



Italian American Heritage Club Of Hunterdon County

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BASILONE STAMP COMING IN 2005

By Rick Cornejo ~ Staff writer

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RARITAN ~ John Basilone is a bit closer to being memorialized on a stamp.

The US Postal Service, in a letter to Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen, has said the stamp will be issued in 2005, but the exact date of issuance or the details of the issuance ceremony have not yet been finalized.

John Pacifico, chairman of the John Basilone Parade Committee, said he's been working for years to get the Marine gunnery sergeant from Raritan honored on a stamp.

"We can put comic strip characters and all sorts of things on stamps. Can't we put our veterans and national heroes on them?" Pacifico said. "It's about time. We've been promoting this for 10 years now."

Basilone was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroism in fighting a Japanese regiment during the Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942. He was the first enlisted Marine to be presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism in World War II. He also was awarded the next highest military honors, the Navy Cross for Valor and the Purple Heart, becoming the only enlisted Marine in World War II to ever receive all three medals.

He was killed during the battle of Iwo Jima in 1945 and is remembered nationally as a war hero. Raritan, where he grew up, has honored him with a parade for nearly a quarter century and with a life-sized bronze statue.

Basilone enlisted in the Marines after being honorably discharged from the Army and served in the Philippines.

In 1949, the US government commissioned a destroyer, the USS Basilone, and in November 1951, Gov. Alfred Driscoll posthumously awarded Basilone New Jersey's highest decoration. After World War II, his body was reburied with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

"The story of Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone is one of patriotism, valor and courage," said Frelinghuysen. "He is a son of Raritan, and a true American hero who has earned the honor of being recognized on a commemorative postage stamp."

Frelinghuysen and other members of Congress have been working for years to get Basilone honored with a stamp. Last year,

Frelinghuysen cosponsored legislation which recommended the Postal Service create a postage stamp honoring Basilone.

Pacifico said he and other volunteers collected 15,000 signatures on a petition to forward to the Postal Service.

"Since then, we've got many, many more names," he said.

The stamp will be one of four commemorative stamps honoring Marines. Also to be featured are General John A. Lejeune, Lt. General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller and Sgt. Major Dan Daly.

Pacifico said the parade committee hopes to have the unveiling of the Basilone stamp held in Raritan.

The parade committee plans to hold a special ceremony February 19, 2005 on the 60th anniversary of the battle of Iwo Jima. ❧

