

**August 14, 2010**

## **Still Carrying the Flag**

By DIANE CHURCH, The Herald

Sam Girasuolo of Bristol recalled the fright he felt as a young Marine 65 years ago during the battle of Iwo Jima. "I spent 42 days in a foxhole with my shoes off," he said. "We ate C and K rations."

As the sun set in the west Saturday, soldiers, sailors, marines, and the public gathered to recall those whose lives were cut short while serving their country, especially the 106 Connecticut men who died in at Iwo Jima during World War II. The ceremony took place at the Iwo Jima monument near Central Connecticut State University.

The evening also marked the final official reunion of the Iwo Jima Survivors Association in Connecticut. It has been 65 years since that battle, which raged on for 36 days, claiming 6,821 American troops and wounding over 24,000 more.

"This is their last encampment," said Carl Venditto, the area's military ambassador. "The members of the Iwo Jima Foundation will perpetuate the ceremony and take care of the monument."

The ceremony included a riderless horse, with a pair of backward boots in the stirrups to symbolize that the rider was gone.

The ceremony also marked the 65th anniversary of Victory in Japan Day and the end of World War II. The battle of Iwo Jima did not end the war, but even though America was victorious there, the high number of American casualties may have convinced the military to not invade Japan but to use the Atomic Bomb instead. Japan surrendered after the bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"I've been to several events with Iwo Jima survivors," said Linda Schwartz, commissioner of the state Department of Veterans Affairs. "and each time I am honored and humbled to be with them." Schwartz's father was on a ship that sailed into Tokyo Bay at the end of World War II. Years later, during the Vietnam War, Linda Schwartz served in Japan as a nurse. She said her father was a little worried. "The spirit of World War II continues to enrich and inspire men and women to serve their country," she said.

Rear Admiral Michael McLaughlin also paid homage to the veterans.

"You earned our support for your courage at Iwo Jima," he told them. "Although it was long ago, it is still remembered."

The monument is modeled after a famous photograph by Joe Rosenthal. It depicts five Marines at the top of Mt. Suribachi, the highest point on the island of Iwo Jima, raising an American flag. The names of the Connecticut residents who died in the battle are inscribed on a metal plaque and the names of the survivors are engraved on the bricks around it. American flags encircle the monument area.

After the names of those who died at Iwo Jima were read aloud, a candlelight vigil was held to honor all veterans who served anytime in any branch of the service. Candles were given out with plastic cups around them to shield them from the wind.

"This ceremony is to show honor and respect to all veterans," said John Lasnier of Bristol, who served in the European Campaign during World War II. "We admire and respect all veterans and honor them."