2003. The businesses there today are *Raritan Valley Printing* and *Sophisticated Storage Solutions*.



John Basilone was a caddy at the *Raritan Valley Country Club*. He also played golf himself. *The Raritan Valley Country Club*, which opened in 1911, is still open today.



John Basilone worked at *Calco Chemical* - a division of *American Cyanamid*. Today *Calco Chemical* is no longer there. On the location where their parking lot once was is *The Commerce Bank Ballpark*, home of the *Somerset Patriots* Minor League Baseball Team.

and saw that John was smiling. He yelled to John “ wipe that smile off your face.” But John could not stop smiling and was given one week of K.P. (that’s kitchen patrol - peeling potatoes).

While there were no major historical events happening in Manila during John’s Army enlistment, there were two historical figures that were in command of the U.S. troops. General Douglas MacArthur was the commander in charge. Another general, who reported to MacArthur, was Dwight Eisenhower - who would later be in charge of the Allied forces in Europe and after that, U. S. President from 1952-1960.

The most fighting that John Basilone did in the army was in the boxing ring. Boxing matches were held before large crowds of rowdy military men, especially if a fighter from the Army and Navy were up against each other. John excelled at boxing, becoming the inter-service light heavy weight boxing champion in Manila. This brought him admiration from all ranks of the service.

When John’s enlistment was up, he thought quite a bit about re-enlisting, but his desire to be back home with his family and friends was so strong that he decided not to reenlist and come home. It was tough to leave, John had a girlfriend named Lolita whom he had many good times with. However, he could not see himself being tied down at this time. Also, he did not want to spend the rest of his life in the Philippines. He knew he had to leave. His girlfriend did not seem to understand, which troubled John. But John had some consolation, he wrote in a letter home that Lolita parent’s understood and that her father had said “ Go in peace, son. May you find what you are looking for.”

On his return trip home, he was so eager to get home he practically ran from the loading plank onto the ship. A journey home from the Philippines was a long one. When he came to his final train connection, he had to hurry and had no time to call. When John arrived home, he surprised his mother in the kitchen, as she was tending to one of her favorite past-times, fixing spaghetti and meatballs, the perfect homecoming meal for the Italian Soldier. His mother, who cried when he first left, now cried at having John arrive home. After eating his first home cooked meal in three years, he was so full he could barely walk. But this did not stop him from setting off walking to see the rest of his family.

He started to walk to his Dad’s shop in Somerville. He first stopped on the way at his sister’s house which was just down the street. After an hour there, he set out again for Dad’s shop, but in this small town, family was always close by. He ran into his brothers Al and George who were overjoyed to see John, and he was overjoyed to see them. They had their loud and emotional reunion right out on First Avenue.

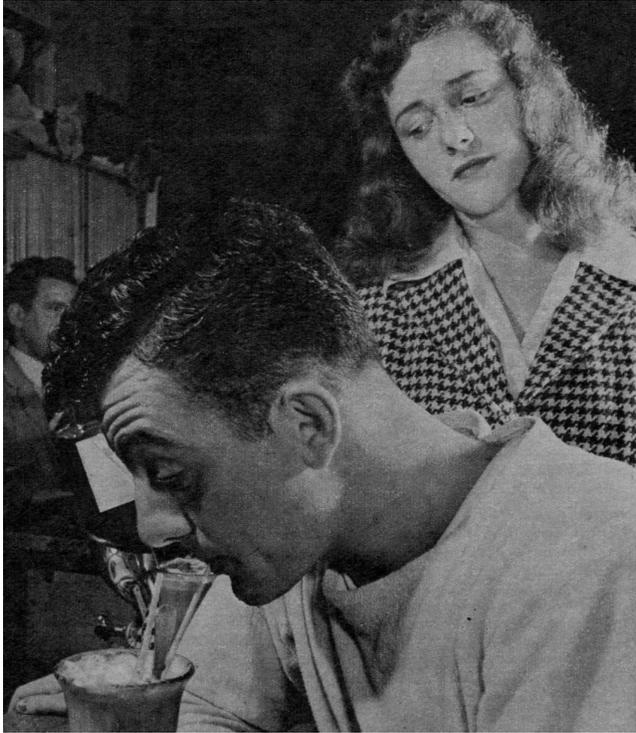
It did not take long for his brothers to ask him about the girls in the Philippines. John just glossed over the girl questions as he had trouble bringing himself to talk about Lolita, the girl he had to leave behind. Even to his brothers, he could not bring himself to talk about her — as he thought about the wonderful times they had together and would no longer have.

## **John At Home 1937-1940**

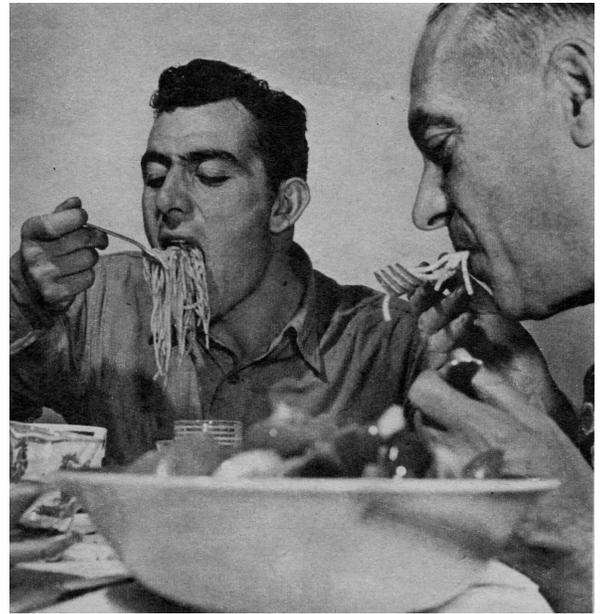
When John arrived home from the Army he was in great shape. John was just average height, 5 foot 9 inches, but he was muscular. John went back to an old job, caddying at the *Raritan Valley Country Club*, where many of the gentlemen he had worked for before were glad to see him return. Some of his customers were Japanese, his future enemy in war. There were several well educated Japanese Businessmen, mostly from New York City, who were members of the *Raritan Valley Country Club*. They were very accommodating and usually big tippers. After his heroics, John would recall working with them, saying they were very polite and that so many of them would bring their cameras to the golf course as the surrounding area had views of the factories and canals.

While John liked caddying, his dad Salvatore, who always wanted the best for his kids, one night said “you don’t want to be a caddy your whole life do you?” His dad had wanted John to take the traditional route, a steady job, a nice girl, and settle down. John felt there was no rush to settle down.

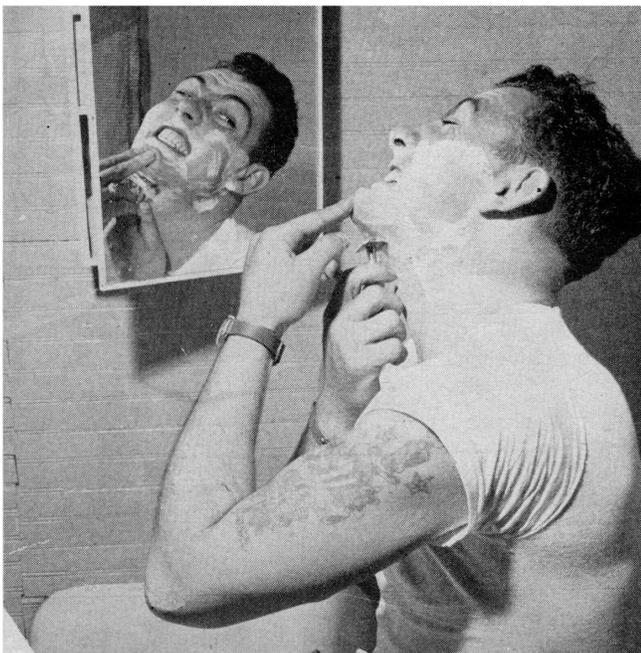
When the summer ended, John moved from caddying to a job at a chemical plant, *The*



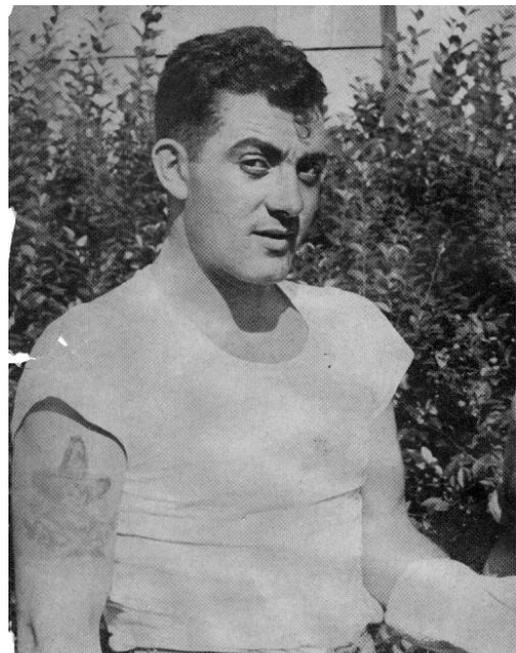
Living it up as  
“The Town’s Biggest Soda Drinker”



Spaghetti with Pop



John’s left arm had a tattoo that said  
“Death Before Dishonor”



John’s right arm had a tattoo  
of a Wild West Girl

*Calco Chemical Division of American Cyanamid* in Bound Brook where he worked on the production line. But that job only lasted a year. He eventually tapped family connections to find a newer job. John's sister Phyllis had moved to Maryland with her husband Bill, who worked for *The Philgas Company*. Through them, John got a job with *The Philgas Company* as an installation mechanic. He was a good employee and for a time liked his work. But after a few months, he found himself restless and again searching for adventure.

John realized that the country was headed to war and he wanted to be there. He started thinking about re-enlisting. He decided this time not to join the Army, but instead enlisted in the Marines. John had tried many jobs and felt the Marines was his calling, the long sought adventure he had been striving for. He would tell his family "The army is not tough enough for me". The Marines were glad to have a recruit like John - a military veteran in his 20's. Most of their recruits were just eighteen and inexperienced.

John signed up at the Marine Recruiting Station in Baltimore, Maryland. The next step would be to tell his family. John had only been home three years after his three year Army enrollment, so he knew his family would be disappointed. John was at peace with his decision, telling his sister Phyllis that "it brought him inner calm".

John arrived home for a scheduled family dinner driving from Baltimore to Raritan. He waited for the right moment. After dinner while having a smoke with his father Salvatore in his backyard, John told his father that he had joined the Marines. He explained how he had jumped from job to job and that he felt this country was headed for war and he wanted to help. Salvatore asked "Who would be crazy enough to try and hurt this country?" Showing his vision based on the recent news coverage, John said "The Japs". His prediction would come true on December 7th, 1941, just 18 months later. Salvatore said "If you feel this way, then O.K." and he gave John a look of reassurance. A greatly relaxed John said "Thanks Pop. Some day I'll make you proud of me. There will be a day that the name Basilone will be held in high esteem."

John spent the next 10 days visiting family before leaving for the Marines. He recalled that he "had a ball doing it". His family members gave him gifts and some money as send off presents.

## **The Marines**

On July 11th, 1940, John arrived at Quantico, Virginia to start boot camp for the Marines. John had machine gun experience in the Army, so the Marine commanders choose to use his experience and assigned John to a machine gun unit.

Years before, John thought that the Army training was tough, but this Marine training was much more intense. He described "when they train you to be a Marine, you either fall by the wayside or you emerge as the best damn fighting man in the service." He called his sergeant a "holy terror", but later said he thanked God for the training under this sergeant.

After boot camp, he was headed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba where, to his surprise, the training got even tougher. The top man in command was Brigadier General "Howling Mad" Smith, who took pride in making sure his men were a trim, tremendous fighting force. Never staying in one camp too long, John and his outfit then moved to Culebra, Virgin Islands. It was here that John went through simulated beach landing to prepare for an invasion. They moved back to their home base in Quantico, Virginia in May of 1941, where they were assigned to the new Seventh Marine Division. Then they shipped to Parris Island, South Carolina. After landing and unpacking, they were ordered to re-pack again. They would go to New River, North Carolina. This place had swamps and snakes, which would help them prepare for the future jungle terrain in the South Pacific. In the months of training here, they learned how to land and bring tons of equipment onto shore. He learned teamwork – and felt that his unit seemed a part of him. The unit looked to Basilone for leadership. The cohesion of the group led John to tell his family "I knew these guys would never fail me when the chips came down." Later events would prove him right.

The camp was isolated from any entertainment. Their access to the outside world was a local paper which came out just once a week. Some U.S.O. shows did come to the camp, but just as they were about to transfer out.

# St. Ann's Church



Here is the old St. Ann's Church. It was next to where the new church is today. The church was in use 1906-1933.



St. Ann's today. The church building was built in 1933.

**The Basilone family went to St. Ann's Church. John Basilone wrote that *St. Ann's* was "my place of refuge when I was a confused and puzzled lad."**

## History of St. Ann's

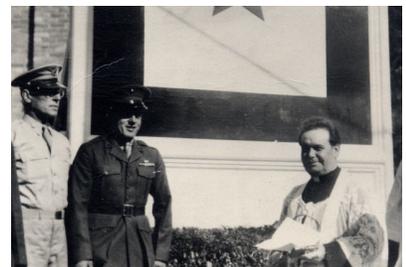
It was on April 17th, 1903, that the papers were signed establishing "The Catholic Church of St. Ann" in Raritan. The first members consisted of more than 100 families who had come from Italy. For the first three years, an empty building on Somerset Street was used as their church. Then, in 1906, they built a church on Anderson Street (see above picture). Over the years, the church membership grew, and this small wooden church could not accommodate all its members. So in 1933, the brick church that still stands today was constructed. The church features Roman Renaissance Architecture.

**By the end of *World War II*, 354 members of St. Ann's had enrolled in the armed forces, and 15 of them had given their lives to preserve our freedom.**



## Father Amedeo Russo

Beloved pastor at St. Ann's. He held the post for 23 years - longer than any other Pastor. Parishioners described him as a regular guy you could easily talk with. He was pastor when St. Ann's did their renovations in 1945. Father Russo died in 1953, while still pastor at St. Ann's.



Father Russo with John Basilone in September 1943.

John recalled the only recreation was card games and boxing. John enjoyed the thrill of being in the boxing ring. In fact, he was undefeated during all his Army and Marine service. In those days, boxing was not viewed as dangerous as it is today. It was part of the Marine culture at the base. The Marine commanders had even managed to obtain an old circus tent they would set up for the boxing matches.

After the U.S. was attacked at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, John's Marine Division was itching to go into action. They got their wish, and on May 8th, 1942, they received their orders to sail, first landing in Samoa, an island 2000 miles east of Australia. The island was peaceful, for it was outside the range of the Japanese Empire. However, they were now just one long boat ride from the war.

Throughout the training, John had moved up in the ranks. During his first year in September he had been promoted to private first class. In May of 1941, he became a corporal, then, a sergeant on January 23rd, 1942. Finally, he would be promoted to a "platoon sergeant" on November 23rd, 1943.

As leader, John made sure his unit was top notch, he said "My boys were the best damn machine gun outfit in the division." One soldier later described John during this period in an article called *Manila John* written by Edward Dieckmann, "He was a neat military man, who always made a favorable impression on both officers and enlisted men. He was able to solve any military problem which might confront him, and he demonstrated leadership ability to a marked degree. He was a natural at inspiring the men of his section to greater effort."

By August 1942, fierce fighting began on an island north of Australia called Guadalcanal - one of the Solomon Islands. John's Captain Rodgers explained to them about the battle conditions, so John's group practiced for island fighting. They complained bitterly, but the practice would pay off in the months to come. John said that the training directly saved lives through the signals that the men learned between each other. After four months in Samoa, at the end of August 1942, the group got their orders to go to Guadalcanal.

## On the way to Guadalcanal

As they started packing for the war, John's group took on a new serious tone, all bitching and griping ceased. Their only focus now was to get to the island and help the other fighting men. A large convoy of all types of ships made the journey, freighters, destroyers, heavy cruisers, and transports. It was an inspiring site to see the force that was going with them. They would need this inspiration.

On the trip over, the Marines drifted between preparing for combat and diverting themselves from the upcoming fight. They talked (and bragged) about girls at home. One of John's preparations was to have his buddies blindfold him, and then he would assemble his machine gun.

Everyone wondered how they would stand up to the action ahead. The U.S. military strategy in 1942 was to prevent the Japanese from taking over Australia. The Japanese had invaded much of the Southern Pacific Region, having conquered Singapore, the Philippines, and parts of China. The Japanese initially took control of Guadalcanal, which was just 1000 miles from Australia. The Japanese had started constructing airstrips which would put them within striking distance of Australia. A Japanese base on this island would threaten the Allied operations and supply lines.

The top man in charge of driving the Japanese off Guadalcanal was Admiral Chester Nimitz. He was the U.S. top commander in that half of the Pacific. The infantry force was the First Marine Division commanded by Major General Alexander Vandegrift. Earlier in August of 1941, the Marines overran some unprepared Japanese troops and forced them away from a key airfield on Guadalcanal. The U.S. called this airstrip Henderson Field. It was named after a U.S. pilot, Major Lofton Henderson, who was killed at an earlier battle at sea, *The Battle of Midway*. These Japanese forces were caught by surprise, only having a small number of troops, making the U.S. take-over easy. However, the Japanese made retaking Henderson Field a high priority. They started sending troops and supplies to fight the Americans holding the island. John Basilone and the rest of the Marines, along with Army troops, were on the way to help the existing forces hold Henderson Field and purge the Japanese from Guadalcanal.

On the boat trip over, a false alarm brought home the realization that they were getting close

**The Town of Raritan was first established as a municipality of Bridgewater in 1868.**



Raritan became an independent town in 1948.

Ex-mayor Anthony DeCicco calls Raritan  
“One of the Most Patriotic Towns in America.”

He sites the attendance at the annual John Basilone Parade  
as an example of this.

## **Raritan Train Station**

In the 1940's transportation by trains was much more common than it is today. This was especially true during *World War II*, as gasoline was rationed thus encouraging train travel. Trains at times ran every 10 minutes. The train fare to Somerville was 5 cents and to New Brunswick was 20 cents. The name of the train company was *The Central Railroad of New Jersey*.

During World War II, Raritan was the last “residential” stop on that train line. (Commercial freight trains could go through to Pennsylvania.) The “round house” was just west of the station (where Johnson Drive and *Lab Corp* is today) where the train would turn around to go back. Today, the train continues for many “residential” stops after Raritan.

The train line was extended to Raritan around 1850. The train line, which originated in Newark, had reached Somerville in 1842, but the railroad company went bankrupt and thus forced Raritan to wait several years to get its train transportation. When the train finally reached Raritan it greatly changed the commerce and living standard in the town. As industry could easily be transferred to and from Raritan. The power of the Raritan River was harnessed for industry.



**Raritan Train Station around 1890**

to the real war. On September 18th, 1942, they arrived at Guadalcanal landing unopposed. Thousands of men with their supplies and vehicles moved quickly on the beach. Then they moved quickly off the beach, as you never knew where the enemy might be. The Japanese were known for their trickery, so you could not be too careful.

The arriving troops were met with great enthusiasm by the veteran troops. John Basilone noticed the difference in the appearance of the men that had already been on the island, as opposed to his guys. He wrote "Compared to their tattered and haggard appearance, we were neat, clean, and tough, while they looked like they had been through hell. Their baptism of fire had aged them beyond belief."

The existing troops at Guadalcanal had battled more than just the Japanese. The jungle conditions carried with it the diseases malaria, dysentery, and dengue fever. These diseases accounted for half of those soldiers in the U.S. military hospital.

The first order for the men was to dig foxholes. Some thought this was a foolish order, making the soldiers waste their energy on this task. But when an enemy plane dropped a few bombs that first night, everyone immediately jumped in their foxhole, thankful for its existence.

Guadalcanal was hot, mountainous, and loaded with mosquitoes. At night strange noises were everywhere. Food was in short supply, soldiers were given just two meals a day. Water was also in low supply due to difficulties in transporting it to the troops. The Marine's appearance reflected this, they looked very thin and they had as one writer would describe "a hollowed eyed look of exhaustion."

## First Combat

After a few days at Guadalcanal, John had his first orders to engage the enemy. A U.S. patrol had spotted a small group of Japanese on a scouting mission. John was told to bring three machine gun crews and wipe out the enemy, hopefully leaving no survivors that would bring information back to enemy headquarters. Guadalcanal was a jungle, with low visibility. An enemy could hide a good defensive position just 30 yards away without being seen. John and his group snaked their way quietly toward the location where the U.S. patrol had seen the Japanese. Luckily the Marines spotted them undetected. John Basilone led the group, moving in the closest to observe that the Japanese had stopped to eat, obviously unaware of his presence. Moving back toward his men, John instructed them to set up in a half circle around the unsuspecting enemy. John would fire first, then everyone else would join in firing. He crept forward, the tenseness of the situation made breathing difficult and sweat poured down his forehead into his eyes. He cleared his forehead and wiped his eyes, then started firing his machine gun. The rest of his group also opened fire. John observed the Japanese reacting as they were shot. He later said "They seemed to be dancing up and down. I forgot to realize the impact of the heavy bullets was jerking them into all sorts of crazy contortions." Their ambush had worked perfectly, no Japanese soldiers escaped. When all movement stopped, John signaled for his boys to cease fire. Remembering his training, he knew the work may still not be done. The Japanese used many tricks, playing dead was one. Even when wounded and dying, Japanese soldiers were instructed to call for the U.S. medic, and when the medic arrived, set off a hand grenade.

So John decided to take no chances. He walked around finishing off the enemy, making sure they were dead by firing a short burst from his machine gun. One of John's men, Bob Powell said "Jesus sarge, what the hell are you going? Why waste ammo on dead ones?" Just as Bob finished his words, a supposedly dead Japanese soldier jumped up with his gun in hand. Another of John's men quickly shot him down. Bob then said "Damn it Sarge, I'm always shooting off my mouth." With the job done, they headed back to their camp, leaving the smell of death behind. On the way back to camp, two men got sick. This was everyone's first taste of war. They had been very fortunate in this battle. They suffered no casualties. In the upcoming battles they would not be so lucky.

A week later, John Basilone and his group were sent to join with many other troops in response to intelligence reports that said the Japanese were sending in a huge number of ships with men and supplies. At the time, the U.S. only controlled parts of Guadalcanal - such as the strategically important airstrip *Henderson Field*. The Japanese still had secure landing areas in

# John Basilone's Officers at Guadalca-

## Lieutenant Colonel Lewis "Chesty" Puller

He was known as one of the toughest and most determined leaders in the Marine Corps. He was nicknamed "Chesty" for his barrel torso. He was always one to speak his mind. He earned the Navy Cross for his leadership at Guadalcanal at the battle for Henderson Field. One way that he looked out for his men was that he encouraged church services to be held for his men at the front lines. Puller wanted these services to be inspirational - giving his soldiers inner strength. At times he was very dissatisfied with the chaplain's talk and once thought about doing the service himself. He was always talking with his men and kept them informed as possible. Puller was on Guadalcanal during the fighting. His "command post", which was lit by flashlights, often shook from the impact of Japanese bombardment. Puller was the one that personally recommended John Basilone for *The Congressional Medal of Honor*. He was quite a character - there are multiple biographies about him. He would be awarded five Navy Crosses. He died in 1971.



## Alexander Vandegrift

General Vandegrift commanded the infantry force, the First Marine Division, which drove the Japanese from Guadalcanal.

Alexander Vandegrift was born in the United States in 1887. He joined the US Marines and in March 1943 was appointed commander of the 1st Marine Division. He was also given responsibility for the combat training in preparation for its assignment to the Pacific War. Vandegrift had the task of removing the stranglehold of the Japanese in the South Pacific and conducted his first successful amphibious landings at Guadalcanal on 7th August, 1942. Despite attempts by the Japanese Army, Japanese Navy, and Japanese Air Force, the US Marines were able to stay and build the Henderson Field airstrip. Vandegrift, who was awarded the Navy Cross and the Medal of Honor, for his achievements on Guadalcanal, was relieved by General Alexander Patch and the 14th Corps in December. In July 1943, Vandegrift was given command of the 1st Marine

Amphibious Corps and directed the military operations at Bougainville in November. Promoted to general, he was later recalled to Washington in 1944 to assume overall command of the Marine Corps. Alexander Vandegrift died in 1973.



## Admiral Chester Nimitz

Admiral Nimitz shared the command of the Pacific (the war with Japan) in *World War II* with General MacArthur. He commanded the Navy and the Marines from the west coast of the U. S. to the coast of China.

He was born in 1885. After he was not accepted at West Point, he attended the U. S. Naval Academy. Early in his career, he commanded submarines and was in charge of building a submarine base at Pearl Harbor.

He was known for his calm demeanor, never getting excited even in a big crisis. In battle, his focus was to use the U. S. strengths against the enemy weak points. He relied on aircraft carriers to bring battle victories at *Midway*, *Battle of the Coral Sea*, and *Guadalcanal*. He died in 1966.



which they were able to load their men and equipment.

The U.S. troops moved toward the coast to look for the enemy. Fortunately they found them at a position where the existing terrain favored the Americans. The Japanese, in their usual way of fighting, charged the U.S. troops. The U.S. forces along with John Basilone and his men were ready and well positioned for this encounter. The Japanese charge was blasted down, resulting in them taking many casualties. While the main thrust of their charge was held back, some Japanese did manage to get close to the Americans to inflict losses. John Basilone would later describe "A few got within 30 feet of our guns and the sound of bullets smacking into their flesh was sickening." The battle ended with the Japanese retreating, but not before they took a 1000 casualties. The U.S. had their share as well, 50 dead and over 100 wounded. Unlike their first battle, John Basilone and his men had now seen their own side suffer combat losses.

John felt like he had grown old overnight. Looking at the carnage at the end of the battle seemed unbelievable. Like many soldiers, he asked himself, "Why did I come through this unhurt?"

After seeing and tasting death, they were no longer the naïve, cocky soldiers they had been before they arrived on the island. Having seen some of their buddies blown apart, they developed bitterness. Their slogan at Guadalcanal became "The only good Jap, is a dead one."

On Guadalcanal, the U.S. forces were bombed from both Japanese aircrafts and battleships. The ground based U.S. troops could do nothing but dig in and pray against the air attack. The Japanese may have been pushed off some parts of Guadalcanal, but they still had control of much of the sea and air which allowed them intense bombardment of the American troops. The bombardment from the Japanese ships was under the command of Admiral Nagumo, who had led the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The losses and terror inflicted on the Marines from the bombing were horrible. John said "The carnage was such as to break down even the bravest of men, and we were no exception. Good brave men gave way and sobbed."

By mid October, 1942, the Japanese set their objective, to retake the important airstrip, *Henderson Field*. They would do anything to get it. They started by intense bombing of the American positions that went on for days. The bombing, along with mosquitoes, made sleep difficult for the U.S. troops. The shelling shook the ground. Through it the screams of the mangled and dying could be heard.

At one point in mid October, the Japanese bombing of the U.S. ground troops escalated to the point that the U.S. knew that a ground assault was not far off. By October 22nd, 1942, scouts reported that the Japanese were massing for a full scale attack. Intelligence intercepts obtained by the breaking of the Japanese code they used for communications confirmed this. Where it would be, was still in question. The Marines started to set up defensive positions against the attack. The Marines had only a fraction of the troops that the Japanese had. Only a single U.S. Battalion stood between the readying Japanese Division and the vital Airstrip, Henderson field. This 1st Battalion, the 7th Marines, was a tough bunch, led by one of the toughest men in the Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. Puller. He was nicknamed "Chesty".

John Basilone and his men set up a defensive position in front of Henderson Field to prepare. John would have 16 men with 4 heavy machine guns in place. The heavy guns were set up in groups of two's. They also had rifles and pistols, but the heavy guns were the key weapons. His group was vital, as machine guns are often the strongpoint of a defensive position against a charging ground assault.

They set up barbed wire 75 yards in front of them. This setup was crucial as a common Japanese battle tactic was to overwhelm the enemy with large numbers of charging troops. John and his men hoped that the barbed wire would slow up the attackers. John wanted to hold off the enemy at the barbed wire. To help detect the Japanese, they tied string across the trees trunks and attach cans of pebbles to enable them to hear intruders who tried to sneak up on them in the dark.

The U.S. had limited forces for the battle ahead. Their ground commander Lewis "Chesty" Puller estimated that they had only 30% of what he thought was necessary. The lines were spread thin and there were no reserves. There was a good possibility that the Japanese would break through. However, while numbers were not on the U.S. side, their defensive position was strong.

# Raritan during World War II (1942-45)

Raritan had it's own Movie Theatre !

It was called

## *The Raritan Playhouse*

It was at 23 Anderson Street

Before the movie started, the theatres showed newsreels (film of the latest news events) and cartoons. The theatres always showed two films back to back (a double feature), so a night at the movies could last for over 3 hours - and the cost was just 15 cents.

Here is an ad for *The Playhouse* from 1943

The building is still there today.

One would never guess that a movie theatre was once there. The businesses who now occupy the building are

*Kimberley Ross Photography and Frame Me.*



## Raritan had it's own Newspaper, it was called *The Raritan Valley News*

*The Raritan Valley News* was published every Thursday and cost 3 cents per issue. It covered news in Raritan, Bridgewater, Hillsborough and Branchburg. It is no longer printed today. The paper was started by Warren Glaser in the 1930's. The Newspaper's office was on Wall Street. Other local newspapers in 1942-45 were the *Somerset Messenger Gazette* and the *Plainfield-Courier News*.

The Marines had managed to set up plenty of barbed wire. They had dug out bunkers for their well positioned, heavy armed machine gun units.

The dense jungle had a big effect on battle conditions. While it could hide enemy troops until they got close, the jungle would slow an advance. Each step when running could be difficult and an attacking soldier could easily fall off balance. There were also trees and bushes to run around.

## **The Battle for Henderson Field Begins**

For two days, October 22nd and 23rd, 1942, the Marines waited for the attack, but nothing happened. Later it was learned that the Japanese had wanted to attack on the 22nd, but they were delayed due to logistical problems in organizing an attack in a dense jungle. On the 24th, the Japanese were ready. Their commander General Maruyama told his men “This is the decisive battle between Japan and the United States in which the rise or fall of the Japanese Empire will be decided. If we do not succeed in the occupation of the island, no one should expect to return to Japan alive”.

At 10 PM on the 24th, the “field phone” rang. Having waited for days, they initially thought it must be just another outpost getting lonely. However, as John answered the phone he heard trouble. It was one of his men from a post closer to the front line. He screamed “Sarge, the Japs are coming.” In the background John could hear the sounds of explosions and gun fire. “Thousands of them, my God. They just keep coming, Sarge, we can’t stop them. Sarge I got ... .” the line went dead, and so soon would the soldier who had made the phone call.

John Basilone took control, he turned to his men and said “All right you guys, don’t forgot your orders. The Japs are not going to get through to the field. I’m telling you that goes, no matter what !.”

They could soon hear the Japanese cutting the barbed wire. Unfortunately, they could not see the Japanese in the dark as they had hoped. Their first line of defense, the barbed wire, was already falling. John set the strategy for his unit. He told his men to let the enemy get within 30 yards and then “let them have it.” They fired at the first group of attacking Japanese, successfully wiping them out. John, whose battle descriptions were often very descriptive and at times comical, would write “The noise was terrific and I could see the Japs leaping as they were smacked by our bullets. Screaming, yelling, and dying all at the same time. Still they came only to fall back, twisting and going through all sorts of motions as we dispatched them to their honorable ancestors.”

This first charge was only the beginning of the overall enemy attack. They charged several more times. The carnage and dead bodies started to pile up. John later said “One thing you got to hand the Japanese, they were not afraid to die, and believe me, they did.” In addition to frontal charges, the Japanese lobbed mortal shells and threw hand grenades. One Japanese soldier got within 5 feet of John Basilone - here John used his pistol, killing the attacker.

Eventually this attack took it’s toll. John, while manning the left two machine guns, heard a loud explosion come from the right setup of the machine guns. After that, the machine guns that had previously been rattling constantly had fallen silent. Moments later, one soldier from the right side crawled over to John Basilone and informed him that both right guns were knocked out and that the crew was all dead or injured. The horror of battle hit John hard. He thought My God, not the men that I had trained and was so proud of.

John could not pause to grieve, but instead knew he had to get to the knocked out guns to see if he could get them working. He took some remaining men and crawled through the rain soaked jungle toward the damaged gun post. The path across brought them to an area where one of their artillery shells had previously exploded in the middle of an enemy patrol. There was mutilation everywhere and the stench was almost unbearable.

Before arriving at the knocked out gun post, a couple of Japanese were encountered. John urged his men to hang back. He jumped out spraying the enemy, killing them with his Browning machine gun. However his arm was burnt from the hot gun. While the Browning gun can be fired

# Raritan during World War II, 1942-45

Four of the five churches were the same



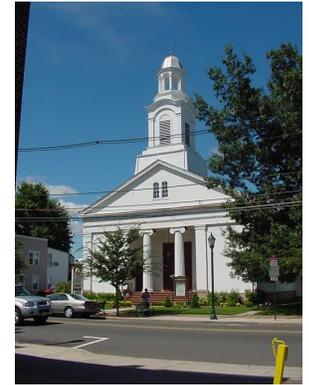
*St. Ann's* on Anderson Street, was founded in 1903. This church was built in 1933.



*St. Joe's* which formed in 1911, built this church 1914-15.



*St. Paul's* was founded in 1883. The church building was built 1925-27.



*The Third Reform Church* was founded in 1848. They built this church in 1850-51.



Today's Shrine on Somerset Street was *St. Bernard's Church*, which was built in 1881. *St. Bernard's* had formed in 1843. They moved out in 1988 to Route 22 in Bridgewater.



**The Frelinghuysen House**, which is today's library, on Somerset Street, was not the library, but had people living in it. It was divided up and rented as apartments.



**The Post Office** was located in this building here on Somerset Street

During *World War II*, today's "Historical" Firehouse on Anderson Street was there, but of course it was not yet a "historical" firehouse, just a regular firehouse. It also served as the municipal building and police station.



Most storefront buildings on Somerset Street are still standing, but now different businesses occupy them.

Where Today is	in 1945 was
<i>As You Like It Ice Cream</i>	<i>Lipoma's Barber Shop</i>
<i>Dr. Patel's Office</i>	<i>Conroy-Bongiovi Funeral Home</i>
<i>Raritan Vacuum</i>	<i>Spallucci's Pharmacy</i>
<i>E&amp;M Deli</i>	<i>Raritan Valley Hardware</i>
<i>Raritan Pharmacy</i>	<i>Jerry's Barber &amp; Beauty Shop</i>
<i>Francesco's</i>	a Drug / Candy Store
<i>Pregnancy Aid</i>	<i>Mae's Luncheonette &amp; Raritan Liquor Store</i>
<i>Coster's Frames</i>	<i>Hannon Funeral Home</i>

held in a soldier's arms, the gun works best when held in support triangle, as the heat can be a hazard to the shooter.

When they arrived at the right gun position, John saw that five men were dead, and two were injured. The two injured men were still holding their guns ready to fire. Before John could get a look at the knocked out guns, the Japanese attacked again. Using the gun John brought over and their rifles, they held back the attack. This time some of the Japanese attackers tried to sneak in quietly crawling low in the high grass. John spotted them and laid on the ground firing his gun accurately through the grass, as he would later say "mowed down the crawlers." Beating back that attack gave them a few minutes of quiet to inspect the damaged guns. The first gun was beyond repair. The second gun had a chance. There was no light to aid in examining the damaged gun. John would have to troubleshoot the problem in the dark, by feeling the parts to find out what was causing the gun not to fire. The Marines had to learn how to assemble their guns blindfolded. John was expert at this. As he worked to find the problem, the Japanese could be heard lining up for another charge. John found the problem and yelled to his guys "the head spacing is out of line." One of his men thought that means the gun is not repairable, but John quickly had the gun working again. As soon as it was back in action, the enemy charged. With the extra gun now working, Basilone and his unit easily beat back the Japanese attack.

The enemy was soon charging again. Fortunately for John and his remaining men, the Japanese battle tactics were very similar each time. They would group up and could usually be seen and heard doing so. Then they would charge, yelling "Banzai Banzai". This allowed the Marines to anticipate the attack and counter effectively. John and his men started to yell Banzai back, along with a few choice American words.

Through holding back the attacks, John wondered quietly to himself how long can they keep this up? At one point later in the heat of battle, one of his men had the same worries and yelled "Sarge how long can we keep this up?" John briefly had his doubts too, and wondered "is this where it ends, out here in the jungle, thousands of miles from home." They were getting groggy and many thoughts were going through their minds. John wondered about the dead enemy soldiers in front of him. Did they have families? Then he would switch his thoughts to how those men were not human. They're just something the earth vomited up and his job was to put them back down with lead.

There was no water, as their canteens had been hit by shrapnel. Their mouths were so dry and dusted with dirt that it changed their appearance. John said "We had lost our resemblance to the human race." No reinforcements were coming. At one point the guns were getting too hot and there was no water to pour into the cooling jacket, so John instructed his men to urinate into the shaft to cool the guns down. It worked.

The attacks kept coming, even in a heavy downpour of rain. John told two of his remaining uninjured soldiers, Powell and Evans, to keep the heavy machine guns loaded. John would roll to one machine gun and fire until it was empty, then roll over to the other one that had been loaded while he was firing the first one. When that was empty, he went back to the first gun which had now been reloaded. This strategy was used against the remaining Japanese attacks.

When they felt they could not keep up the pace any longer, the Japanese would retreat and regroup. The enemy would then predictably charge in groups of 15 or 20. Basilone would let them get close and then mow them down. As they were hit, their screams filled the night.

Another Japanese soldier managed to sneak up to their position and jumped right at them with a knife. Again, John got him with his pistol. The pistol would see more action through the night, as it was the best weapon for those who crept in close by crawling. Some grenades exploded close to John and his fellow Marines, but none hit them. It was a long night, and some of the early kills started to decompose. It brought on a nasty stench.

Later in the night, Basilone saw an incredible site. The Japanese had taken their dead and piled them up high in front of them to form a wall to protect the living Japanese soldiers who set up their machine guns behind the pile of their dead comrades. To counter the new enemy "wall", John decided to move his position to get a better angle at the enemy. Later, in a break in the fighting, John sent one of his men to go push over the wall of dead bodies.

# Raritan during World War II (1942-45)



*Glaser's Department Store* was at this location on 59 Thompson Street for over 100 years. From 1880 to 1986.

## *Glaser's Department Store*

When they first opened over 100 years ago, they sold their goods by a horse drawn cart in addition to the store. During the depression, Glasers extended generous credit terms to the Raritan residents to buy the necessities such as clothes and shoes.

On the Corner of Wall & Somerset St. was ***The Candy Kitchen.***

Here kids could get candy, ice cream, soda, and potato chips - treats that were special in those days. Kids were even encouraged to hang out and play cards in the booths.

*The Candy Kitchen* was here for over 50 years. It closed in the mid 1970s. Today in that location is *Trend Setters.*



*The Candy Kitchen* was located in this building.



Today *The Town Pharmacy* occupies the building that *Amerman and Reger's* did.

## *Amerman and Reger's General Store*

It was open 1883-1953. It functioned as the local supermarket of it's day. Meats, sugar, coffee, vegetables, fruits, and all other food were provided to Raritan for 70 years.

## *The Granetz Department*

Store stood at this location from 1900-1988. Clothing, fabrics, supplies, and service were provided here for 88 years. These department stores of the past were very small, this one just 3000 square feet. Today's Department stores are often 20 times that size.



*The Great Wall* (a Chinese restaurant) is in the building were *The Granetz Department Store* was.



***The Schaub Bakery*** on Somerset Street was Raritan's most popular bakery in the 1940's. It is still a bakery today, but it's name is *The Raritan Bakery*. Over the years it has changed owners and names a couple times.

***Stabile Insurance & Real Estate*** was located in this building at 5 Anderson Street.

The business had been closed for decades, but the door still has the letters on it that says "General Insurance Real Estate".



## ***Tropiano's***

was in this location during *World War II* — across the street from where it is now. When it opened in 1936, it sold appliances, radios, and a small amount of jewelry and coins. Over time, the jewelry business grew and the appliances were dropped. Today *Tropiano's* sells only jewelry. It is one of the oldest stores in Raritan.

## ***Raritan State Bank***

was located in the building where *Tropiano's* is today



## A Run for Ammunition

At about 3 AM, his remaining uninjured men, Garland and Powell, who had been loading the machine guns, informed Basilone that they were almost out of ammunition. This came as a surprise, as initially they had what they thought was plenty of ammunition, but this intense battle had depleted their supply. Basilone thought “what a hell of a way to go, no ammo.” He said to his two men, “Hold on, I’ll bring you back some ammo.” Garland yelled “what are you going to do, go back for shells?” That was exactly what he had planned. The Marines had stored ammunition about 100 yards away. However, this would be a difficult 100 yards. The battlefield was covered with enemy soldiers. By this point, some Japanese were scattered about. There were enemy troops on both the sides and behind their position. Garland told Basilone “Sarge you can’t. There are Japs behind us, in front of us, and on each side.” John figured he had no choice. He told his men to hold the position with the remaining ammunition for the machine guns and their rifles and pistols. By this time in the night, John Basilone had removed his boots. Earlier it had rained, and the cool night made his feet too cold to tolerate the soaked boots. He had also stripped to the waist to rid himself of a soaked shirt.

John crawled through the jungle until he reached a path and then got up and ran. Bullets flew off over his head and grenades exploded around him. One grenade exploded with a force that knocked him to the ground, but while it stunned him, the shrapnel did not hit John. He got up and continued to the hidden ammo dump. When he finally arrived at the dump, Basilone felt like it was a miracle he made it there. The ammo dump was dug into the ground, he jumped in. The Japanese had not located it, so the supplies were still there. The bullets were stored in cartridge belts. John threw six of them over his shoulder. The image of John with the cartridge belts over his shoulder would inspire the design for the “Basilone Statue” and a portrait of him. (The statue has him shirtless, but the portrait has him with his shirt on. See the portrait on page 4) The total weight of the belts was around 100 pounds. As he started back to his men, bullets were whizzing all around him again. Fortunately, the darkness and the fact that he crawled most of the way back, provided him enough protection to avoid getting hit.

When Basilone arrived back, he found another challenge. One machine gun had been smashed. John took parts from another knocked out gun and fixed it quickly. Soon after he had repaired the machine gun, the enemy began another attack. This attack was more intense than the previous ones. John sensed that the Japanese must really want Henderson Field badly to waste all that manpower. To combat this new charge, John took the gun off the tripod and flattened it to the ground to get better aim at the attack. His helmet got in his way, so he ripped it off to allow himself more effective firing. He again used his standard firing technique where he would roll between two machine guns, firing one while his men reloaded the other. The Japanese came as if hypnotized - the slaughter was appalling. John told family “the enemy was climbing over their dead comrades and seemed eager to throw themselves in my line of fire. It was unbelievable that life could be so cheap.”

Later in the night, the ammunition ran low again. John would need to go for more, but this time it would be to another ammunition dump, 600 yards away. This ammunition dump had water, which was now a necessity if they were to continue fighting. He crawled low in the grass. Once again the Japanese threw everything at him. They shot at him and threw grenades, but he snaked through the grass well enough so that the Japanese could not find a clear target. Basilone later said “How I got through, I’ll never know.”

John made it back with the much needed water and ammunition. The enemy was still attacking again, this time yelling “malines you die, banzai, banzai, malines you die!” John and his two men were getting light headed and later admitted that while they yelled back to the enemy, they did not make much sense. They started to notice that the Japanese attacks were getting weaker and weaker. Finally ending around sunrise.

The daylight revealed a scene of utter carnage on the ground. Hundreds of bodies laid dead in front of the American positions. In some spots dead bodies were on top of each other. The

## The Gas Stations in Raritan during World War II (1942-1945)

All 3 buildings still stand, but the gas pumps have all been removed. Only one building is still in use. At *Stabile's* and *Terpis Esso Station* the cars would remain in the street when getting filled up.



**Jimmy Arcieri's Gulf Station**  
was on Nevius Street.  
Today *Raritan Tire* is there.



**Stabile Service Station**  
was in this building on Anderson Street  
at the corner of Second Street.  
No business occupies it today.



**Terpis Esso Station**  
was at this building on Somerset  
Street. No business is there now.

## Places to get food were located here



**Carlino's Confectionary** - a candy and ice cream store was in this location. Mary Carlino Soriano who worked at the store recalled that the most popular penny candies that the kids purchased were *Tootsie Rolls* and *Lolly Pops*. Carlino's had (hard) ice cream as well. The cones were 5 cents, sundaes - 15 cents, and a banana split - 25 cents.  
building



**Costa's Market** was in  
this building on First Ave.



**Spinelli's Market** - a small grocery store - was here at 53 First Ave. It was the closest market for the Basilone Family and thus a frequent shopping stop.



**Delucia's Brick Oven Pizza**  
is the oldest store in Raritan today. It opened in 1916 as a bakery. For years they offered bakery goods and pizza, then around 1950, they became pizza only.



**A Sewing Factory**  
was here.



Ice and Coal was delivered by **John Valko's & Son's** - they were at 21 Colfax Street. Ice was in large blocks for the "Ice Box" since there were no refrigerators. The ice block would last 2 days.

debris of war was everywhere. Broken weapons, ammunition containers, and pieces of barbed wire.

They counted thirty eight dead Japanese surrounding one of Basilone's defensive positions. This number would be later used in the headlines of the newspapers. The real number that John Basilone killed himself could never be determined, and it was many more than thirty eight.

Early in the morning, John saw Japanese planes trying to land at Henderson Field. The Japanese had mistakenly thought that they had taken Henderson Field. Their battle plan was to throw a whole regiment at the field, overwhelm the U.S. forces, taking the airstrip. They were so sure this would be done, that the Japanese commanders of the planes did not even check to see if they had taken the airstrip. The reason for their over confidence was that they had not yet tasted defeat. Many planes trying to land were shot down by alert U.S. forces. Some planes escaped and returned to inform the commanders that the attack had failed. In fact, the entire Japanese regiment, around 3000 men, had been "annihilated", or as Basilone would later say, "they were now sleeping the long sleep."

Now with the morning light, a welcome sight arrived, reinforcements. They had not been forgotten. John wrote "I rested my head on the edge of the emplacement, weary, tired and thankful that the Lord had seen fit to spare me."

John's commanding officer Lewis "Chesty" Puller was making the rounds that morning, talking to the surviving soldiers. When he saw John, he said "I heard you came back for ammunition, good work." Later it would be Puller who recommended Basilone, and only Basilone, for *The Congressional Medal of Honor*.

John ordered his men away from the front to the base on Henderson Field. They were Powell, Garland, Evans, and La Pointe. Basilone chose to stay at the post in order to help the new men. The battle on that next night was light as the Japanese were all but defeated for now. He stayed until 6 AM the next morning, when he was ordered back to Henderson Field.

## The Battle Ends

The Japanese attack had been held off. There were of course many Marines in addition to Basilone who defeated them. These Marines, along with Army troops had shown tremendous tenacity and courage to hold off a determined enemy who was not afraid to die. The Japanese had come close to breaking through, but did not succeed. The Marines named their defensive position *Bloody Ridge* due to the large number of dead.

The battle at Guadalcanal held much significance to the Japanese. Up to that time, they had won each land battle and had taken territory as they pleased. They would take many casualties, but they eventually would win, adding to their growing empire. A few months back, they lost a battle at sea - *The Battle of Midway* - but when they were prepared, they had not been beaten on land. Their initial loss of Henderson Field occurred only because they had been surprised, and had just a small number of Japanese troops to defend the airstrip. This time the Japanese felt that with a fully prepared squad they could return to their winning ways. However, after they threw everything they had at the U.S. forces to win back Henderson Field and failed, from that point on, they were no longer on the offensive, but on the defensive, trying to hold the islands and countries they had conquered.

Guadalcanal was unique in that it was the first large battle in history that used an intense combination of land, air, and sea forces.

There would still be more fighting on Guadalcanal after the battle for Henderson field on the night of October 24th, and 25th, but the outcome was certain. The U.S. had turned the tide of the war and the previously undefeated Japanese were on their way to defeat. The Japanese fully retreated from Guadalcanal in early February 1943. As these exhausted Japanese troops finally retreated, the Japanese generals were shocked to see that only 10,000 of their initial fighting force of 40,000 were still alive.

Today, the battle of Guadalcanal has not been forgotten. The First Marine Division commemorates this battle on their soldier patch, with the word "Guadalcanal" inside the number one. This is to honor the brave men who held the line when the battle defenses were the thinnest against fanatical suicide charges in the dark, who battled thirst, disease ridden mosquitoes, and rain-

# Orlando's Tavern

No review of Raritan during *World War II* would be complete without talking about **Orlando's Tavern** - which was located at 19 Wall Street. Orlando's was started by Raritan resident Tony Orlando, who in 1933, just after prohibition, converted an abandoned church to a tavern. Orlando's was dedicated to the local soldiers over seas. They sent them thousands of letters and hundreds of packages (usually with cigarettes) through out the war. **Orlando's displayed hundreds of photos of local soldiers on it's wall.** Part of this wall is preserved and on display today (see photos) at the Raritan Library.

Orlando's was the meeting place during *World War II* where people would come together to discuss the latest happening and casualties of the war. **Former Mayor Steve Del Rocco recalls that service men were absolutely forbidden to pay for their drinks.** This was Tony Orlando's way of thanking them for their service. Tragically, in 1975, Orlando's burnt down, and a landmark of Raritan's past was gone.



A lot and a house stand today on Wall Street where *Orlando's* once was.



A sample of the wall at Orlando's is displayed at the Raritan Library



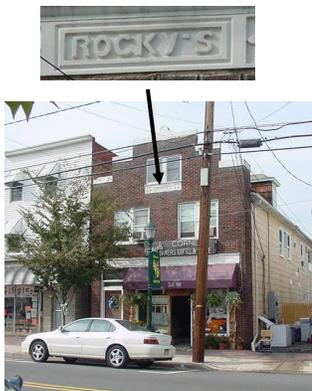
A few years after the war, Tony Orlando was honored with a dinner at *The Martinsville Inn* for his dedication to the servicemen. Here is Tony in the center with future mayor Steve Del Rocco (left) and Daniel Memoli (right).



***DeCicco's Tavern*** was called the ***The Anderson Tavern*** (although it was owned by the DeCicco Family) It first opened in 1933.



Another popular tavern was ***The Park Grill***, which was also called ***Rocky Mieli's Bar***, after it's owner, who in 1948, became the first mayor of Raritan. It was at Nevius and Somerset Street. A laundry place is now there.



***Rocky's Department Store*** was in this building where a Flower Shop is now. The name **ROCKY'S** is still inscribed at the top of the building.



A popular restaurant was the ***Raritan Valley Inn***, which was on the Somerville Circle. The building is now gone, The ***Super 8 Motel*** is there today.

soaked conditions to turn the course of the war.

When John was first taken out of battle on October 26th, he realized he had not eaten in 72 hours. The U.S. base at Henderson Field had only crackers and jam, hardly a gourmet meal, but John ate them like it was Thanksgiving Dinner.

He now had time to think about the battle. The Japanese disregard for death had amazed him and his soldiers. Was this a winning fighting strategy? The U.S. soldier certainly did not fight this way. It made the enemy soldiers seem sub-human.

As time went on, John continued having trouble keeping the terrible details of battle out of his mind. He said that during the day he was somewhat successful pushing aside the battle memories, but the night would bring back the horrible images of battle. A few times he woke up screaming as his mind forced him to relive part of that terrible night defending Henderson Field.

A battle like that stays with a soldier in many strange bizarre ways. Even when first showering (days after the battle) John and his men felt like (as he would say) “the smell of rotting stinking flesh was still with us.” It was a while before he could take a deep breath and not smell the stench of dead bodies which still caused him to feel like he would get sick to his stomach.

There was still another combat assignment for John. He was sent on a mission where Marine raiders landed behind enemy lines to search through the island hunting out and eliminating the small groups of Japanese soldiers that were scattered through out the island of Guadalcanal. They were out on this assignment for eighteen days. They only had “field rations” for food. Since the Japanese defenses were now considerably weakened, this assignment was completed successfully without taking many casualties.

## Taking Leave in Australia

John’s “orders”, along with the men who fought that night of October 24th and 25th, was to take leave. A rest was necessary if they were going to fight again. The toll that the battle had taken on the soldiers physically and emotionally was tremendous.

John’s heroics on that night gained him much respect from his fellow buddies, but the awarding of *The Congressional Medal of Honor* was still months away. John had no idea that he would be awarded the medal and the resulting spotlight that was to come.

Remembering boot camp, John recalled they were taught and shown films on combat fatigue, but seeing real men with combat fatigue, including himself, was the real teacher that no film could teach. Half the division he was with, at one time or another, had malaria fever. The change in men’s appearance and attitude was interesting. Months ago, they acted like teenagers, but now they had been aged by their experience. John described “Their sunken eyes reflected the pain and misery they had been subjected to. I was no different.”

What kept the men going was the fact that they had won their battle. In the battles before, the U.S. record had been poor. It started with the bombing at Pearl Harbor. After that, the U.S. lost their territory, the Philippines to Japan. In that battle, thousands of U.S. soldiers were captured and forced to march in the brutal “Bataan Death March”. While Guadalcanal was a difficult and costly victory, it was victory. Their buddies had not died in vain. John Basilone thought that the backbone of the Japanese had been broken. He wrote “their spirit died in the jungle. To the Oriental mind, ‘loss of face’ was disaster and the fact that they had been unable to push the Americans off the island, had disgraced them”. Events would later prove that Guadalcanal was indeed the turning point of the war.

John and his Marine division boarded a transport ship and were headed for leave toward what they were told was Brisbane, Australia. On the ship they enjoyed some of the simple pleasures in life, sunshine and fresh air - and life itself, which was no longer “taken for granite”. The soldiers spirits started to pick up as the boat approached shore, but when they arrived, it was a shock. They were to be set up in a military “tent city” just outside of Brisbane. It was another swamp with mosquitoes and now Goony Birds. John wrote that Guadalcanal was paradise compared to this place. Fortunately, General Vandegrift, the commander who had led the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal, became furious at the vacation spot that his victorious fighting men were given. He proposed having the division moved to Melbourne, Australia. After this decision however General Vandegrift found that there were no transports available to take the men there.

# Raritan during World War II (1942-45)

The schools were much different than today

***The Primary School, Grades K - 4, was on the site where the Municipal building now stands.***



The Primary School, shown here, is now gone.



The Municipal building stands where the primary school once was.

***The Intermediate School, Grades 5 - 6, was in this building (which is still standing) at 2nd Street and Church Street. Today, it is an office complex.***

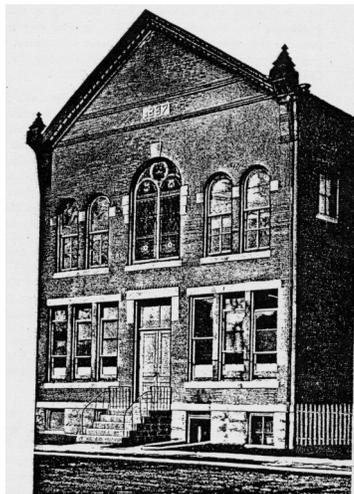


***Grades 7 and 8 were at The Washington School, The building still stands today, it is used for county municipal offices.***



***John Basilone went to St. Bernard's Parochial School grades (1 thru 8).***

It was located in downtown Raritan on Somerset Street. With only four classrooms, it grouped two grades together in each class. The school was open from 1889-1938. The building, which is now gone, was later used as a V.F.W. Hall, but it burnt down in 1986.



St. Bernard's Parochial School



Today, where *St. Bernard's Parochial School* once stood, is an Italian Bakery & Nail Art.

There was no High School in Raritan during *World War II*. Teenagers went to Somerville High School.

Further up the command line Admiral Halsey heard of the situation and reorganized priorities, making transport ships available to take the 1st Marine Division to Melbourne. These men were heroes. They gave the U.S. its first badly needed land victory, so the generals took care of them.

The Marines arrived in Melbourne, Australia. It was a wonderful site that brought tears to their eyes. For the months before, the soldiers had only seen tent camps and jungle surroundings. This was a regular city, with streets and real buildings. When they first arrived at Melbourne, they were paraded through the city streets with their division band leading the way. They were cheered by thousands of people. The Australian people were grateful, as they knew that the defense of Guadalcanal had saved Australia.

John described Melbourne as just like home. It had beaches, amusement parks, golf courses, and of course, bars. The transition from a dark disease infested jungle to this fun town of friendly people was such that the soldiers had to keep reminding themselves that this was real, not just an illusion they were having while trapped in fox hole on a dark wet night. It was a wonderful vacation for the soldiers. John wrote about the Australian people "They were without question the most honest and sincere people we had ever met. They opened their homes to us and most of the men took advantage of their generous hospitality."

The soldiers, as they always do, searched out for girls on their leave. Some boys met girls that they fell in love with. For many other soldiers, there did not seem to be enough girls to go around. John wrote "It was a rat race to get a date", but with his good looks, he said "I did pretty well with the girls." After a few weeks in Melbourne chasing the local girls, the social scene changed. A division of Australian soldiers returned from the war. This created a situation at the bars and pubs where the local Australian soldiers were now competing with the visiting U.S. soldiers for the local girls. As a result, many fights over girls flared up in the bars. Even with the fights, John spoke positive about the Australian soldiers, saying "they were a wonderful bunch, you could not blame them for flaring up. Here we were solidly entrenched in their homeland, and we had the market for their women."

One night, John got involved in a situation over a girl in a bar, with an Australian Soldier. John tried to back off, but the other guy would not. Using his boxing experience, John hit him with a straight left causing the Australian soldier to fall to the floor. He got back up and came at John again, this time with two of his friends. Basilone's buddies joined in and a small riot erupted. Military police got the riot under control relatively quickly.

The fights between the U.S. and the Australians (one of our allies in the war) had become such a problem that one of the U.S. Generals decided to try and ease the situation by hosting a large party, where the Australian soldiers would be the invited guests of the U.S. . The party drew thousands of soldiers from both sides. Beer was served, but as a precaution in paper cups, glass might be dangerous. The party, which was really a "peace conference", was a success. Basilone would describe, "we got to know the Australians better, and believe it or not, the fights in the bars stopped." When leave was over, John even said he missed the Australians when they parted ways.

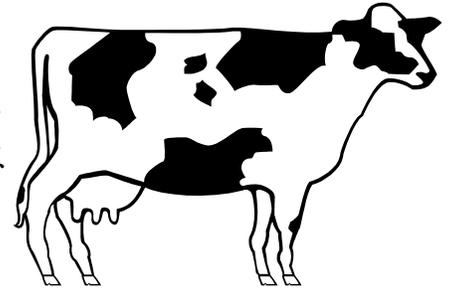
## **The Congressional Medal of Honor**

John started to hear rumors that he was being considered for *The Congressional Medal of Honor* for his heroics on Oct 24-25th, 1942, at Guadalcanal. The award is the highest decoration a soldier can receive. The story of his actions had been told through interviews with John and his men after the battle. Initially, John never thought he would be up for the medal. He said "Why should I be singled out? There had been thousands of guys who fought bravely and many that died at Guadalcanal." Then in May of 1943, there was a big parade scheduled at the base. John wondered what it was for. On the morning of the parade, May 21st, 1943, there was lots of excitement through out the camp. John noticed nearly everyone but him was involved in the setup of the parade. Was he really going to get such an honor? That morning, his commander came in the barracks and escorted John outside to the reviewing stand in the front of the parade. John noticed that all eyes of the lined up soldiers were on him. General Alexander Vandegrift, was also present. John was walked up to the general, and the general saluted him. John was stunned as he

# Raritan during World War II (1942-45)

## Raritan Had Cows !

**Raritan Valley Farms**, a dairy farm, was located on both sides of Route 206 (then 206 was called Route 31). **The farm was owned by one time Senator Joe Frelinghuysen.** The buildings were on the (east) Somerville side of the road in the parking lot of the now closed *New York, New York Diner*. A field with cows was on the (west) Raritan side of the road where the *Raritan Mall* is today. (This shopping center contains *Blockbuster* and *Stop & Shop*.)



In order to get the cows from the field to the buildings to be milked, there was a tunnel that went under Route 206. The tunnel, and of course the cows, are gone today. *Raritan Valley Farms* supplied milk, cream, butter, cottage cheese, and eggs. The glass bottles for the milk were always returned to *Raritan Valley Farms* where they washed them out and filled them again. But no one called this “re-cycling”, they just called it returning the bottle.

Life and business was different in 1942-45. Many products were delivered to the home. Such as milk, ice, coal, and vegetables. Many products were rationed during *World War II*. They included butter, rubber, gasoline, sugar, and cigarettes.

**Most stores were owned by local people, and the stores were named after the owners, thus they were the classic “Mom and Pop” shops of their time.** Store owners recall that they knew 80 percent of the people that came to shop. Most people walked to the stores.

Things certainly were not the same as today - for cigarette smoking was not viewed as unhealthy, since the dangers were not yet known. Even the kids places, *The Candy Kitchen* and *Carlinos*, sold cigarettes, real cigarettes, not just candy ones. And because people were poor, cigarettes could be sold individually, as well as by the pack. Six cigarettes cost five cents at *The Candy Kitchen* during *World War II*.

There was a sense of community through out the town, any extra bakery goods that *The Schaub Bakery* could not sell, were given to the nuns. There were many buses. The public service bus ran every 20 minutes. Buses went to Bound Brook and Somerville.

**During *World War II*, right next to next to Canal Street, was an actual canal, that was used by businesses to move their materials.**

Soda and Beer were delivered by ***The Raritan Liquor Store***. Which was owned by Joe Pinto. Favorite beers were *Balentine & Schaeffer*



Here is Joe Pinto standing outside his truck in the late 1940s. Joe, now 95, still lives in Raritan.

***Many products were delivered to the home !***

Bread was delivered by ***The Troisi Bakery*** on Anderson Street and ***The Longordo Bakery*** on Thompson Street.

Fresh Vegetables were delivered by **Frank Vitelli**

remembered that the holder of *The Congressional Medal of Honor* gets a salute from even a General. It hit John like a bullet, this was an honor authorized by the President of the United States. The General read the citation over the loudspeakers to the thousands of soldiers present. John felt a tear go down his cheek as he thought of his dead buddies who fought with him during that night of hell. Upon completion of the reading, the General placed the medal around his neck. The highest decoration the country gives a soldier - *The Congressional Medal of Honor*. John said "it was a feeling that was hard to describe." John had become the first enlisted Marine to receive *The Congressional Medal of Honor* in *World War II*.

After the parade, John had many fellow soldiers visiting him, offering him congratulations and even wanting to touch the medal. This attention was just the beginning of the fuss that would be made over him for the remainder of his short life. John wrote "The youngsters in the outfit were so open in their admiration, that it became embarrassing." John had to answer endless questions about that night of torture (Oct 24th, Oct 25th). Reflecting on it all, he was amazed and thankful that he was alive, let alone a hero.

## Hero on the Home Front

At home, John Basilone's award of the medal first became known to his family. They received a short letter from him on June 21st, 1943 (it was dated June 12th) that stated:

*I am very happy, for the other day I received The Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest award you can receive in the armed forces ... Tell pop his son is still tough ... Tell Don thanks for the prayer they say in school.*

His family did not realize the significance of the award until a few days later. The story was told to the national press on June 23rd, 1943, in an official Navy press release. Numerous visitors came to the Basilone house offering their congratulations. Friends, relatives, and of course, the press, packed their small house at 113 First Avenue until the late hours. The next day, June 24th, 1943, there were articles in many newspapers.

*The New York Times* ran a front page article about Basilone's actions at Guadalcanal. The headline read "Slew 38 Japanese in One Battle: Jersey Marine Gets Honor Medal". The article started with this:

*The son of an Italian-born tailor in New Jersey took his place tonight among the great American war heroes, when a Marine Corps platoon sergeant, John Basilone of Raritan, 26, one of a family of ten children, was cited for the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest tribute this nation can bestow upon its fighting sons.*

*The Star Ledger* had an article whose headline read "His Gun Slew So Many, He had to Move".

*The Newark Evening News* read "Raritan Hero Got Action He Sought in Marines - John Basilone, Who Found Army 'Too Tame', Wins Congressional Medal for Valor."

*The Plainfield-Courier News* (now *The Courier News*) had "Raritan Marine Gets Top Medal, Killed 38 Japs on Guadalcanal".

The hometown paper *The Raritan Valley News* stated "Congressional Medal Given to Basilone for Heroism As Guadalcanal Marine".

Later, General Douglas MacArthur was quoted as saying "Basilone was a one man Army." Even the next year, July 1944, a portrait of him would appear on the cover of *Colliers Magazine*.

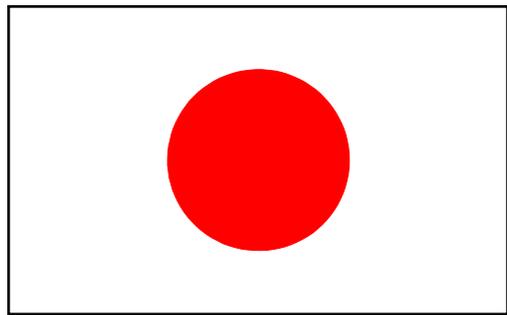
In July of 1943, John was informed that he was being sent home, but there was a catch to it. John would have to go on a "bond drive" and on a "speaking tour" to war plants. As John loaded up to go home, he told his buddies he would be back, but they did not believe him. His men figured that with his medal, he could get a safe assignment at home for the rest of the war. But John Basilone knew that if the war was still on, he would be back, no matter what.

John arrived back in the U.S., landing in California in August of 1943. Upon arriving he realized that he had become a celebrity. He saw the articles and pictures of himself in newspapers and magazines. Even a comic book featured a story about John Basilone. The comic book series called *War Heroes* had a five page story about John Basilone's heroics on Guadalcanal. Away

# Japanese Code of Honor

## Fight to the Death

The Japanese soldiers were tough opponents — for they did not care if they died in battle (for many it was even preferred) and we, while we would fight bravely, still wanted to live. This made for unique battle conditions in many of the battles of *World War II*.



**In the Japanese culture to surrender to the enemy was a disgrace to ones self and family. It was honorable to fight to the death for the emperor.**

**One fighting tactic was the “banzai charge”** — where many Japanese soldiers would charge an American position in a suicide assault trying to kill as many Americans before they died. Often this banzai charge was a last ditch effort in battle when all was lost. But other times it was to charge and overrun an enemy position taking large casualties but eventually overwhelming their opponent taking control of the position.

When doing a banzai charge, the Japanese soldiers would yell “banzai” as a rallying cry. But this often gave away their intentions and position to the American troops who then knew the suicide attack was coming.

The term banzai comes from an expression “Tenno heiko banzai” - which means “long live the emperor.”

**Toward the end of the war, the Japanese started using a new suicide attack.** Japanese planes would intentionally crash into U.S. ships killing the pilot and causing much damage to the ship. Many ships were sunk this way. **It was called a “kamikaze” attack.**

In Japanese, kamikaze means “divine wind”. It recalls a severe storm in 1281 that destroyed a Mongol invasion fleet that would have certainly conquered Japan.

These kamikaze attacks were first used in *The Battle of Leyte Gulf* in October of 1944. But they are most known for their use in the battle of Okinawa that was fought from April through June of 1945.

**The kamikaze attacks were quite effective, sinking or disabling aircraft carriers and battleships.** The U.S. downplayed the success of these attacks and told the media to not report the quality of their effectiveness. After a few months of kamikaze attacks, the U.S. learned to better defend against the attacks and started shooting down most of the attacking planes, thus reducing their effectiveness.

from home, John had not seen any of the articles about himself. Now he was doing lots of interviews and signing many autographs. John Basilone was indeed a special hero. The reasons for this, in addition to his heroics, was that he was good looking, very modest and likable, and he came from a small town, which made him the ideal hero. His family was even a model family. His dad had struggled initially, then rose to have his own business. John's family had 10 children. Two brothers were in the military as well (his brother Alphonse was in the Army, stationed in Iceland, and George was in the Marines.) Two other brothers, Carlo and Angelo, worked in war plants. His family information had appeared in the articles about him.

John Basilone was one of the first heroes of the war, at a time when America needed heroes. The bombing of Pearl Harbor had been humiliating. The U.S. at their own military base were caught sleeping with their planes parked "wing tip" to "wing tip" making them easy targets. In the first battles with the Japanese, the U.S. suffered defeat, losing the Philippines resulting in 10,000 soldiers being captured. These soldiers were then treated brutally by the Japanese as they were forced to march miles in extreme heat with no water. This came to be called "The Baatan Death March". It resulted in the deaths of many U.S. soldiers. But now, the tide of the war was turning, the U.S. was getting revenge, and they had a hero, John Basilone.

Being in the spotlight was beginning to get to him, John wrote "it is beginning to scare me. I don't know if I can stand this constant attention."

John was briefed on the bond tour that he would undertake. He was told what cities they would visit and what his role would be. After the bond tour, there would be a parade in his home town, Raritan, New Jersey. John thought that since he came from a small town, it would be a small parade, a relief from the large bond rallies he was scheduled to attend. He was very wrong.

John's first stop in California would be to see his brother George, at the Marine base Camp Pendleton. When he visited George the camp made a big fuss over John. George was promptly released from duty in order to see his hero brother. John told George about Guadalcanal. George, who had just returned from two weeks leave at home in Raritan, informed John of the planned size and scope of the celebration. John was still in disbelief and could not fully grasp his new status. George informed him, "Hell John ... the whole country is crazy about you".

This started to sink into John. He then realized that he had fulfilled his promise to his dad, that he would make him proud, and that the name Basilone would one day be carried high.

John asked George to see about getting leave in order to attend the parade. But George, demonstrating character, responded that after having just gotten back from two weeks leave, getting a second leave would not be fair to his fellow Marines, most of whom had not had leave in a long time. John understood.

## Heading Home - September 1943

Returning to the east coast, John reported to Marine Headquarters in New York City, on September 4th, 1943. There he was given some new uniforms and briefed on the bond tour. At the press interview, Basilone told the reporters how he won the Medal of Honor. John first remarked here that he "felt like a museum piece." This would be an expression that he would often say to friends and would eventually influence his decision to return to battle.

After the meeting at Marine Headquarters, he visited with the mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia. Part of the meeting was private, but then the photographers and reporters were invited in. They took John's picture and wrote down his every word. John felt pride, a kid from a small town meeting like this with the mayor of the largest city in the U.S. in a media frenzy to celebrate his accomplishments. The mayor said that John's heroism should inspire Americans to buy War Bonds. The mayor praised the hero, "I know you must be good, I know you must have guts, because the medal is not awarded lightly." *The New York Times* printed an article about the meeting, it was entitled "Guadalcanal Hero Welcomed by City."

From New York, John then moved to Washington D.C. for another press conference, this one in the Navy Department Press room, on September 9th, 1943. The conference was reported, along with John's picture, in numerous national newspapers. At the beginning, John remarked he was a little nervous as he was a natural soldier, not a speaker. Ironically, during battle, John was never nervous. He once remarked "If you don't keep a cool head, you won't have a head to worry

## John Basilone's Citation for The Congressional Medal of Honor

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action against enemy Japanese forces, above and beyond the call of duty, while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines in the Lunga Area, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, on 24 and 25 of October 1942. While the enemy was hammering at the Marines defensive positions, Sgt. Basilone, in charge of 2 sections of heavy machine guns, fought valiantly to check the savage and determined assault. In a fierce frontal attack with the Japanese blasting his guns with grenades and mortar fire, one of Sgt. Basilone's sections, with its "gun crews", was put out of action, leaving only 2 men able to carry on. Moving an extra gun into position, he placed it in action, then, under continual fire, repaired another and personally manned it, gallantly holding his line until replacements arrives. A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, Sgt. Basilone, at great risk to his own life and in the face of continued enemy attack, battled his way through hostile lines with urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment. His great personal valor and courageous initiative were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Franklin D. Roosevelt



John Basilone receives  
*The Congressional Medal of Honor*



Here is John Basilone on the far right with three other Medal of Honor recipients. Left to right is General Alexander Vandegrift, Colonel Merritt Edson, and Second Lieutenant Mitchell Paige.

## Congressional Medal of Honor

The Congressional Medal of Honor was established in 1861. It is granted to persons who shall distinguish themselves conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their lives, above and beyond the call of duty. The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States. The medal is suspended by a light blue-starred ribbon, it is worn at the neck as a pendant. Only 121 of these medals were awarded during *World War I* and 464 in *World War II* among the million who served in that war. The wearer of the *Medal of Honor* receives a salute from an officer of all ranks in all branches of the armed forces. Generally, it is presented to its recipient by the President of the United States in the name of Congress, although John Basilone did not receive it from then President, Franklin Roosevelt, as he received it at a military base in Australia.



about.” John stayed cool for the interview, even as flash bulbs went off in front of him. With all the questions and pictures, Basilone remarked at one point, “this was worse than fighting the Japs.” The quote was a good one liner that the newspapers would print. In this meeting, as in his personal life, John was shy and modest about his award. A *Somerset Messenger Gazette* article described his actions at the conference, “He wore his honors well with dignified reserve.”

They asked for John’s opinion of the Japanese fighter. He said they were a rugged fighter, but he did not think they had the brains for victory. He sighted as example that they would on each attack yell “banzai”, tipping off the Americans that an attack was coming. John told the press how he and his boys yelled back, but what they said was off the record. He told them that he did not know how many Japanese they killed, but Colonel Lewis Puller had said that on their divisions side of the wire (barbed wire had sectioned off some areas) there were 900 bodies. John told the details of that night, October 24th and 25th, the relentless charging enemy, the disabled machine guns, and the dangerous return for ammunition. The audience, as future audiences would continue to do, listened very careful to each word about the now famous battle.

John wrote that by having to talk about his experience in battle over and over again, it would take a long time to erase the horrible images of battle from his mind. But that was the price that a hero paid.

After the press conference, John appeared on a radio program where he told his story of the fight against the Japanese at Guadalcanal. One comment he made on the show was “I think only a part of this medal belongs to me, pieces of it belong to the boys who fought by my side”. This quote would be printed in the newspapers and often referenced in the weeks and years to come.

The bond tour was set to go. Other soldiers on the tour with John were Sergeant Schiller Cohen, Ward Gemmer, and Robert Creak. The film stars were Virginia Grey, Martha Scott, Eddie Bracken, John Garfield, and Gene Lockhart. It was the Third Bond Drive for the U.S. . There were seven separate bond drives altogether during the war.

Military commanders explained the importance of the bond drive to Basilone. Money was greatly needed to finance the war. The U.S. was spending an unprecedented amount of money on the war. There were tanks, flamethrowers, guns, ammunition, landing boats, and other supplies that were being produced in record number. The U.S. output of military hardware was staggering - an unmatched accomplishment in history. We even supplied our allies, Britain and Russia, with equipment. It was this production efficiency that many said “won the war”. John was told he would be serving his country well, just as important as if he was back on the front lines, fighting the enemy.

## **The Bond Tour**

The “bond tour” started in New Jersey, with stops in Newark and Jersey City. They would go to New Haven, Connecticut and two cities in Rhode Island, Providence and Pawtucket, then Manchester, New Hampshire and Worcester, Massachusetts. After that, three cities in New York State - Albany, Utica, and Rochester. Finally, it would end in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

The bond tour began in Newark, New Jersey. Newark’s Mayor Murphy said he was proud of the city of Newark for their contributions to the war. Like all other speakers of the day, he urged the attendees to buy bonds until it hurt. The Hollywood stars, John Garfield, Gene Lockhart, and Virginia Grey then spoke, and at their close, the stars introduced the service men. John Basilone said a few words telling the public to “back the attack”. The reception they received at this first stop on the bond tour was excellent. The large, enthusiastic, cheering crowds would be at all the stops. There would be little rest as they moved from city to city.

Their second stop was Jersey City. John wrote that he could not believe the size of this crowd. It was thrilling and inspiring as the crowd cheered each speaker as they were introduced. It caused Basilone to reflect, he would write “I feel there must be a guardian angel that watches over us in times of great stress. How else can you account for any of us being on this platform, instead of being in a lonely grave thousands of miles from home.”

The next stop was New Haven, which welcomed them with a huge parade. There were over 5000 people in the parade itself. All types of groups, both military and civilian, marched in the parade. These bonds tours were very popular. The promotional campaign urging people to buy



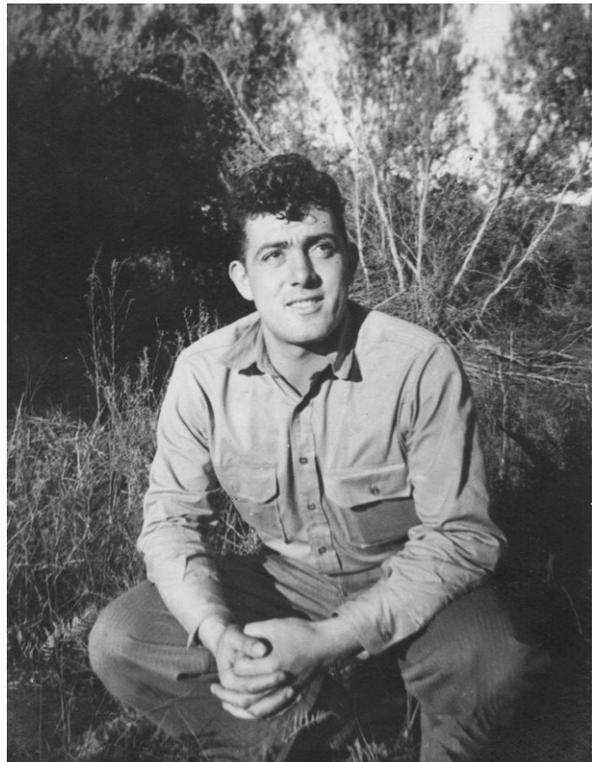
Courtesy Basilone Museum

“One thing you got to hand the Japanese, they were not afraid to die, and believe me, they did”

John Basilone

“The enemy was climbing over their dead comrades and seemed eager to throw themselves in my line of fire. It was unbelievable that life could be so cheap.”

John Basilone



bonds was immense. If you just browsed any newspaper or magazine from the *World War II* years, you will see numerous ads promoting the sales of bonds and referencing the upcoming bond tours.

Each speaker, Hollywood or soldier, was given a standing ovation. The total unity of the country shown at these rallies and in the media was in contrast to today, where some opposition always seems present in one form or another.

On the next stop, Rochester New York, John, who was always dedicated to his men, was able to visit Bob Powell's mother. Bob had survived with John the night of October 24th - 25th, at Guadalcanal. Basilone told Bob's family that Bob had fought bravely and without Bob, John would not have lived to get his medal. This made the Powell family very proud.

On another stop in Albany, John was able to visit another family of a fellow soldier from Guadalcanal, his friend Jackie Schoenecker. John comforted the family, who was worried as Jackie had written to them that he was sick with malaria. John explained how common malaria was at Guadalcanal, and that many soldiers have contracted it and recovered.

The publicity and fanfare did not let up at any of the bond rallies. While Basilone appreciated this, he said "the constant fuss is starting to get on my nerves." He was not cut out to be a public speaker. He was a soldier, and started to wish that he was back in action. On the tour there were constant questions about the battle with the Japanese, which he answered over and over. The pressure of the attention got so bad that John started drinking. One veteran said "He knocked off a 5th the way you knock off a beer. Whiskey, gin, it made no difference."



Courtesy Somerset Messenger Gazette

John at a press conference



John with Ed Sullivan on his CBS Radio program



Courtesy Basilone Museum

Women were in awe of the war hero. Here John Basilone meets with workers at *Johns-Manville Company*.



Here is John Basilone in a photo to promote the "Bond Tour." In the car are celebrities Keenan Wynn and Virginia Grey.



# War Bonds

The cost of *World War II* was tremendous. To help pay for the war, the government asked people to lend them their money, by having them buy war bonds. A person paid \$18.75 for a bond that would in 10 years be worth \$25. This was a low interest rate, but it was the public's patriotic duty to buy the bonds.

There were seven formal "bond drives". Celebrities and war heroes toured the country urging people to support the war and buy bonds. John Basilone was part of the Third War Bond Drive. By the war's end, total sales of bonds were near \$150 billion. Bonds were not the only way the government raised money. A 5% "Victory Tax" was placed on personal income and corporations had their taxes raised as well.



John Basilone at a War Bond Drive



This promotional picture for a "War Bond Drive" shows John Basilone with Hollywood stars Gene Lockhart, John Garfield, and Virginia Grey.

# The Welcome Home Parade

When John Basilone was awarded *The Congressional Medal of Honor*, the town of Raritan immediately planned to have a homecoming parade in his honor. The plans started even before a date could be set, as it was not yet known when Johnny would come marching home. The unofficial word from the beginning was that John Basilone would first be brought home for a bond tour and then allowed time for a home town celebration. The parade organizer was Judge George Allgair. He was both a judge in the Somerville court system and the town's attorney, a position he held for over 25 years. He was quoted in *The Raritan Valley News* in the July 1st, 1943, issue saying "It will be the greatest day in the history of Raritan". Many types of groups were lined up to be in the parade. In a few weeks, John's returning home date and schedule were made official. He would return home for his parade on Sunday, September 19th, 1943. The organizers called it "John Basilone Day".

Anticipating the public would turn out in vast numbers for the parade, the organizers realized that the town of Raritan would not be big enough, so they planned to start the parade in Somerville and end it in Raritan. The parade would form on West High Street in Somerville. It then would start by moving down Grove Street to Main Street in Somerville. (Grove Street and Main Street are where the Somerville County Courthouse is.) The parade would then head west down Main Street toward Raritan bearing left onto Somerset Street. It would cross over Route 206 (then called Route 31) where the town changes from Somerville to Raritan. Once in Raritan, the parade would continue west down Somerset Street and turn left onto Nevius Street and advance over the Nevius Street Bridge, ending in a large field. In this field, a platform and sound system would be set up for speeches and some music. The field was owned by tobacco heiress, Doris Duke, who gladly loaned her property for the rally.

After much planning and anticipation, *John Basilone Day* arrived. At 8 AM, John Basilone was picked up by members of the parade committee at Marine Headquarters in New York City. He was driven to meet with the Bridgewater/Raritan Township Committee. Waiting until the day of the parade to bring John into town, as opposed to days before, added to the excitement.

At 10 AM, mass was said in his honor at St. Ann's Church on Anderson Street in Raritan. He asked that mass be said in honor of his buddies still in Guadalcanal. Mass was said by Father Amedeo Russo, who said in his sermon "Sergeant Basilone's life will be a guide to American Youth. God had spared him for some important work." In reference to this, John Basilone later wrote to his sister Phyllis, "The importance of bringing me back finally sank in, and I resigned myself to the role that had been suddenly thrust upon me."

At 11:30 there was a lunch in Basilone's honor headed by the reception committee at *The Raritan Valley Farms Inn* - a popular restaurant that was located on the Somerville Circle where the *Super 8 Motel* is today.

Then at 1 PM, the parade started. Total attendance was estimated at 30,000. The number of groups marching was large as well. Some of the groups marching included *The American Legion*, *Veterans of Foreign Wars* (VFW), state and local police, service men on leave, French Navy Soldiers, Coast Guard, Drum and Bugle Corps, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Red Cross Units, Air Raid Wardens, *The Italian American Society*, Raritan First Aid Squad, soldiers from Camp Kilmer, and various marching bands.

One parade marcher was another *Congressional Medal of Honor* winner, John Reilly, who had won his honors in *The Spanish-American War* way back in 1898.

John Basilone rode in an open car with his parents Sal and Dora - who beamed with pride throughout the day. Also in his car was Private Stephen Helstowski of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Stephen had fought with John at Guadalcanal and had been injured in the battle.

The picture on the cover of this book shows them riding in the car on Somerset Street in Raritan. John sat on top of the back seat (between his parents) acknowledging cheers from the crowd. His car moved slowly allowing John to shake hands with various people, including a group of veterans from *World War I*.

The atmosphere along the parade route was impressive. Signs were hung saying "Welcome Home Sergeant J. Basilone". There were flags (with only 48 stars then) everywhere, and bunting (half circular banners that are red, white, and blue.) John Basilone's picture appeared in many storefronts. Raritan resident and business owner, Charley Glaser, described the parade as "electrifying" - and that "Basilone Day" was truly a once in a lifetime event. All those in

# 30,000 To Welcome Sgt. Basilone!

**JOHN  
BASILONE  
EDITION**

# NEWS

RARITAN VALLEY

Welcome

Mrs. Thomas Gable,  
96 First Ave.,  
Raritan, N. J.

VOL. VIII; No. 40

RARITAN, N. J., THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1943

SIXTEEN PAGES

## Committee Purchases \$5,000 War Bond Screen Stars, Military Units, 12 Bands in 2 - Mile Parade



Postmaster Dominick Soriano receives \$3,750 check from Committee and turns over five \$1,000 bonds. Left to right: Angelo R. Soriano, Alfred Gaburo and Chairman George W. Allgair.

PHOTO by MILLER

### Two Universal Stars To Entertain



Louise Allbritton, glamorous Texas oil heiress who decided to go into pictures, and Robert Paige, badman of the screen, shown in a scene in their latest picture, "Fired Wife," which was released by Universal to 31 key cities and will open soon on Broadway. Both will be in the parade and at the celebration grounds.

### Hero Reading His Favorite Newspaper



Basilone takes a squint at the latest issue of the NEWS, which reached him regularly while he was at Guadalcanal. "It was like getting a letter from him, only it brought more news about the town and my friends," remarked the Marine Sergeant. He is one of several hundred men in service receiving this newspaper at camps

Sergeant John Basilone comes home tomorrow and he will get the lustiest welcome ever accorded a hero. A crowd of 30,000 and a two-mile parade will greet him. Hollywood stars, Broadway talent, military units and even a dirigible from Lakehurst are on the program.

The auspicious program will be topped with a War Bond rally, with Jimmy Walker, ex-mayor of New York City, as chief salesman. The highlight of the bond selling will come when Basilone receives a \$5,000 War Bond, the gift of hundreds of friends and neighbors.

### Sidelights

Topflight reporters, newsreel men, magazine writers and camera guys will record the event for history. Life, one of the nation's leading magazines, is doing a six-page spread on how the hometown greets a hero and will have a photographer on hand... Parade, also a leader in the field will have one of its aces, Jim Goden, and a photog... Jim was in town Wednesday to get a background and will be back to see the event—he was one of the stars of the now-defunct City News Association of New York City and one of the best reporters in the big city—until he shifted to Parade... Camera bugs will have a field day—have been saving their precious flash bulbs for months...

William Geeghan of Frelinhusen Ave. was on the committee and doing a swell job—until the Navy grabbed him. Now he won't even be able to see the celebration—he's taking boot training...

Some of the merchants are going all out to dress up their window... Costa did a grand job and deserves a prize. Has a Jap graveyard with 38 tombstones and a machinegun, all against a Basilone picture. Ray Soriano has the picture which was shown in New York City by the International Business Machine Co., on 57th street... Manager Johnson of Grants devoted his center window... Burke's was the first Somerville store to appear in bunting... Somerville did an ex-

(Continued on page sixteen)

Units of Waves, Spars, Women Marines, 12 bands, 600 school children, a detachment of 100 French sailors and band, a platoon of soldiers from Camp Kilmer and civic organizations from all over the State will be in the parade, which will undoubtedly be the biggest one ever seen in Somerset County.

The hero will reach town at 9:45 a. m. and will be met by Mayor Peter Mencaroni and Chairman William Slattery of the Township Committee will meet him and officially welcome him. The greeting will take place at the entrance to the town at the traffic lights on Somerset St. He will then go to St. Ann's Church for high mass. Next he will help dedicate the honor roll in front of the church. At the conclusion of this ceremony he will be received by the official committee headed by Col. William H. Kelly and taken to Raritan Valley Farms Inn for lunch.

Basilone will ride in an open car, with a group of women Marines marching ahead. The stars who will attend the celebration are Louise Allbritton and Robert Paige of Universal Pictures and Virginia O'Brien, MGM star of "DuBarry Was A Lady." Harry Hershfield, famous

humorist, star of the radio program "Can You Top This?" and creator of "Abe Kabbile," will be master of ceremonies.

Among the speakers will be Joseph S. Frelinghuysen, former Governor A. Harry Moore, Alexander Ormsby, head of the Marine Corps League and Wilford Langille of Diehl. Msgr. Thomas Reilly of Trenton, vicar general of the diocese of New Jersey, will give the benediction. A dirigible from Lakehurst will fly over the parade and the celebration at Duke's Park.

General James I. Bowers will be grand marshal of the parade. The War Bond Rally at Duke's will consist of getting pledge from the crowd. Walter Darrell, cashier of the Raritan State Bank, has arranged for pledge cards to be distributed to every home here and at the celebration grounds. Members of the committee will collect these and the rally will get credit for the sale. Several booths will be on the site and teler from the local banks will sell bonds.

The Broadway headliners who have promised to show their talents' Sunday include—

1. Jack Marshall, comedian, who has just completed a successful run at Paramount.
  2. Rocco, Negro piano player, sensation at the Zanizbar night club.
  3. Two acts from Cafe Society Uptown.
1. Danny Thomas, comic who is wowing 'em at the Martinique. Basilone will give a Guadalcanal momento to the purchaser (Continued on page sixteen)

### THE PROGRAM

- 8:00 a. m.—Basilone leaves 90 Church St., N. Y. C. for Raritan.
- 9:45 a. m.—Arrives at Somerset St., and Route 31—welcomed by Honorary Chairman.
- 10:00 a. m.—Goes to High mass at St. Ann's Church.
- 11:00 a. m.—Dedicates Honor Roll at Church.
- 12 Noon—Lunch at Raritan Valley Farms.
- 1 p. m.—Joins Parade in Somerville
- 3 p. m.—Duke's Park Program starts.

### Parade Units Slip Off At 1 P. M.

The parade starts promptly at 1 o'clock. Wilfred Davis and Steve Timko of the Parade Committee urged all units to slip off at that time. Here are the units and the order in which they will parade:

Parade Committee Cars; State, Raritan and Somerville Police; Bridgewater Dawn Patrol; Brig. General James Bowers and Stac; Colors and Guards of American Legion Post 280 and Veterans of Foreign War Post 748; Service Men on Leave; Camp Kilmer Military Band; Camp Kilmer Military Detachment; Womens' Army Corps; British Royal Navy; U. S. Navy; Spars of Lakehurst; Free French Sailors; U. S. Navy Waves Co. C, 8th Battalion; N. J. State Guards; Johns-Manville Police Guard and Military Guard of South Somerville Q. M. Depot. Curtiss-Wright Band of Caldwell; Marine Corps League; V. F. W. with massed colors; V. F. W. Auxiliary with massed colors; Women Marines; Marine Sgt. John Basilone, flanker by A. L. 280 and Aux., V. F. W. 1748 and Aux. R. F.

American Legion of Somerset Co., massed colors; and American Legion Auxiliary of Somerset Co., massed colors.

Harold Norman Halstead, Drum

Observation Post 280A; U. S. Army Observation Post 17 of Somerville; Raritan, Bradley and Somerville Boy and Girl Scouts; 600 children.

Garfield Cadets Drum Corps; Raritan, Bradley and Somerville Firemen and Reserves; Raritan, Bradley and Somerville Police Reserves; Raritan, Bradley and Somerville Air Raid Wardens; A. L. Cadet Band; Red Cross of Raritan and Somerville; Red Cross Canteen; Raritan Ladies' First Aid; Staff Assistants; Hospital and Recreation; Surgical Dressings; Nurses' Aides; First Aid; Volunteer Special Service; Productions.

Somerville High School Band; Elks, Raritan and Somerville; Files, Bound Brook; Holy Name Societies, three Churches; Knights of Columbus; Eagles.

Princeton American Junior Drum Corps; St. Rocco Mutual Aid Society; Raritan Mutual Aid Society; LaFrantelanza Society; Marchegiana Society; Democratic Men's Social Club.

Bound Brook Drum and Bugle Corps; Italian American Society of Somerville; Mount Carmel Society; Boianese Society; Sons of Italy; Risveglio Society; Motor Corps; Raritan Firt Aid Ambulance.



HARRY HERSHFIELD

attendance that I spoke with recalled how the town was amazed that such a big event came to Raritan. There were 30,000 people, including many politicians, numerous celebrities, and the national press. Even the young children, such as six year old Peter Vitelli knew that this day was special. Peter remembers fondly how much fun and how crowded the parade was as he sat on the curb in front of *St. Joe's Church*. A 13 year old Anthony Hudak, a current member of Raritan's borough council, said "it was a parade of a lifetime, it was as if the world came to Raritan." Others described it as "a magical day" where everyone was so happy. Even the weather turned out perfect for *John Basilone Day*.

It was a very emotional parade, as the war had consumed peoples lives in many ways, through missed loved ones who were overseas, the rationing of goods, constant news reports, and the ever mounting of casualties of the local men who were fighting the war.

## The Rally Following the Parade

### Speeches, Music, and Snacks

The parade moved on to the field at Doris Duke's estate. At 3 PM, the festivities started. Speeches were given. Songs were sung. A blimp, supplied by the Navy, flew overhead. Bonds were sold. The master of ceremonies was Harry Hershfield, a popular New York Columnist, who was also host of a radio show, called *Can You Top This*. The refreshments stand was staffed by members of the Somerville/Raritan Chapter of *The American Red Cross*. There was a platform with a microphone and a powerful sound system. Behind the platform was the grandstand where 250 important people from the state, the military, and the entertainment world sat. John's parents were seated in the front of the grandstand. The program started with the playing of *The National Anthem*, sung by a local rising singing star from Raritan, Catherine Mastice. Catherine would later have a short career, singing in a Broadway Opera, in the 1949 *Radio City Christmas Show*, and on *The Milton Berle Show*. Then Father Russo of St. Ann's said the invocation. Next a \$5000 war bond was presented to John Basilone by parade organizer George Allgair. John Basilone, while wearing his Medal of Honor, addressed the crowd:

*"I want to thank you Judge Allgair and these very good home folks of Raritan for this wonderful gift. For all my buddies overseas on the front lines - that they really appreciate everything you wonderful people are doing by backing the attack and buying these war bonds. Today is like a dream to me. Thank you all for everything from the bottom of my heart."*

John made sure to introduce Private Stephen Helstowski, who John said prayed in the same foxhole with him.

One Speaker was former Senator Joseph S. Frelinghuysen - whose son was at that time in an enemy POW camp. Frelinghuysen said,

*"Today, on the far flung battle fronts of the world, some 600 brave lads from Raritan have answered the drum beat of war; and you John are living witness that they fight valiantly and not in vain. Sergeant Basilone ... may I express personally to you the feeling of respect and admiration I have for the fine honor you displayed when, in recounting your experiences you said so modestly 'I think only a part of this medal belongs to me; pieces of it belong to the boys who fought by my side.'"*

While Frelinghuysen was speaking, John Basilone's 5 year old niece, Janice, who was his brother Angelo's daughter, snuck up on the platform and sat with John. The crowd roared in response. Janice remained with John for most of the program. This was the image that the local press was looking for to highlight their story. A picture of John and his niece Janice appeared on the front page of *The Somerset Messenger Gazette*. (See page 55 in this book)

Another speaker was ex-New York City Mayor James J. Walker. He praised Raritan and its Italian heritage. Those present said that he was the most dynamic, inspiring speaker of the day. Highlights from his talk were:

*"The Italian-American and the Italian Soldier are as valiant as exist when they've got something to fight for. Sergeant Basilone is an inspiration, not only to other Italian-Americans, but to all Americans."*

For entertainment, there was a singing quartet from the Coast Guard, who came wearing their uniforms and sailor hats. *The Somerset Messenger Gazette* said they "stole the show". Inter-

# John Basilone Day - September 19th, 1943



The morning of *Basilone Day*, *Sept. 19th, 1943*. John Basilone attends church with his family at *St. Ann's*.



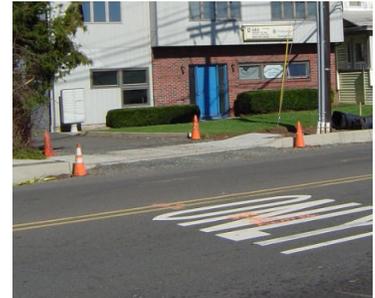
The stain glass windows and pews at *St. Ann's* are still the same 60 years later. Here is Basilone Parade organizer and *St. Ann's* Deacon John Pacifico.

## The Cover Photo

John Basilone, along with his parents and private Stephen Helstowski, ride in a car for the *Welcome Home John Basilone Parade* which was held on Sunday, September 19th, 1943.



Picture was taken on Somerset Street in Raritan, just 300 feet from Route 206.



Here is the same camera angle in 2003. An office building now occupies the lot that was empty in 1943. Occupying the building are A&S Electric and Prudential.



Here is a wider view, in 2003, of where the original (cover) photo was taken in 1943.

views with those who personally attended the rally all remember how good the singers were. They received a terrific round of applause after each song. Their rendition of *Where Do All The Flowers Go in the Wintertime* received rave reviews from the crowd. They were even called back for an unplanned encore.

Two Hollywood stars, Louise Allbritton and Virginia O'Brien, were present at the parade and rally. Louise Allbritton surprised and delighted everyone when she kissed John Basilone on stage. The crowd let out a tremendous roar. She then repeated the kiss a second time, in order to give the cameramen a chance to get their pictures. John's sister Mary, who was close by, later wrote how John turned bright red upon his kiss with the beautiful movie star.

Three stars of New York Night Clubs were on hand - Maurice Rocco, Bob Morris, and Danny Thomas - who was at the beginning of his career. Thomas would later have his own T.V. show, *The Danny Thomas Show*.

Catherine Mastice, who had earlier sung *The National Anthem*, returned to the microphone to sing a new song especially written for the event. It was called *Manila John*. The music was written by the St. Ann's Church organist, Joseph Memoli. The words were written by W. A. Jack. (Years later, this song would still be sung at a ceremony that follows the annual Basilone parade.)

Toward the end of the event, Master of Ceremonies Harry Herchfield talked John's dad Salvatore into saying something to the crowd in Italian. Many understood his message, as Raritan was then a second generation Italian town, where the older people often spoke Italian.

During the rally, War Bonds were sold. Sales were made right at the grandstand. Fourteen volunteers could not handle the volume, thus many people said they would buy their bonds during the week. An amazing 1.4 million dollars worth of War Bonds were purchased by the crowd at the rally. The largest contributors were the local businesses, *Johns-Manville*, *The Raritan Savings Bank*, and *The Raritan State Bank*. Another contributor was John's old employer, *Gaburo's Laundry*. The two hour program closed with *God Bless America*.

The parade was covered by all the local papers and *The New York Times*. *Life Magazine* ran a four page story on *Basilone Day*. (Today, video of the welcome home parade highlights can be seen on a video tape entitled *John Basilone - A Marine's Marine*, which is available at *The Raritan Library*.)

Even the *Fox Movietone News* video taped the event making a newsreel that was shown at movie theatres throughout the country. This newsreel footage which is just one minute and ten seconds long, is a true delight. The next week, the newspaper ads for both local theatres, *The Raritan Playhouse* and *The Cort Theatre* in Somerville, promoted the newsreel footage of Basilone Day. The local people flocked to the theatres to see this short footage, and oh yes, to see the regular movie as well. The first scene of the newsreel shows John riding in a car on Main Street in Somerville. The cameras position was high above and the video shows the large enthusiastic crowds on both sides of the street. The whole spirit of the event is captured in this shot. Another scene shows John kissing his Mom. The real gem is at the end of the newsreel, where John Basilone speaks to the crowd at the rally that followed the parade. He tells the crowd that the soldiers appreciate their support of the war. (His exact quote can be found one page back). It is the only audio of John Basilone that exists.

John Basilone Day was an overwhelming success. No person in attendance had anything negative to say. Newspapers raved about how wonderful everything went. 95 year old Nick Esposito who was the town clerk then, and also on the parade committee, said that Judge Allgair did a tremendous job planning and coordinating this special day. Judge Allgair had first predicted it would be the greatest day in the history of Raritan. Then through extensive work, including difficult fund-raising, he fulfilled his promise to the town. Later, he would help with legal matters to enable Raritan to obtain its independence in 1948.

On his big day, John Basilone did not disappoint anyone who came to see him. He acknowledged the crowd throughout the day and spoke briefly at the bond rally. However, personally he said that he was overwhelmed by it all, and on the speakers stand at the rally he wished he would have said more, but the words just would not come out. Some friends said he was not himself the day of the parade. John was able to read the parade program beforehand. This gave him a sense of the immense size of the event. So he tried to prepare himself for the day, realizing that it would be the

# John Basilone Day - September 19th, 1943

## The Biggest Day in the History of Raritan !



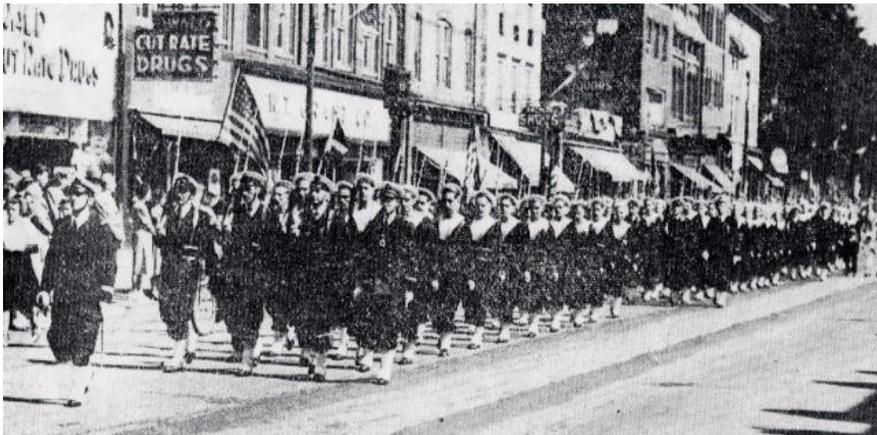
1943

Courtesy Charles Tatum Productions



Today

Here is John Basilone on Somerset Street. St. Joe's Church can be seen in the background. Note the railroad crossing sign in the old picture. In 1943 there was a train track that crossed over Somerset Street. It was used by the local factories to move their materials.



Courtesy Somerset Messenger Gazette

The parade is shown here at Main Street in Somerville, between Maple & North Bridge Street



The same view in 2003. Note *Wald Drugs* (on the left) is still there after 60 years !

biggest day of his life. But it was overwhelming, as everyone wanted to shake his hand or touch the medal. Some security people were necessary during parts of day to keep the well meaning crowd back.

## After the Parade - Months of Hero Worship

At the end of Basilone Day, John was still not on “leave”. In fact, he had orders to go back to New York City, so he did not get to spend the night with his family. He did however, return on the next Monday to speak to workers at the *Johns-Manville* plant in Manville, just a few miles from Raritan. There he met and spoke to workers, shaking hands while the cameras went off in front of him. The *Johns-Manville* newsletter the next month featured John on the cover. Inside was a story about him with many photographs of his visit.

The next day, John visited with his old employer, *Calco Chemical*, returning to the place where he previously was just a laborer, but now he was a hero, meeting the top people at the plant who were eager to shake his hand and talk with him. *Calco Chemical*, a week before the parade, had taken out a full page ad in *The Raritan Valley News* which said they were proud that John Basilone had once worked for them.

The same day, Basilone met with *The Somerset County Bar Association*. Here as everywhere else, he met the top people, shook some hands, and said a few words. Always on the go, John was sent to another bond rally at a large steel plant in Pittsburgh. After that, it was back to Somerville to meet with the Rotary Club.

John told others the admiration and attention was appreciated, but he was a soldier, and that he had given his word to his men that he would be back. This was not an empty promise. At this point in the war, the Japanese had conquered and taken control of the Philippines. The capital of this country was Manila, which contained the Army base that John had served in for almost three years. It was the location that gave John Basilone his nickname “Manila John”. Now Manila was no longer a U.S. base, but a Japanese one. This bothered “Manila John”, so he wanted to be part of the U.S. invasion force that would recapture Manila. He was quoted as saying “I keep thinking how awful it would be if some Marines made a landing on Dewy Boulevard on the Manila waterfront and ‘Manila John’ Basilone wasn’t among them.” John officially asked to go back to his men, but was denied. He was told that they needed him more on the home front, helping to raise money and boost moral. His presence inspired people to back the war and buy bonds, allowing the production of an unprecedented amount of war supplies needed for the war offensive. He was offered a commission (an officer’s job), but he turned it down, saying he was a plain soldier. He was offered a job as a gunnery instructor at the Marine Base, Camp Pendleton in California. To John, these soft, easy assignments did not seem right. He had a strong sense of purpose, and a safe easy job while there was a war going on was not his idea of being a Marine.

After bond tours and visits to war industries, John was granted a thirty day leave, which he was able to spend at home. While most of the attention bothered John, when the attention came from kids, he loved it. John’s brother Carlo remembers that kids would gather outside the home at 113 First Avenue, yelling until John came out to talk to them. The kids would swarm over John, which he greatly enjoyed. John’s old boss from *Gaburo’s Laundry*, Alfred Gaburo, remarked “his greatest pride was the kids in the neighborhood. The kids idolized him, and he idolized the kids.” During the brief time that John was home after the big celebration, he made special visits that those present will always remember. In between public appearances, John got some relaxation, visiting neighbors, feeling somewhat like a regular guy again.

On one day, John took time to pay a special visit to his niece Janice’s school - The Primary School - which was located where the Raritan Municipal Building now stands. Janice was the niece who climbed on his lap at the rally on Basilone Day and had her picture on the front page of the newspaper. Janice, now 65, when interviewed for this book, lit up and described how special that day was, when her Uncle John, everyone’s hero, came to visit “her” kindergarten class. He talked with the kids and shook hands with many teachers. The whole school was excited and she was a very proud five year old. While Janice said she has only vague memories of the parade and rally on Basilone Day and no specific memories of sitting on John’s lap at the rally, she remembers vividly her Uncle John’s visit to her school.

One night on leave, John stopped by the local tavern, Orlando’s. The owner of the tavern, To-

# John Basilone Day — September 19th, 1943

## The Biggest Day in the History of Raritan !



John Basilone rides down Somerset Street. Notice the Frelinghuysen Building, today's library, in the upper right hand corner.



Courtesy Somerset Messenger Gazette

John shakes hands with *World War I* veterans



Here John waves to the crowd as he heads down Main Street in Somerville



George Allgair did a tremendous job planning John Basilone Day



Courtesy Somerset Messenger Gazette

Mom and Pop ride with their hero



John with his Mom and Dad and Father Russo of St. Ann's



ny Orlando, was very dedicated to the local service men. He posted their pictures on the wall, wrote them letters, and sent them packages. To have John Basilone, Raritan's hero, stop in to socialize, was an honor for the Orlando Tavern. All eyes and attention that night were on John. His drinks were of course "on the house".

John was wined and dined by the local community. On one outing, John was being taken out to dinner by local businessman Joe Pinto, who owned *The Raritan Liquor Store*. On the way, the car tire became flat. Tires in those days, occasional would go flat, but could be pumped back up manually and this was the case. John Basilone, always the one to take action in a crisis, took the pump, and as Joe Pinto, now 94, (who now lives on Basilone Place in Raritan) describes, "John took that pump and had that tire pumped up so fast, it was as if he was made of steel."

Another stop for John was at *The Star of Italy Mutual Aid Society* - a local group that helped new Italian immigrants get started in this country. John's father Salvatore was a member. The group had their own building on Anderson Street in Raritan. On this visit, John was still officially "under orders", so he had to speak promoting the sale of war bonds to the 100 people in attendance. The President of the club was local businessman Charles Franchino. Charles recalled John to be a likable, regular guy. In his conversation with John, Charles recalled that John said that he wanted to go "back into action" overseas. Mr. Franchino, surprised, asked him why. John, kidding, responded that he liked the feel of shooting the machine gun.

John Basilone was featured on the radio a few times toward the end of 1943. The NBC show entitled *Marine Story* had John talk about his experience at Guadalcanal. Legendary Ed Sullivan, who had a variety show on the radio, similar to his later T.V. show, had John Basilone on the show. Ed Sullivan and John Basilone would come to know each other as friends. They met at a bond rally at the Capital Theatre on Broadway in New York where Ed Sullivan was the master of ceremonies. At this rally, John spoke to the crowd about his division's action on Guadalcanal. When he was finished, he received a standing ovation that lasted several minutes. Ed Sullivan wrote a few times about John in his newspaper column for *The New York Daily News*. John wrote that "Ed went out of the way to do things for me and he took pleasure in whatever he did. I shall never forget him and his sincere friendship". Even years after John's death, Ed Sullivan sent John's family free tickets to his T.V. show. John's sister Dolores recalled Ed to be very personable and caring.

John Basilone's life was no longer private. An article appeared in *The Sunday Daily News* that told many things about John's life, including that John had a girlfriend. The girl was Helen Helstowski of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. She was the sister of John's military buddy Stephen Helstowski. Stephen had fought with John at Guadalcanal, and even rode in the car with John at the parade. When John and Stephen were overseas, Stephen, who had a girl to write home to, noticed that John did not have any girl to write home to, except occasionally Mom. So Stephen introduced John to his sister Helen, long distance style, by having them write letters to each other. Soon multiple letters passed between John and Helen. When John was home on the bond tour, he managed to meet Helen in Albany, New York. They liked each other and saw each other again a few times. While no one said the romance was a wild passionate affair, John was a celebrity, and the newspapers were going to report and sensationalize the story, writing that "he fell in love".

While home, "fan mail" started to arrive at the Basilone household. These were letters to John from female admirers. Many girls sent pictures asking if they could meet John. Some said that they wanted to marry John. Quotes from the letters said things such as "I think you are wonderful. I always wanted to marry a hero." Even though John was a hero to everyone, he never let it go to his head. Some say John even turned shy any time someone started to talk about the medal. One writer, James Golden, tried for days to get John to talk. But he found that John was too modest to talk about himself and his heroics. Finally, after pestering John for information, Basilone replied "look, Golden, forget my part. There was not a man on the canal that night who doesn't own a piece of that medal awarded to me."

## The Decision to go Back

Since returning home, John had been treated as a hero. He had been on war bond rallies, visited war plants, and of course, had the hometown parade. He kept up with the news reports of the ongoing war and often thought of the men he left behind. John appreciated the hero's reception, but it became too much. Every where he went, there was a fuss, and many questions. John was a Ma-

# Basilone Day - September 19th, 1943

## The Rally After the Parade



John Basilone meets with actress Louise Allbritton before their big kiss.



An estimated 30,000 people gathered at the property of Doris Duke for speeches after the parade.



All the kids wanted to touch "The Medal". Here John's nephew, Richard Basilone, admires his Uncle's award.



A quartet from the Coast Guard stole the show



Ex-mayor of New York City Jimmy Walker was a speaker at the rally



Former New Jersey Governor Harry Moore



Here, in 2003, is the field that the rally was held in on Basilone Day, 1943. It is located 200 feet south of the Nevius Street Bridge on the right hand side when going south. Today, it is just an abandoned field with a "No Trespassing" Sign.



John Basilone speaks to the crowd

rine, not a public speaker. When not giving speeches or selling bonds, John was assigned easy duty at the Marine Barracks in the Washington Navy Yard. There he sat at a desk, which his sister Mary recalled in a 1996 interview that “he simply hated sitting at a desk.” This further increased John’s desire to return to his men and contribute to the ongoing war. He told family and friends many times that he “felt like a museum piece.” His brother Angelo tried to persuade him to stay, saying “John do not go back, you did enough for the war.” His sister Mary did not want him to return, but she felt if that was his wish, then he had her blessings. Mary said John thought about it for a long time, and after a few long walks, made up his mind, he would ask to return. John had asked before to return to his men, but was denied. The reason he was always given was that he was more valuable selling bonds and visiting war plants, than on the front lines.

There was a dinner at the *Waldorf-Astoria Hotel* in New York City for *The National Association of Manufacturers* where John was one of the “guests of honor” and speaker. Present at the dinner was General Vandegrift, John’s old general. John recognized the opportunity to speak with someone who would have the clout to get him assigned back overseas. At a break in the program, John approached the General, asking him to help get him back overseas. There was still a big job to do, and John wanted to be there for the finish. The General said he would see what he could do.

Later, when John was doing guard duty at the Washington Naval Yard, he asked again to go back overseas. John told family that he went to see “The Man” (the top officer) at the Navy Yard and said “I want the fleet.” The man understood and this time, probably due to General Vandegrift’s help, John was granted his request to return to “real” military duty. His assignment however, was neither of his top two choices. “Manila John” had wanted to be part of the unit that would re-capture Manila or to return to the unit that he fought with at Guadalcanal. Basilone was told to report to Camp Pendleton in California to train with the newly formed Fifth Marine Division. This group was preparing to invade an island in the Pacific. John jumped at this opportunity to be a soldier again. He looked forward to training young men who would need his guidance in the battles ahead.

On December 27th, 1943, John left the easy life of a hero on the home front to return to the soldiers who would soon go back overseas to engage the enemy. John was thrilled to arrive at Camp Pendleton, especially when he saw a large stock of his favorite Brownie Machine Guns. John was put in charge of a platoon of heavy machine guns. His outfit of young boys idolized him. While it was embarrassing to him, it was gratifying. To them, John was a great Marine, not some museum piece selling war bonds. One eighteen year old Marine, Charles Tatum, who was initially assigned under John Basilone, wrote “We had heard about John Basilone in boot camp, thus meeting him was like meeting a movie star ... a living legend was going to be in our company !”

John was eager to prepare these young men for battle. He wrote his sister Phyllis, “The boys in my platoon are all youngsters and they look to me for guidance. They are fresh eager kids who have no concept of what they are in for. I resolve I will do anything to insure their chances of coming back.”

The Marine commanders were glad to have a dedicated, proven soldier like John at the base. In April, John received a promotion from “Platoon Sergeant” to “Gunnery Sergeant”.

## **John Marries Lena Riggi**

When John had first arrived at Camp Pendleton, there was quite a buzz around the camp that a Medal of Honor winner would be stationed there. It was not just the men, but also the women who were enthused (for different reasons of course) about having John at the camp. One woman, Lena Mae Riggi, a Marine herself, was a new transfer to the base. Lena, a Sergeant, was a cook who worked at the “mess hall” at the base. As she was settling in, her friends told her excitedly “guess who is at Camp Pendleton? John Basilone!” Lena had not heard of America’s hero of Guadalcanal and responded “so what”. But soon Lena would meet John at a social event. John found something interesting in this female Marine and asked Lena for her phone number. Two weeks later, he called, they got together, and love blossomed. After several months, they decided to marry. The amount of time they dated before getting married may seem short, but during *World War II* there were many “war time marriages”. Since couples were not sure what the future would hold, and with the man heading overseas, many decided to seek the security of marriage, even if they had not known each other very long.

John and Lena were both Catholic, so John asked a young Priest from the base whom he had

# John Basilone Day — September 19th, 1943

## The Biggest Day in the History of Raritan !



Courtesy Somerset Messenger Gazette



Courtesy Somerset Messenger Gazette

While ex-senator Joseph Frelinghuysen was speaking at the rally, John Basilone's 5 year old niece, Janice, his brother Angelo's daughter, climbed up on the platform and sat with John. The crowd roared in response to this. Janice remained with John for most of the program. This was the picture, that the local press was looking for to highlight their story. A picture of John and his niece Janice appeared on the front page of *The Somerset Messenger Gazette*.



Janice, sixty years later in 2003, at her home in Manville, holding the Newspaper with the photo of herself with her Uncle John.

become friends with, Father Paul Bradley, to marry them. Father Paul liked John and he was happy to marry them. The wedding of a hero drew a lot of attention. It was also one Marine Sergeant marrying another Marine Sergeant.

The news of the scheduled wedding even appeared in *The New York Times*. (See page 57.)

The wedding was held on July 10th, 1944, a Friday afternoon at *St. Mary's Church* in Oceanside, California. Lena was late for the wedding because the cab driver, who she knew well, forgot his assignment. She finally managed to get him on the phone to remind him, but she still arrived at the church twenty five minutes late in tears. Once the ceremony finally started, it was described as textbook by Father Paul Bradley. After John kissed the bride, Father Paul got to kiss the bride as well. The newly married couple and their friends then went to *The Carlsbad Hotel* for the reception. For their honeymoon, John and Lena went to see her parents at their onion farm in Oregon. As for Father Paul Bradley, he would later hit the beaches of *Iwo Jima* with John Basilone and the Fifth Marine Division.

During their marriage, John and Lena did not live together - as they each had their separate barracks where they stayed. Most of the time they spent together was on weekends. Their salaries were low and it was difficult to find a cheap place to live. Their time alone together was limited. In a 1996 interview, Lena, spoke fondly of one 72 hour pass they had together. Their favorite spot to go on weekends was Los Angeles.

John Basilone did not use his hero status to get special favors. Lena recalled that they were trying to find an apartment for them on weekends, but were not having any success. Lena said to John, "maybe you could tell them who you are, and that would help us." But John did not want to take advantage of his status.

John always said about his medal, "my men earned it. I'm just wearing it for them." It was this modesty and strong personal ethic that endeared John to those that knew him personally.

Both John and Lena talked about having many children, but unfortunately they would never have the opportunity to live their lives together. Just one month after being married, John was ordered back overseas. Lena said John had no idea that he would not come back. Since he had lived through the battle at Guadalcanal, he thought he could make it through anything. She said "I have never understood why I wasn't allowed to have a married life with him. I suppose there is a reason, but I have never known what it was."

While John's wedding of July of 1944 was big news at Camp Pendleton, there were other big happenings at the base. President Franklin Roosevelt visited the base in early July. His visit was work related and little publicity was given to it. Many troops caught sight of him, but only from a distance. Roosevelt was seen that day wearing a dark cape, seated in a canvas chair next to a large black limousine.

A special historic event had its origin at the base. Six men, Mike Strank, Harlon Block, Ira Hayes, James Bradley, Rene Gagnon, and Franklin Sousley would get together for the first time. These men would later be photographed raising the U.S. flag at *Iwo Jima* in one of the most famous pictures of all time.

The training at Camp Pendleton centered around countless simulated landings from special boats called LCVPs - Landing Craft Vehicular Personnel. These vehicles were used for landing on a defended island. As the months at Camp Pendleton went on, the training increased. They fired all types of weapons, tossed grenades, and learned to use flamethrowers. One exercise even had the Marines crawl under live machine gun fire.

On August 11th, 1944, orders were given for the Marines to ship out of Camp Pendleton toward their secret objective. John packed up and said good-bye to his new wife, boarded his ship, and sailed with the rest of the Marines for an unknown location. The large fleet of ships set off in a southwestern direction. The next day, the public address system announced that their initial destination would be Hawaii. However, it would be the island of Hilo, in a location called Camp Tarawa, which was named after the battle on that island in the Pacific. The location was remote from any of the fun parts of Hawaii. It was described as a miserable place. *The Red Cross* had judged it unfit to hold prisoners there. That made it a perfect place for the Marines.

## **The Marines Arrive at Camp Tarawa**

# John Basilone Married Lena Riggi on July 10th, 1944 at *St. Mary's* in Oceanside California



John and Lena with their wedding party and Father Paul Bradley

News of John and Lena's Wedding appeared in *The New York Times*

## Guadalcanal Hero to Wed

San Diego, Calif., July 8th, 1944  
Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone, aged 27 of Raritan N.J. the only enlisted Marine now wearing *The Congressional Medal of Honor*, said today that he would be married at Oceanside, July 10th, to Sgt. Lena Riggi of Portland, Oregon, a member of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. He received his award for gallantry at Guadalcanal.



Courtesy Charles Tatum Productions



Courtesy Charles Tatum Productions

Lena in 1996 in an interview for the video *The Saga of Manila John*. Lena died in 1999.



John Basilone with Father Paul Bradley (far right), who married John and Lena.



Monsignor Paul Bradley is still active at age 89 in 2003, in Long Branch, NJ.

On August 18th, 1944, they arrived at Camp Tarawa, Hawaii. After one day, the training schedules were posted, and it was obvious that this was a serious training program designed to prepare them for battle. By October, the training included “pillbox attacks” using demolition men and tanks.

When the threat of combat is approaching, men often bond in strange ways. John Basilone and the 50 men in his machine gun platoon all shaved their heads together. They made sure they took pictures of themselves afterwards. (The photos are on page 61.)

Camp Tarawa was indeed remote and primitive. The soldiers stayed in tents. There was no radio or even newspapers. However, an outdoor movie theater was set up that showed pictures every night. With that being one of the few forms of entertainment, one soldier said “we were so starved for fun, there were no bad movies”. There were some “leave” assignments, on a rotational basis, to the other parts of Hawaii. John’s brother George was stationed in another part of Hawaii at a base on Maui with the Fourth Marines. One day, John was able to visit with George. This time the combat experience that they talked about was not John’s, but George’s experience. George had been in combat at two of the Marshall Islands, Saipan and Tinian. George would not brag about himself, but some of his friends told John that George had done some heroic things in battle.

On January 17th, 1945, orders were given to ship out of Camp Tarawa, which had been their home for five months. When the ships pulled out, the men became concerned that the next stop would be the battle they had trained for. To their surprise, the next stop was Pearl Harbor. On January 19th, 1945, they arrived at Pearl Harbor. The number of ships present amazed the soldiers. The damage that the Japanese had inflicted on that day of infamy, December 7th, 1941, was still evident. Most soldiers were granted one final liberty before battle, which they could spend in Honolulu. Only a percentage of men could go out at once, resulting in many soldiers getting just a day or two on liberty. But it was better than nothing, as the ship was not only boring, but very crowded. Personal space was limited to your own bunk, and even the bunks were stacked five high.

At Pearl Harbor, John, George, and a few buddies were the dinner guests of an old acquaintance from home. Dr. John Fox had been the principal of a school back home in Bridgewater. Now he was the principal of a school in Honolulu, Hawaii.

John and his brother George talked about many issues in life together. George told John to make sure he invested the \$5000 bond in a business that he liked. George asked John the big question, why did John return, when he could have sat out the rest of the war in a safe assignment. John responded that the Marines were his life, and the rest seemed empty without it.

## Leaving Hawaii

After a week at Pearl Harbor, on January 26th, 1945, the U.S. convey of 100,000 soldiers and 800 ships left Pearl Harbor. The line of ships extended for seventy miles. The ship that John Basilone was on was named the *Hansford*. After sailing for two days, the voice of Lt. Colonel John Butler on the PA system announced “Our destination is *Iwo Jima*, an objective closer to the Empire of Japan than any other to date.”

The capture of *Iwo Jima* was the main objective in the Pacific for the U.S. military commanders. The reason was basic, *Iwo Jima* was one step closer to Japan, just 600 miles, half the distance of their current closest access to Japan, which was through the Mariana Islands (Saipan and Tinian). *Iwo Jima* also contained an operational air strip which currently allowed Japanese planes to attack the U.S. . If the U.S. could take the island, this air strip would change hands. It would allow the U.S. easier bombing of the Japanese mainland. From *Iwo Jima*, the U.S. B29 bomber planes would be in closer range to hit Japan. The U.S. fighter planes which accompanied the bombers would be in range as well. Previously, the bombers had to fly over Japan alone. The fighter planes who could protect them would have to turn around just before Japan, otherwise they would run out of fuel. Finally, *Iwo Jima* would be an emergency landing field for damaged U.S. planes, who currently had over a thousand miles to travel back after a bombing raid. Due to this long distance, U.S. planes, when partially damaged, usually wound up ditching in the ocean.

The convey of U.S. ships was still three weeks and 5000 miles from arriving at *Iwo Jima*. They took time to prepare. The men kept in shape by doing exercises. Due to the limited room on the ship, each group would have to wait for the limited open space that was used for calisthenics. John worked his men hard to ensure that they would be ready. By this time their hair started to grow

# Service Stars



During *World War II*, families would display a blue star in their window if they had a family member in the military.

If the family member was killed in action, the star was changed to gold.



The Basilone family, shown here in 1943, had three stars in their window - for John, and his brothers George and Alphonse. Shown here is John's parents Sal and Dora, along with the children who were still at home in 1943, Catherine, Dolores, and Donald.



Alphonse Basilone served in the Army



George Basilone served in the Marines



This photo of John Basilone was released to the press by the military after John was awarded the Medal of Honor. It appeared in many newspapers.

in again. To keep themselves busy, soldiers played cards and read. Books often were passed around and traded. A small pocket copy of *The New Testament* became popular as they neared closer to *Iwo Jima*. Letters home were written by most everyone.

At one point, officers announced that *Iwo Jima* would be an operation that would only last for several days, as they had bombed the island for over two months and the U.S. had a 4 to 1 man power advantage. Basilone knew better, he was heard saying “bullshit” just loud enough for his men to hear, but not loud enough for the officers to hear. John Basilone had fought the Japanese before. He knew that no fight against 20,000 Japanese soldiers prepared to die would be a three day cakewalk.

On February 12th, 1945, the U.S. convoy of ships stopped one last time at the island of Saipan. The U.S. had taken Saipan from the Japanese eight months earlier. Saipan was just 700 miles from *Iwo Jima*. They would stay here for four days before embarking on the final voyage. For this last leg of the trip, Basilone and his men changed ships. They moved from the Hansford to a LST-10, a special landing ship that contained small landing crafts that they would hit the beach with. On February 16th, 1945, they moved out. The men were quieter than previous days. Religious services were well attended. Some doctors on the ships reported an out break of diarrhea. It seemed the young men were getting nervous.

The attack would be no surprise to the Japanese. It was obvious that the U.S. planned to invade the island, due to the intense bombing that took place in January and February. The U.S. bombed *Iwo Jima* for 72 days. Raritan resident Armie Salerno was a “gun loader” aboard the destroyer the *USS Thorn*, he said “You think with all that we bombed them, that a worm could not survive, but they were hidden in tunnels.” The location of the U.S. landing would be no surprise to the Japanese, as there was only two miles of the beach suitable for a landing.

The Japanese prepared for the battle for months. They built what James Bradley described in *Flags of Our Fathers* as “the most ingenious fortress in the history of warfare... (Japanese commander) Kuribayashi transformed *Iwo Jima* into the equivalent of one huge blockhouse”. Practically a city for the 20,000 Japanese soldiers was constructed underground. Expert mining engineers had made a system of caves, tunnels, meeting rooms, and communication centers. Some parts had electricity, others had fuel lamps. The underground tunnels had multiple levels, some as deep as 75 feet.

At the entrances on the surface, they constructed many firing positions called blockhouses that were reinforced with steel and concrete. These blockhouses were well hidden and well positioned to allow them easy firing at the soon to arrive Americans. Many blockhouses had multiple entrances.

Three days before the invasion on *Iwo Jima* saw an even more intense bombing campaign. However, as was later learned, the large majority of the Japanese were underground, hence they, with their equipment, had survived the most intense bombing in military history.

The soldiers wondered quietly to themselves, how will I hold up when the bullets and bombs start flying at us, will I let my buddies down, will I live or die ?

The day before the attack, February 18th, 1945, a serious tone was taken on by the men. All joking had ended. Nearly all the men attended one last religious service.

## **The Iwo Jima Invasion Begins**

On the morning of the attack, the naval bombardment was so intense that the view of the island was partially obscured. Flames and debris shot high in the air. The noise and the bombing was described by one soldier as indescribable. While waiting in the transport vehicles some Marines hoped this final bombing would allow them to take the island with little resistance. However, these Japanese warriors were well dug in and heavily armed. There were 22,000 of them, and almost all were prepared to die in the upcoming battle.

The U.S. bombing stopped only minutes before the first U.S. invasion force landed on the beach at 9:05 AM. John Basilone’s group landed around 9:30 AM. They were surprised to find little opposition. They wondered “where were the Japanese ?” Had the bombing wiped out the enemy ? The Marines got up on the beach and noticed that their feet could barely move in the soft black volcanic sand. For one hour, the U.S. was able to get their transports up to the beach and unload the men without major resistance. Then, with the beach crowded with U.S. soldiers, the Japanese began their counter attack. Suddenly the Japanese from their hidden blockhouses began firing away at the



Courtesy Charles Tatum Productions



Courtesy Charles Tatum Productions

John and his men shaved their heads in Hawaii toward the end of 1944



Actress Virginia Grey, now 87, lives today in California. She was contacted for this book - and asked if she remembered John Basilone. She wrote back

How I do remember John, every time I pass Basilone Drive at Camp Pendleton, it brings tears to my eyes.

*Virginia Grey*



exposed U.S. troops. This was their planned strategy. Hold off from firing immediately, then when there were thousands of U.S. soldiers grouped together on the beach, start blasting them. An estimated two thousand Japanese were gunning down the American forces. They fired everything from machine guns to heavy artillery shells. Many of the Japanese strong positions were in the 550 foot Mount Suribachi. This allowed them to easily pick off the “sitting duck” Marines, who had no cover and very little footing on the beach. The Marines tried to dig into the sand to provide cover, but the volcanic sand was just too soft. For each shovel they dug out, it seemed two shovels filled back in the hole. The Marines were getting annihilated. The noise and the carnage was everywhere. Survivors later wondered how anyone survived the initial Japanese barrage. The U.S. forces were on the beach, but they had little or no cover, were still disorganized, and had not yet gotten enough heavy equipment ashore to defend against this type of attack. Many hundreds of Marines were killed or wounded. The survivors were bogged down with the little cover they could find. The beach became a graveyard of dead Marines and a salvage yard of wrecked trucks and jeeps. One Marine on the beach summed it up as he told his fellow soldiers, “this is a fucking slaughter.” Those would be his last words, as he was hit with a mortar shell moments later.

Many clergy and priests charged onto *Iwo Jima* with the Marines. Father Paul Bradley, the priest who had married John and Lena, was one of them. He had volunteered for a combat assignment, saying that a combat area was a place where a priest should be. He was there at *Iwo Jima* on Day One to provide comfort and administer “last rites” to the dying men. He told his story in the book *Flags of our Fathers*. He said “I was young and didn’t think about the danger to me. And I was too busy crawling from dying man to dying man. It was always, ‘Father over here!’ Once I was kneeling in the sand administering to a guy who had been hit. There was a loud thud! His eyes closed, he had been hit again, and was now dead. ‘Father over here’, I heard someone else call. I went on to the next one.”

## John Gets the Attack Started

The troops had trained for years, but nothing could prepare them for what was happening all around them. The soldiers would later say how frustrated they were that they could not see the enemy to fight back. The Japanese counterattack had stalled the U.S. invasion. Most Marines were hiding in the sand. The beach was littered with damaged vehicles, equipment, and dead soldiers. Further landings of more men and equipment was put on hold. The invasion was not moving. Brave men with leadership ability were needed to rally the troops. One of these men was John Basilone. Many survivors of the battle recall that in the midst of the battle, with everyone hunkered down in the sand, there was one Marine out in the open, running around, directing men. It was John Basilone. He first guided a tank out of a mine field. Only a few tanks came ashore and they were needed to knock out Japanese blockhouses.

Charles Tatum describes John Basilone’s action in his book *Red Blood, Black Sand*. “I noticed a lone Marine walking back and forth on the shore, among hundreds of prone figures, kicking asses, shouting cuss words and demanding, Move Out! Get Your Butts Off the Beach. He gave the Marine Corp signal to follow him. A group of men responded. Fascinated, I wondered why he wasn’t digging in like the rest of us. As he advanced, I recognized the solitary Marine was John Basilone.”

John had noticed a particular Japanese bunker had been effectively shooting mortar shells and raging deadly fire upon the U.S. troops. This enemy strong position “had to go”. John found and organized some machine gunners along with demolition men and directed them toward the bunker. First, the Marines fired on the bunker causing the Japanese to take a defensive position and close the gun port. Then the soldiers advanced toward the bunker. John Basilone instructed a demolition man to blow a hole in the concrete structure, while others gave cover against other nearby enemy positions. The demo-man charged the bunker and quickly tossed his explosives at the base of the closed metal door and ran for his life. A large explosion went off opening part of the bunker. Basilone then told the enthused machine gunners to hold their fire and directed a flamethrower operator to charge the pit. The flame throwing unit, worn on a soldier’s back, weighed seventy pounds. The brave flamethrower charged the pit as quickly as he could, stuck his nozzle in the pit and ignited the flame. This flame was an effective weapon. It contained napalm, which leaves a burning gel on those that it touches. Some of the Japanese soldiers ran out of the pit screaming as

# The Marines Raise the American Flag at *Iwo Jima*

on Feb. 23rd, 1945.

This was four days after  
John Basilone was killed at *Iwo Jima*.

Flag raisers were Ira Hayes, Franklin  
Sousley, John Bradley, Harlon Block,  
Mike Strank, and Rene Gagnon.



## Flag Raising Facts

It has been called the most famous picture ever taken. It is the U.S. Marines raising the American Flag on top of Mount Suribachi on the island of *Iwo Jima*. The flag was raised on February 23rd, 1945, four days after John Basilone was killed at *Iwo Jima*.

The picture first appeared in numerous newspapers two days later, on February 25th, 1945. The U.S. public went crazy over the image. It captured the spirit and tenacity of the U.S. soldiers in war. It was reproduced in many formats - eventually more than any other photograph in history. It has inspired songs, books, and movies.

The photograph was taken by AP news photographer Joe Rosenthal. The flag raising was also captured on video (in color) by motion picture cameraman Bill Genaust. However he never got to see his own video, as he was killed at *Iwo Jima* a few weeks later.

Three of the men who raised the flag died in battle a few days later as the fight for *Iwo Jima* was far from over. This picture was taken on day four of the thirty six day battle.

## Iwo Jima Facts

The name *Iwo Jima* means Sulfur Island - as it is covered with soft volcanic ash. It is a small island, just 8 square miles. It is 600 miles from Japan. It contained air fields that the U.S. felt were vital to give them access for the aerial bombing of Japan and a planned future invasion of Japan.

The island has a mountain, which is actually an extinct volcano called Mount Suribachi. It is 550 feet high. The lava flow from this volcano is what created the island.

they tried to wipe away the jellied gasoline that was burning them. John Basilone cut them down with a machine gun. Fellow soldier Charles Tatum, who held the ammunition belt for John Basilone recalls “Basilone’s eyes had a fury I had never seen before. Rigid hard clinched jaw, sweat glistening on his forehead; he was not an executioner, but a soldier performing his duty. For me and others ... who saw Basilone’s leadership and courage during our assault, his example was overwhelming.”

## **The Death of Manila John**

After knocking out the bunker, Basilone led twenty men off the exposed beach area to a location where they could take some cover and plan their next move. They were inside a crater that appeared to be made earlier by a U.S. bomb. John Basilone judged that they would need more men to advance against the next Japanese blockhouse. He ordered the men to stay while he went back to get more men and some heavy machine guns. The young soldiers waited and watched Basilone run back to gather more men. John Basilone gathered some troops and weapons and started back across the beach to the waiting soldiers. A Japanese mortar shell landed right in the middle of John and a few of the men he was leading. John’s reported last words, just before the shell hit him were printed in *The New York Times*, they were “All right, you guys, let’s go on in there and set up these guns for firing”. The shell killed several men next to John instantly, but John, held on. One soldier who witnessed his injury described it as very bad. The explosion had ripped his insides open and part of his intestines were exposed. John held his hands on his stomach as blood oozed all around him. A small puddle of blood formed and started to grow slowly. A medic was summoned. John Basilone’s only chance was if the medics could get him off the beach to a hospital ship. However, at the moment, there were no more ships coming in or going out. The beach was in chaos. There was a log jam of ships, wreckage, and bodies. No more ships would be landing until the U.S. was more organized and the incoming ships were not sitting ducks. The medic shot John with morphine to comfort him. At one point some men stopped to gaze at the fallen hero, but a sergeant yelled them off, not wanting to see them get shot while grieving for him. John clung to life for around thirty minutes before dying.

Word started to circulate among the Marines that John Basilone had been killed. Several men recalled that this rallied the Marines. Before they were hunkered down, afraid to advance, but now they rose and charged the Japanese positions with renewed energy. They took casualties, but started to complete their objectives, foot by foot, blockhouse by blockhouse.

One soldier, Adolph Brusa, who witnessed John’s action that day, said in an interview for the video *The Saga of Manila John*, “John Basilone was killed at *Iwo Jima* because he was a God Damn Hero. While everyone was hugging the ground, he was out there leading the men.”

The first family member to be informed of John’s death was his brother George, whose Marine unit landed at *Iwo Jima* a few days after John had been killed. George had just arrived and a Sergeant who was assigned to deliver the news to George, saw the name “Basilone” printed on George’s backpack and called to him, “George, I need to talk to you.” Since George had not met this Sergeant before, he became suspicious, and responded “how come you know my first name.” The Sergeant then told George of his brother’s death. George wanted to go to the gravesite to pay his last respects. A photo of George at John’s grave can be found on page 67. John’s “back pack”, which he discarded during the battle at *Iwo Jima*, was found in the sand by Tony Cirello, a soldier who also came from Raritan. He would later give it to George.

## **The Basilone Family and Raritan Learns of John’s Death**

News of John’s death, which had occurred on February 19th, 1945, did not reach home until March 8th, 1945, a Thursday. The military’s standard procedure is to notify the family before the media. However, in John’s case, something got mixed up.

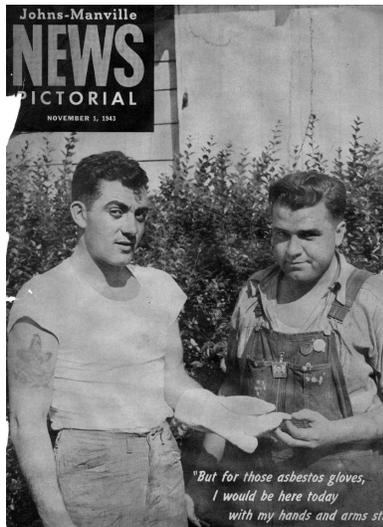


**“Manila” John**

**“Manila John” was his nickname. But what and where is this place.** Manila is the capital of the Philippines - an island country of Southeast Asia - located on the west edge of the Pacific Ocean.

Manila gets it’s name from the Manila Bay which is the body of water on it’s coast. It is strategically important because it is central to foreign trade. The U.S. was ceded possession of the Philippines in 1901 after the Spanish American War. (The U.S. did still have to pay 20 million dollars to Spain for it ). In 1935, the U.S. made the Philippines a commonwealth (a self governed colony but still owned by the U.S. ) that would evolve into independence in 1946.

The fighting in the Philippines started in 1942, when the Japanese invaded, taking it over and occupying it for 3 years. While the Philippines was liberated in 1945, Manila was greatly destroyed, as the Japanese destroyed the infrastructure, such as bridges and water pipes, before they left. Manila was one of the heaviest damaged cities of the war.



John tells his brother Donald about Guadalcanal



John with his brother George



John practices assembling his machine gun blindfolded.

The first notification of John's death came to the family when a reporter, on the morning of March 8th, got in touch with John's brother Angelo's wife, who lived on Second Avenue in Raritan. She quickly went over to the family home at 113 First Avenue to ask John's mother Dora if it was true. Dora had not yet received any information, so they clung to hope that the reporter was in error. However, ten minutes later, a *Western Union* telegram from the War Department was delivered to John's father Salvatore at his new job at *Holcombe and Holcombe* on West Main Street in Somerville. (He had recently sold his tailor shop.) It read:

Deeply regret to inform you that your son, Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone, USMC, was killed in action February 19th at Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, in the performance of his duty and service to his country. When information is received regarding burial, you will be notified. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy.

General Alexander Vandegrift

A similar telegram was sent to John's wife Lena, who was stationed at Camp Pendleton in California.

John's father quickly called home and delivered the tragic news. Dora was in a state of shock and described as being on the verge of collapse. Salvatore quickly came home and soon word of John's death spread through out the town. When a local Raritan boy died in the war, the word always spread quickly. Police Chief Lorenzo Rossi went around town informing people of John's death. The station master at the Raritan Train Station told commuters as they walked to the train. The church bells at *St. Ann's* were rung. Father Amedeo Russo of *St. Ann's* soon arrived at the house to comfort the family. The Basilone house was quickly flooded with visitors offering their sympathy.

John's sister Dolores described for this book how she was notified. She was in class at *Somerville High School* when the principal of the school came in and said that her dad had called. She, along with her younger brother Donald, had to go home. No other information was given to them, but when the principal himself drove them both home, they started to realize that something major had happened. They were informed of John's death when they arrived home.

Back then, the two local papers, *The Somerset Messenger Gazette* and *The Plainfield-Courier News*, were printed and distributed in the afternoon, so they were able to report the story the same day. It was the lead story on the front page of both papers.

The last word that the Basilone family had received from John was a birthday greeting to his mother, one month before.

The Basilone family and the town of Raritan grieved over the loss of their hero.

Judge George Allgair was quoted in *The Somerset Messenger Gazette* "The boys in Raritan all idolized John Basilone and his death seems unreal. We have a very deep sense of loss."

Former (Municipality) Mayor Joseph Navatto commented on a talk he had with John on his last home visit, "he said he couldn't take it easy while his friends fought on. He had to get back to the fight. If his number came up, that was part of the game. He was a tribute to this great country of ours, an American, a Marine, a hero who gave his life for the country he loved."

Father Amedeo Russo of *St. Ann's* said in *The Plainfield Courier News*, "John Basilone had a high sense of patriotic duty, which impelled him to give all in his service to his country. He has left a noble example of unselfish devotion to duty."

*The New York Times* wrote about John, "Being a Marine fighting man, and therefore a realist, Sergeant Basilone must have known in his heart that his luck could not last forever. Yet he chose to return to battle."

In the midst of their grief, the Basilone family still had anxiety about their other son George, who they also thought to be at *Iwo Jima*.

Two days later, on Saturday, March 10th, a memorial mass for John Basilone was held at *St. Ann's Church*. The church was beyond capacity with servicemen home on leave, neighbors, towns-

# John Basilone is buried at *Arlington National Cemetery* which is just outside of Washington D. C.



John Basilone was initially buried at *Iwo Jima*. To the left, is his brother George at his grave. George, also a Marine, would arrive at Iwo Jima a few days after John was killed. It was there that he was told of his brother's death.

This is a photo of John Basilone's Funeral at *Arlington National Cemetery* when his body was brought home from a grave at Iwo Jima in 1948.



John's sisters Mary and Dolores put a wreath at John's grave on the 50th Anniversary of his death in 1995. President Clinton spoke at the Service.



John's Grave at  
*Arlington National Cemetery*.  
(Burial spot is Section 12  
grave 384 Grid y/z 23.5)

people, members of the local VFW and American Legion, family, and even some folks who had traveled from out of state to pay their respects.

The flags in the local schools, Bridgewater and Raritan, were lowered to half staff. A lodge of sorrow for Sergeant Basilone was held March 22nd at the Somerville Elks Lodge.

The first step to honor the fallen hero was taken by *Raritan Valley Post 280* of the American Legion. They changed their name to “*Sgt. John Basilone Post 280*” . For his bravery in action at *Iwo Jima*, John was posthumously awarded *The Navy Cross*, the second highest award a soldier can receive.

Many believe that if John Basilone had not already received *The Congressional Medal of Honor* at Guadalcanal, that he would have been awarded it at *Iwo Jima*. John was “submitted” for a second *Congressional Medal of Honor* after his actions at *Iwo Jima* by his commander Justin Gates Duryea. Justin, who lost an arm in the battle, recalled that he was told by his superiors that all the Congressional Medals they could give out were already awarded.

## The Marines Finally Take Iwo Jima

The Marines would eventually finish taking *Iwo Jima* from the Japanese on March 26th, 1945, after thirty-six days of fighting. On the fourth day of the battle, the U.S. secured the 550 foot mountain named *Mount Suribachi*, where they raised a U.S. flag on top of the mountain. Since the pole was very heavy, they needed six men to hoist it up. *Associated Press* photographer Joe Rosenthal captured the flag raising in the famous photograph. After the picture appeared in the newspapers throughout the country, the flag raisers, were called home to promote a bond tour. However, three of the six men had already been killed in the fierce fighting at *Iwo Jima*.

*Iwo Jima* was the only battle in *World War II* where the U.S took more casualties than their enemy. The U.S. suffered 25,851 casualties, nearly 7000 dead. Two thirds of those who fought became casualties. As for the 21,000 Japanese, 20,000 choose to fight to the death, only 1000 surrendered.

At home, news of the casualties and savagery at *Iwo Jima* shocked the nation. Many wondered if the island was worth the cost. But the debate on this ended quickly, as the U.S moved on to the next battle.

The U.S. used *Iwo Jima* as a launching base for attacks on Japan. In addition, *Iwo Jima* was an emergency landing base for U.S. planes. Before the wars end, over 2000 U.S. planes would make emergency landings on *Iwo Jima*.

## The War Ends

Less than three months after John’s death, the war started to come to an end, as Germany surrendered on May 7th, 1945. Hitler had committed suicide just a week before on April 30th. However, the Japanese continued fighting, vowing to fight to the death, just as they had in their battles with John Basilone at Guadalcanal and *Iwo Jima*. The U.S. had another major battle victory against the Japanese in the Pacific at the battle of Okinawa, which lasted April 1st through June 21st, 1945. In this battle, the Japanese continued their suicide tactics, this time using planes as bombs. These were called kamikazes.

An assessment of how to get the Japanese to finally surrender looked to be a very difficult task. A new weapon that would end the war and change humanity forever was created by the U.S., the atomic bomb. On August 6th, 1945, the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Two days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Over 120,000 people would die from these monstrous bombs. Many that survived the initial blast died later from radiation sickness. Fearing more attacks from this brutal new weapon, the Japanese officially surrendered on August 15th, 1945. The war was over. It was later revealed that the U.S. did not have any more atomic bombs to drop. A third bomb was in progress, and a fourth bomb had been started, but they would not be ready for months. The decision to “drop the bomb” has been debated ever since.

In total, 57 million lives had been lost during *World War II*. The United States had 295,000 deaths. Why? The sad and simple answer is so that a handful of dictators could have their glory.

## **Decorations Awarded to Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone USMC**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Congressional Medal of Honor                       | 24-25 October 1942, Guadalcanal         |
| 2. Navy Cross   | 19 February 1945, Iwo Jima              |
| 3. Purple Heart                                       | 19 February 1945, Iwo Jima, KIA         |
| 4. Presidential Unit Citation with One Bronze Star    | 1942 Guadalcanal<br>1945 Iwo Jima       |
| 5. American Defense Service Medal with Base Clasp     | Cuba, 1940,41                           |
| 6. American Campaign Medal                            | 1941-1942, 1943-44                      |
| 7. Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal With 2 Bronze Stars | 1942-43 Guadalcanal<br>1944-45 Iwo Jima |
| 8. World War II Victory Medal                         | 1941-45                                 |

### **John Basilone’s Citation for his *Navy Cross* Awarded Posthumously for his Action at *Iwo Jima***

**“For extraordinary heroism while serving as a leader of a Machine-Gun Section of Company C, First Battalion, Twenty-Seventh Marines, Fifth Marine Division, in Action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands, 19 February 1945. Shrewdly gauging the tactical situation shortly after landing when his company’s advance was held up by the concentrated fire of heavily fortified Japanese blockhouse, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone boldly defied The smashing bombardment of heavy caliber fire to work his way around the flank and up to a position directly on top of the blockhouse and then, attacking With grenades and demolitions, single-handedly destroyed the entire hostile strongpoint and its defending garrison. Consistently daring and aggressive as he fought his way over the battle-torn beach and up the sloping, gun-studded terraces toward Airfield Number One, he repeatedly exposed himself to the blasting fury of exploding shells and later in the day coolly proceeded to the aid of a friendly tank which had been trapped in an enemy mine field under intense mortar and artillery Barrages, skillfully guiding the heavy vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety, despite the overwhelming volume of hostile fire. In the forefront of the assault at all times, he pushed forward with dauntless courage and iron determination until, moving upon the edge of the airfield, he fell, instantly by a bursting mortar shell. Stout-hearted and indomitable, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone by his intrepid initiative, outstanding professional skill and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of fanatic opposition, contributed materially to the advance of his company during the early critical period of the assault, and his unwavering devotion to his comrades and reflects the highest credit upon Gunnery Sergeant Basilone and the United States Naval Service.”**

While these dictators did initially get some of the glory they sought, in the end, they just created death and misery, for first their own people, and then eventually for themselves.

The end of the war brought both celebration and reflection. *The Raritan Valley News* on August 16th, 1945, told of the town of Raritan's reaction.

Local residents lost no time in joining in the national celebration of the Japanese surrender. Hardly had the news been flashed when the din of factory whistles, fire alarms, noisemakers, and automobile horns got started. Parents, wives, sisters, sweethearts, and friends of servicemen, free of anxiety for the first time in almost five years, joined in heartfelt thanksgiving. Somerset Street was crowded with joyful men, women, and children embracing their neighbors, spreading confetti, and setting off firecrackers.

One highlight of Raritan's celebration was a quickly planned parade. At the end of the parade, many came to celebrate at *Orlando's Tavern*, where owner Tony Orlando had planned a victory party. While many celebrated, others reflected, one serviceman said "I keep thinking of my buddies who won't come back."

## **Arlington Burial - April 20th, 1948**

In 1948, the U.S. Government started to move the bodies of the soldiers killed at *Iwo Jima* to a final resting place in the U.S. . The government contacted the Basilone family about the arrangements. The family had a choice, John could be buried at *Arlington National Cemetery* just outside Washington D.C. or locally. The family needed a funeral director to help with the arrangements, so they turned to Anthony Bongiovi, who was partner at the Conroy-Bongiovi funeral home which had opened in 1944 on Somerset Street in Raritan. At first, John's mother Dora wanted John to be buried close to home, but funeral director Bongiovi told her of the honor that it was to have a soldier, especially one of John's accomplishments, to be buried at the patriotic *Arlington National Cemetery*. So the family chose Arlington. Funeral director Anthony Bongiovi then coordinated the details of the service between the family and the government. Father Russo would be present and say a prayer.

The day of the funeral, April 20th, 1945, a limousine was driven by police chief Lorenzo Rossi, who, like the Bongiovi Funeral Home, had volunteered his time for the long day ahead. In the front seat of the limo sat Father Russo, in the back was Salvatore and Dora, along with John's sister Mary. Several other cars carried John's remaining brothers and sisters. Some residents of Raritan attended as well. They included John's old boss Alfred Gaburo, Raritan Mayor Rocco Miele, and future mayor Steve Del Rocco. They all followed the limo on the four hour drive to Arlington, Virginia.

Everyone on the trip had expected a small, simple funeral. When they arrived, they were amazed. First, they were picked up from their vehicles and driven in jeeps to the grave site. There they saw dozens of military dignitaries, a Marine Band, and uniformed soldiers who would fire a gun salute. It was a most impressive, inspiring service, a true tribute to an unselfish hero. Father Russo blessed the casket. An American Flag had first covered the coffin, and then as is customary, it was later taken off, folded up, and given to the Basilone family. Anthony Bongiovi, now 93, said the funeral was simply unbelievable. He recalls that it was during the playing of *Taps* (the military tribute song played at funerals) that everyone became emotional. The family and friends all drove back the same day.

## **The Basilone Statue**

After the war ended, the *John Basilone American Legion Post* decided to build a memorial to honor John Basilone. At first, there was talk of naming a library after John. Soon it was agreed that

# Huge Celebration Here To Greet Peace

## Area Plants Seek Postwar Help

Despite estimates by government economists of 7,000,000 jobless by Christmas, this area may experience comparatively little unemployment. War plants in this area expect government telegrams cancelling war orders with official news of surrender. The majority of them, however, expect to continue operation on peacetime order with only minor reconversion problems. Calco, now employing almost 4,000 has enough civilian orders on hand to continue full production. Six months after the end of the war, the plant anticipates employing an additional 500 workers.

John E. Begert, in discussing employment needs at Johns-Manville, states: "If all war contracts are cancelled, if we limit the work to 48 hours, and if the present volume of non-war orders continues to come in, we still will need at least 270 new employes in addition to those already on the payroll."

Mr. Begert went on to explain that eventually more than 600 new employes will be required to meet the demand of Johns-Manville's postwar production program. At present the Manville plant employs 267 Jamaicans as a war measure, who will be replaced. Lewis H. Brown, president of Johns-Manville commented in a report released last week:

and equipment and development of new products, new sales activities and new markets.

"The war has opened up many new permanent markets for our various lines of building materials and resumption of construction on a large scale will open and expand our pre-war markets for these materials.

"Our industrial products," Mr. Brown continued, "will be needed in large quantities by other industries for reconversion, restoration and maintenance and repair activities deferred during the war, and resumption of production of peacetime goods."

Ruberoid Company expects to increase employment from the present 400 to 550 in the postwar period. Bakelite anticipates adding 100 more to its present 2,100 workers while Sherwin Williams states it could use about 75 more employees. Many workers at the Army depot are employed for the duration and six months.

V-J will put 250,000 of New Jersey's 900,000 workers in war and war-related jobs temporarily, experts predict. Most will be reabsorbed as industries reconvert to civilian goods production. Gov. Walter E. Edge said that the state is prepared for victory with its post war reserve fund and would

## TO GOVERN JAPAN



GENERAL OF THE ARMY  
 DOUGLAS MACARTHUR

## Son's Death Told On Victory Day

In the midst of the general rejoicing over the Japanese surrender, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Harcarik of 22 La Grange St. received

## PEACE GETS WILD WELCOME

A sudden cacophony of joyful noise was loosed in this area at 7 p. m. Tuesday night. Local residents lost no time in joining in the national celebration of the Japanese surrender. The epochal week, beginning with the first atomic bombing of Japan and gaining momentum with the Russian declaration of war against the Nips, came to a triumphant conclusion with total victory.

Hardly had the news been flashed when the din of factory whistles, fire alarm systems, noisemakers and automobile horns got started. Parents, wives, sisters, sweethearts and friends of servicemen, free of anxiety for the first time in almost five years, joined in heartfelt thanksgiving. Residents, in a pitch of anxiety since the first word of Nip surrender last Friday, started to let off steam.

### GATHER IN CROWDS

Somerset St. was crowded with joyful men, women and children embracing their neighbors, spreading confetti and setting off firecrackers. Smaller groups gathered in Bradley and Finderns to discuss the glad news. The biggest traffic jam since the war resulted as cars lined up in impromptu parades. The death knell of gasoline rationing brought reckless expenditure of long-hoarded stamps and many stations were dry long before potential patrons wanted to go home. Pedestrians danced in the streets.

Most taverns respected the request of Commissioner Alfred Driscoll of the Alcoholic Beverage Control and closed early. The area was far from dry, however, as many residents brought out long cherished bottles marked Hirohito.

### BAND PLAYS

One highlight of Raritan's celebration was a parade with music furnished by La Fratellanza Society Band. Many persons fell into line and ended up at the Centennial Tavern where Tony Orlando had arranged a victory party.

Firecrackers, some of which may have been saved from pre-war St. Rocco's celebrations, lent to the carnival air. This is St. Rocco's week and business on the grounds of St. Ann's Church was roused. Servicemen home on leave celebrated the victory which to many will mean early discharge. One GI, however, mourned, "I keep thinking of my buddies who won't come back."

Church services drew a large attendance. Immediately following

*The Raritan Valley News tells of the end of the war*



After the war, John's widow, Lena, meets the Basilone Family for the first time



John's Mom and Dad along with John's sisters Mary and Dolores are presented with a portrait of John.

a statue would be a useful and lasting tribute. A committee was set up to raise the money necessary. Through a nation wide appeal, the money was raised. Ed Sullivan was one of the donors. To build the statue, they chose a sculptor, Philip Orlando, who had been a boyhood friend of John's. Philip had lived years before at the corner of Somerset and Coddington Street in Raritan. He had attended Somerville High School. Philip Orlando was a very dedicated artist, studying art at *The Leonardo Da Vinci Art School* in New York. To build the statue, Philip rented a studio above a bank at 110 East Front Street in Plainfield. He moved in there with his wife Novella and his kids — spending months completing it. His son and daughter played in a sand box next to where he worked. Philip Orlando understood what it was like to be a soldier, as he served in *World War II* as a Sergeant. He saw the horrors of combat up close himself, earning a Bronze Star while serving in France, Belgium, and Germany.

It was decided that the statue would be life size, mounted on a four foot granite pedestal. To get started, Philip Orlando built two smaller models, first 17 inches and then 34 inches. Orlando used photographs and his own recollections of John to design it. The statue is representative of John Basilone at Guadalcanal on the night he earned *The Congressional Medal of Honor*. John is stripped to the waist and he is holding the Browning machine gun that he used that night. Over his shoulder is a cartridge belt of ammunition, just like the ones he had carried through the jungle in the darkness while braving enemy fire. Around his neck is a crucifix and his "dog tags".

John's parents came to the studio to see the work in progress, and gave it their endorsement. Initially, the location for the statue was going to be across the street from his parent's house on First Avenue. But the final location settled on was the corner of Somerset Street and Canal Street.

Upon the completion of the statue, the town scheduled a grand ceremony. On June 6th, 1948, there was a large parade through town. The estimated attendance was 15,000. After the parade, the attendees gathered around the covered statue. To start the program, the Camp Kilmer band played *The National Anthem*. Then, the Basilone Statue was unveiled by John's mother Dora as the band played *The Marines Hymn*. John's brother George, also a Marine, stood with his mother as an honor guard. Father Amedeo Russo then blessed the statue. The St. Ann's choir sang *Ava Maria*. Then Catherine Mastice sang *Manila John*, just as she had done before on John Basilone Day on September 19th, 1943.

Mayor Rocky Miele spoke at the ceremony, he said " John Basilone, our boyhood chum, stands before us immortal. He died to make democracy live and to keep us free. Let him be the inspiration for our efforts, for the preservation of peace." Names of the other men from Raritan who died during the war were read as well. Their names and photos are found in this book on page 82. The statue has stood in the same location for over 55 years, serving as a lasting tribute to a great American hero.

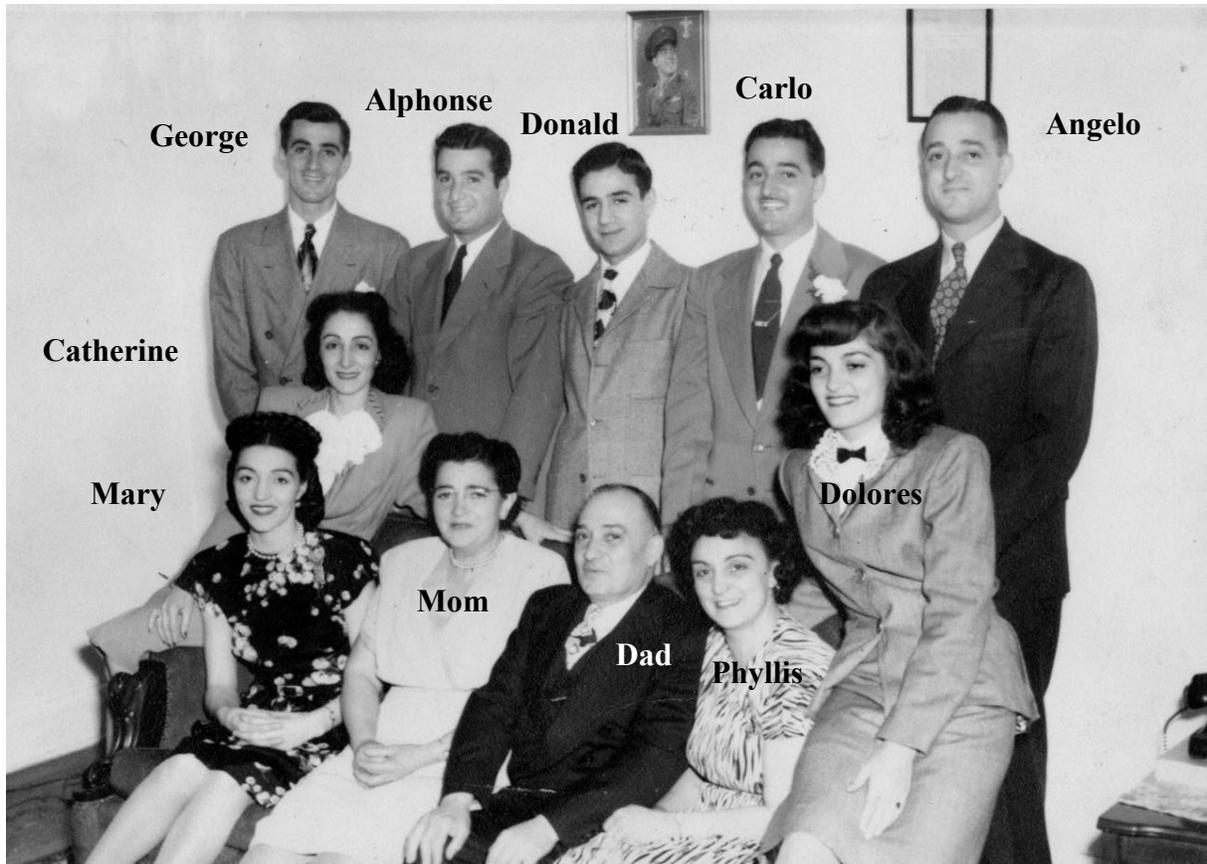
## ***The Ship - The U.S.S. Basilone***

The military paid tribute to John by naming a ship after him. An anti-submarine Navy Destroyer, the *U.S.S. Basilone* was commissioned (put into service) on July 26th, 1949. The ship was first built in Texas and then sailed for the Commissioning Ceremony at the Naval Shipyard Annex in Boston, Massachusetts. In attendance were John's parents, Sal and Dora, John's widow Lena, and his sister Mary, who christened the ship by breaking a bottle of champagne over it. The ship was in service for decades. In 1982 it was used for target practice (as many old ships are) and sunk.

## **The Annual Basilone Parade**

In 1981, a 3rd grade class at *John F. Kennedy School* in Raritan was taken on a class trip by their teacher Joann Liptak. On this trip, they walked around town to visit the historical sites of Raritan. One stop was the Basilone Statue. After returning from the trip, the kids started to ask many questions about John Basilone. The children asked what they could do to honor John Basilone. One kid said there should be a John Basilone day, with a parade. The other kids quickly agreed. Mrs. Liptak thought that was a good idea too. She decided to have her class write to Mayor Steve Del Rocco. All the kids enthusiastically wrote their notes to the mayor expressing their idea for a John

# John's Family



Circa 1946

## Basilone Children

Phyllis Cutter	1909-	Lives in North Jersey
Angelo	1910-2002	Lived on Second Street in Raritan
Catherine Marino	1913-1971	Lived on First Avenue in Raritan
Mary	1914-2001	Lived on First Avenue in Raritan
Carlo	1915-	Still lives in Raritan
<b>John</b>	<b>1916-1945</b>	
Alphonse	1920-1998	Lived on First Street in Raritan
George	1922-1990	Lived on Frelinghuysen Avenue in Raritan
Dolores Hawkins	1928-2003	Lived in Raritan on Wall Street
Donald	1929-	Lives in Florida

## John's Parent's

Dad – Salvatore	1884-1965	Born in Italy, outside of Naples
Mom - Dora Bengivenga	1889–1951	Born in US, grew up in Raritan

## John's Wife

Lena Riggi Basilone	1913-1999	Grew up in Portland, Oregon
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Basilone Parade. Mrs. Liptak gathered the notes, wrote her own letter as the cover page, and mailed them to the mayor. When Mayor Del Rocco received the letters, he decided to visit the class. He told them it was a wonderful idea and that he would start a parade. Steve assumed the position of chairman of the parade committee, organized others, gathered funds, and lined up groups to march.

The time of the year for the parade was chosen to coincide with John's birthday, which was the first week in November. The parade was initially small, but it grew every year. After a few years, the date of the parade was moved to mid September to take advantage of better weather and to coincide with the original John Basilone Day Parade. For 22 years, the parade has been held, rain or shine. It attracts thousands of spectators. It is the pride of the town of Raritan. Joann Liptak, now retired, says she never imagined that her class's idea would grow into the big annual event that it is today.

Steve Del Rocco would serve as mayor for two terms, 1975-1983. His legacy includes not just the annual Basilone Parade. He was also responsible for having the current municipal building built and for obtaining the first major federal grant in borough history—which was used to help build the mini-mall on Route 206. Steve served in *World War II* as a sergeant in the Army. He ran “boot camps” to train new soldiers.

In 1988, John Pacifico took over as parade chairman. John had been on the parade committee since the third year of the parade in 1984. One addition he made was to add a military band to the parade weekend. The band that has been featured the last eight years is *The Quantico Marine Band*. They travel each year from their military base in Quantico, Virginia. Besides marching and playing in the parade, *The Quantico Marine Band* performs a concert the night before the parade at *The Raritan Valley Community College*. After the parade, the band plays at a ceremony at the Basilone Statue. Featured songs at this ceremony are *The National Anthem*, *God Bless America*, *The Marines Hymn*, and *Taps*.

Today the parade committee meets once a month throughout the year to plan for the day. Each year over 150 groups march in the parade. Groups include military and veterans groups, fire companies, high school bands, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and other civic and patriotic groups. There is a different Grand Marshall every year. Previous ones have been Father Paul Bradley and Steve Del Rocco.

## John's Wife Lena

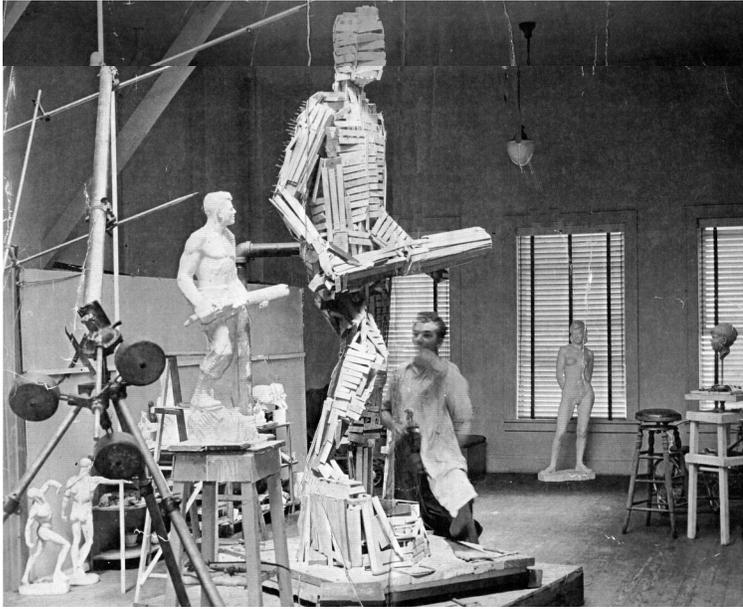
Lena did not meet John's parent's until after his death when she came to New Jersey. A picture of them together appears in this book.

She never remarried, as she was very content with her life. She told a friend “once you have the best, you can't settle for less.” Lena was described by her friends as a great cook, who enjoyed inviting people over for special dinners. She worked at an electrical plant. Always active in military affairs, she volunteered at the *Long Beach Veterans Hospital*, *The American Veterans Auxiliary*, and *The Woman's Marine Association*. She died in June of 1999 at the age of 86.

## The Basilone Museum

Parade organizer John Pacifico thought that there should be a Basilone Museum in town. A place where pictures, articles, and newspapers, would be available to the public. A room at the Raritan Public Library was found to be a good location for it. On the 50th Anniversary of John's death, February 19th, 1995, the museum opened. It contains artifacts donated from the Basilone Family, especially John's sister Mary, and the Marine Corp. Here you can see John's uniform and many photographs. There are newspaper articles from 1943-1945 about John receiving *The Congressional Medal of Honor*, his *Welcome Home Parade*, and his death at *Iwo Jima*.

# *The Basilone Statue*



Courtesy Basilone Museum

Here is Philip Orlando creating The Basilone Statue. Notice on the left a small 34 inch version of the statue.



Here is a picture from the ceremony in 1948 of the unveiling of *The Basilone Statue*.



Wreaths are placed at the statue each year on the day of the parade.

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# *The U.S.S. Basilone*



The ship *The U.S.S. Basilone*, a Navy Destroyer, was commissioned at a Ceremony in Boston, in 1949



Attending the commissioning ceremony was John's sister, Mary, John's Dad, Salvatore, John's Mom, Dora, and his widow, Lena.

## Postage Stamp

While John Basilone is honored with an annual parade, many feel he deserves another honor. For years a drive has been ongoing to have a John Basilone Commemorative Postage Stamp. In October of 2002, Senator John Corzine introduced a resolution to urge the Postmaster General to put John Basilone on a postage stamp. John Corzine was quoted in *The Somerset Messenger Gazette*, "Basilone is a true American Patriot whose legacy should be preserved. Now more than ever, the United States needs to honor and praise the courageous efforts put forth by the men and woman of our military," Mayor Phil Possessky said in the same article "I'd much rather see a picture of John Basilone on a stamp, than a movie star."

An article by Nicole Morella in the *Home News Tribune* described how tough the battle will be to get a Basilone stamp. "The process of getting a stamp in someone's honor is quite cumbersome, as more than 50,000 ideas are submitted each year. Then from that, a few hundred are picked to be under consideration." The Basilone Stamp has passed step one, and is now "under consideration".

There have been more than 130,000 signatures collected and sent to the U.S. Postal Service in support of a Basilone stamp. More signatures are being collected every day, as many stores in Raritan and the surrounding area have signature cards with drop off boxes at their register counters.

## Raritan's Identity

The town of Raritan continues to honor their hometown hero each year with the parade. He is part of the identity of the town. Parade organizer John Pacifico says it all, "I don't think you can talk about Raritan, without talking about John Basilone." Mayor Phil Possessky says that he inherits a big responsibility to keep John's name remembered and honored. The coordination and financing of the parade is a big part of his job.

## Closing

John Basilone remains the only soldier (non-officer) in U.S. history to be awarded both *The Congressional Medal of Honor* and *The Navy Cross*. He is also the only Medal of Honor winner to go back into combat and be killed in combat.

John Basilone is a legend in the Marine Corp. The Official Marine Book found at the local *Barnes & Noble* has a two page tribute to him. At the local recruiting station in Somerville, Sergeant Paul Lillard, who staffs the Marine recruiting department, says "Manila John is a legend in the Marine Corps. You learn about John Basilone several times during your training to be a Marine. He is one of the top names in Marine history."

John Basilone's *Medal of Honor*, along with a bust of him, was donated by his family to *The U. S. Marine Corp Air-Ground Museum* in Quantico, Virginia.

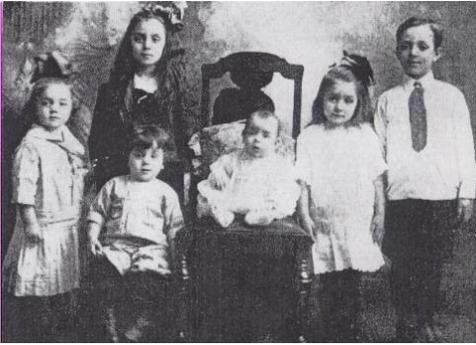
President George W. Bush recently praised John Basilone in a speech on Columbus Day 2003. He said:

For nearly seventy years our country has celebrated in honor of Columbus. And on this day, we celebrate the contributions of Italian Americans. Twenty-four Italian Americans have won the Congressional Medal of Honor ... one of them was Marine Sergeant John Basilone. You may have heard of this brave man. He died in the battle of *Iwo Jima*. He won both the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross. It speaks to his valor and his service.

I will end this book with words written by John's oldest sister Phyllis. I found this passage on a torn piece of paper that was hidden under a stack of magazines in a drawer at The Basilone Museum.

John Basilone is gone, but his courage and spirit are with us. His devotion and love of his country is a shining courageous example for all Marines and the youth of our nation when the going gets tough. The very thought of this great hero who, when being feted and praised

# John's Brother Carlo



↑            ↑  
Carlo in 1917    John



John Pacifico and Carlo Basilone  
at the statue



Carlo in 2003, at his  
home in Raritan

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John's brother Carlo said "A day does not go by, that I don't think of him, he was a great guy." Carlo did his part for the country during the war by working in a war production plant in Bound Brook. They produced the paint that was used for the camouflaged uniforms.

Carlo was born in 1915, fifteen months before John.

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Here is Carlo with John's late sister  
Dolores on the grandstand at the  
parade in 2003



John's sister Dolores lays a wreath  
at the statue after the parade  
in September 2003.  
Dolores died in November of 2003.

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**John's Brother Donald** who is retired in Florida, says many people will still recognize his last name, and ask if he is related to John. (We do not have a recent photo of Donald, but here are a couple of old ones)



John's Brother Donald reads the  
comics about John at Guadalcanal



Donald enlists in the Marines in 1947

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**John oldest sister Phyllis** is still alive, in her 90s, she lives in North Jersey, No photo was available.

by the entire country had this to say "I only own a part of this glorious Congressional Medal of Honor. All my buddies still fighting back in the jungles earned some part of it. I want to get back as quickly as I can to help them finish the job."

Those phrases will inspire our boys in the future to glorious victory, no matter what the odds. The courage and simple humility of this great American will live forever in the annals of American History.

# Special Thanks to:

Carlo Basilone, Dolores Basilone Hawkins, Donald Basilone, Janice "Basilone" Kretch, Phyllis Basilone Cutter, John Pacifico, Peter Vitelli, Jim Foohey, Mayor Phil Possessky, Carl Bengivenga, Charles Tatum, Steve Del Rocco, Joann Liptak, Angela Perone, Vicky Melitsky, Angelo Bernabe, Armie Salerno, Rose Sansone, Irene Sixt, Chris Enny, Charley Glaser, Sid Granetz, Charles Franchino, Nick Esposito, Don Esposito, Lilyan Navatto, Mary Soriano, Bill Funchouser, Anthony Bongiovi, Catherine Mastice, Father Paul Bradley, Joe Pinto, Jimmy Sommerville, The Raritan Library, St. Bernard's Church, Somerville Library, Tropiano's, Delucia's Brick Oven Pizza, The Somerset Messenger Gazette

The Somerset County Library (They have *The New York Times* on microfilm)

The Plainfield Library (They have the *Plainfield-Courier News* on microfilm)

My wife Peggy and my daughters, Megan, Lauren and Jennifer.

## About the Author

Bruce W. Doorly lives on Bound Brook Avenue in Raritan. He moved there in 1993. He lives with his wife Peggy and three daughters, Megan, Lauren, and Jennifer. He formerly owned the kids party place, *Shake Rattle & Romp* on Route 206 in Raritan. It was open September 1999 - December 2002. Currently he owns *Shake Rattle & Rock Mobile DJs*, performing at Weddings, Anniversary Parties, Birthdays, and other events. He has his M.B.A. in business from Fairleigh Dickenson. He can be reached at (908) 725-6020

## John Basilone Videos

All three are available at The Raritan Library

***John Basilone - A Marine's Marine*** - This video is from a TKR Cable Show. It contains interviews with John's brothers and sisters. It also has video from the parade on *John Basilone Day* in 1943.

***The Saga of Manila John*** - This has interviews with John's wife Lena and many soldiers who fought with him. It was made by a man who fought with John Basilone at *Iwo Jima*, Charles Tatum - who is now a military historian.

***Red Blood Black Sand*** - This video (and book) are about the battle at *Iwo Jima*. It contains many references to John Basilone.

To order *The Saga of Manila John* or *Red Blood Black Sand* - The Video or Book, call *Chuck Tatum Productions* at 209-478-2790. Each video or book is \$19.95 plus \$3.50 shipping.





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<i>John Basilone - A Marine's Marine</i>	TKR Cable

### Various Interviews

# Raritan Men who gave their lives in World War II

**Dominic Baldini**



**Carmine Crugnale**



**Philip DeLorenzo**



**Rocco DeMelio**



**Julius Dominici**



**Frank Esposito**



**John Gentile**



**Abraham Granetz**



**Frances Harcar**



**R. A. Koskomp**



**Alfonso Matteis**



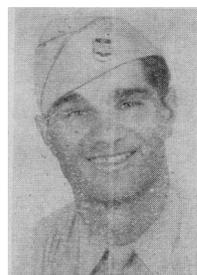
**Peter Obzanski**



**Jerry Ottavianno**



**Frank Passarello**



**Peter Petras**



**Michael Mazepa**



**Rocco Scarponi**



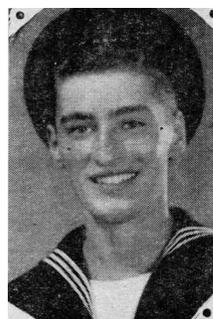
**Joseph Spatt**



**Alfred Zanoni**



**Edward Harcarik**



**Joseph Lamastro**



No photo available

**John Doughtery**

**Walter Jacobs**