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Op/Ed

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Iwo Jima Photographer

Rosenthal deserves Marines' recognition

Absent from the front of the majestic edifice that is the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Va., is the name of the Pulitzer Prize winner whose photo inspired its design. But it's not the first time the Marines snubbed Joe Rosenthal.

Atop Mount Suribachi during one of World War II's bloodiest battles, Rosenthal snapped the iconic photo "Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima" on Feb. 23, 1945. It became the Marines' trademark symbol and reinvigorated a nation.



Daniel P.
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The image helped raise more than \$26 billion in war bonds. Rosenthal profited less than \$10,000 for his efforts.

In 1954 Rosenthal's photograph was re-created in bronze by sculptor Felix de Weldon. In Arlington along with President Eisenhower, Rosenthal, de Weldon and the three surviving veterans from the photograph were present for the monument's dedication. Marines paid for the project with private donations but inexplicably only de Weldon's name was on the structure.

Millions have visited the popular national attraction and in 1982, by an act of Congress, Rosenthal's name finally was engraved on the monument.

The legendary Joe Rosenthal was a friend. He mentored me in photography. We double-dated. He once almost drove my convertible into San Francisco Bay (Joe had bad eyesight). He was the guest of honor at my wedding, but I never let him drive my car again. In 1981, at a near-riotous ceremony on Treasure Island, more

than a thousand of Rosenthal's media friends and well-wishers gathered for his retirement from the San Francisco Chronicle.

Justifiably, the Marines wanted to take part in a ceremony befitting the man whose photograph had come to define them.

I was one of the Marines in charge of organizing the event, which became the leading international news story of the day. President Reagan and the patricians of the craft he loved worldwide sent congratulations.

Rosenthal achieved rock star status in media and military circles, yet remained humble and reclusive in retirement. We visited together in Arlington during the anniversary gathering of Iwo Jima veterans years later.

Sitting on the black granite base of the monument next to his name, an emotional, glassy-eyed Rosenthal shared incredible stories of survival during the war. He reflected on his simple humor used to amuse 19-year-old combatants landing in a hailstorm of bullets and bombs where thousands did not return. For a man who was denied military service due to his vision, Rosenthal had been part of more landings and witnessed more combat operations than perhaps any photographer in military history.

He had a genuine affection for the common soldier, sailor and airman. But because of his role on Suribachi, Rosenthal revered what he called "my Marines."

Living quietly in a retirement home in August 2006, his prized possession was the certificate on his wall from the commandant making him an "honorary Marine." He was 94. I called to check on my friend and discussed the new Marine museum being constructed clearly

from his photograph ... again without his name on the facade. He made light of the omission, recalling the 1954 oversight.

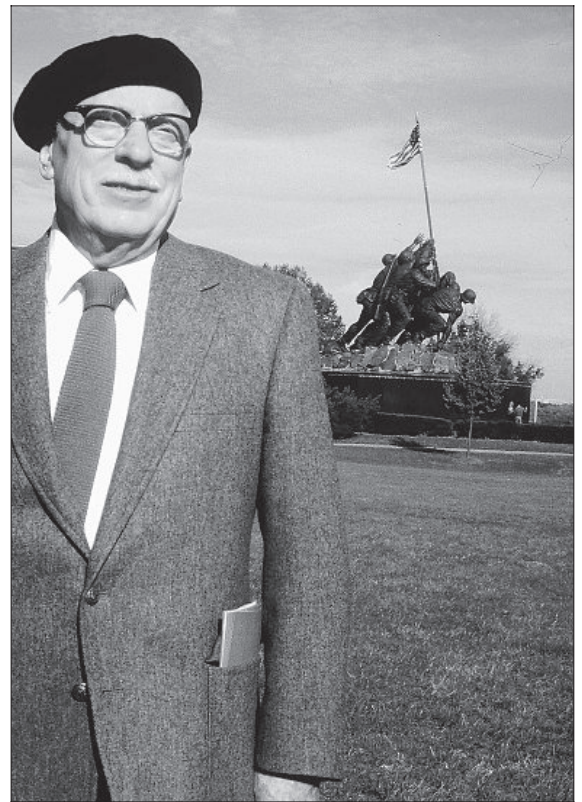
In an effort to lift his spirits, I had a brick inscribed with his name; that brick, and those inscribed with the names of other Marines, line the grounds of the monument site. I told him I'd personally deliver a copy to him the following week.

Rosenthal chuckled, saying, "So now the Marines can walk all over me some more." Then he became serious and melancholy, saying, "Tell 'em," referring to the commandant and chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. Peter Pace, "take care of my Marines down here ... and I will take care of your Marines up there." Those were his last words about the Corps; he died two days later.

Shortly after, at a fitting and moving tribute at the Marines' Memorial Club in San Francisco, his memory was honored. I helped the family organize the funeral and ceremony, eulogizing his final words. For years many have privately attempted to encourage the museum hierarchy to honor Rosenthal and place his name somewhere on the front of the building. They refused.

Part of the offering was donating the entire life story of Rosenthal that he allowed me to tape. With shocking and chilling disclosures, it has never been publicly heard. They still refuse.

This February Marines will again pay homage to Iwo Jima veterans during the 68th anniversary of the historic battle. Retired Marine Commandant Gen. Charles Krulak, who made Rosenthal an honorary Marine, stated, "It would be fitting that Rosenthal's name be placed on a plaque near the cornerstone



JANUARY 1984 PHOTO BY DANIEL CORTEZ

Joe Rosenthal stands in front of the Marine Corps War Memorial (also called the Iwo Jima Memorial), whose design was inspired by his iconic photo.

of the museum in recognition of the fact that the visual construct of the building itself was taken from his famous photograph."

Virginia Del. Rich Anderson, a retired Air Force colonel who chairs the General Assembly's Military and Veterans Caucus, said he also encourages prudent action to honor Rosenthal.

Perhaps public or political intervention would encourage museum officials to "take care of one of their own." But Rosenthal would understand the delay. He'd been snubbed before.

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