This Day in History… November 4, 1916

Happy Birthday John Basilone

Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone was born on November 4, 1916, in Buffalo, New York.

Basilone's family had previously lived in Raritan, New Jersey, and returned there in 1918. Basilone attended school until he was 15 and then found work as a golf caddy at a local country club.

Basilone joined the Army in 1934 and served three years in the Philippines. While there, he was a champion boxer. He was honorably discharged in 1937 and spent a few years driving trucks. He wanted to return to Manila and thought he might get there faster with the Marines, so he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1940.

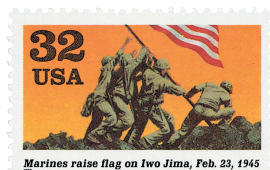*Basilone stamp from the Distinguished Marines Issue*

In the 1942 Battle of Lunga Point on Guadalcanal, Basilone commanded two machine-gun emplacements defending an airfield. When the Japanese attacked and one gun crew was wiped out, Basilone rolled back and forth over the ground, firing first one gun, then the other. When ammunition got low, he went back through enemy fire for more. Basilone, along with two other Marines, saved Henderson Airfield. They valiantly held off the advancing Japanese regiment until reinforcements arrived.

Stamp from the WWII – 1942: Into the Battle Sheet

Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty. He returned to his hometown a hero, where they threw him a large parade that was covered in the national news. He then went on war bond tours across the country, but was uncomfortable with his newfound celebrity status. He requested to go back to battle but was denied, as the Marines said he was needed more on the home front. Basilone was then offered a commission, which he refused, before finally being permitted to return to the war in July 1944.

Basilone received the Medal of Honor "For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry" at Guadalcanal.

Basilone was part of the landing force on Red Beach II on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945. The Japanese rained heavy fire from fortified blockhouses that pinned his unit down. Basilone snuck around the Japanese positions and then attacked with grenades and demolitions, single-handedly destroying the Japanese strongpoint.

Stamp from the WWII – 1945: Victory at Last Sheet

Basilone then made his way to Airfield Number 1. Along the way he encountered a Marine tank that was trapped in an enemy minefield. He helped guide the tank to safety, even under heavy enemy fire. While Basilone moved along the edge of the airfield, he was struck and killed by shrapnel from a Japanese mortar. Basilone's brave actions helped the Marines get off the beach and take the airfield early in their invasion.

Basilone was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for his heroism at Iwo Jima. A number of roads, bridges, and other landmarks have been named in his honor as well as two Navy ships. Raritan, New Jersey, has also held a memorial parade in his honor since 1981.

Issued issued five months after the landing at Iwo Jima.

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316

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