

Carmine Granito – William Smith American Legion Post 1296

This is a story of a small but vibrant community: New Brighton in Staten Island, a borough of New York City. It's about what many have said, "ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

The small community is barely a 1/3 of a square mile and in 1940 had a population of barely 900 people. This is a story of the 28 brave souls who gave their lives in World War II, it celebrates New Brighton, the Granito family and members of the community.

Frank and Arcangela Granito emigrated from Italy in early 1900 and settled in New Brighton, where they raised their 8 children; seven sons, Dominick, Vincent, Carmine, Anthony, Philip, Frank, Ralph, and one daughter, Mary.

Dominick, Carmine, Anthony, Philip, Frank, and Ralph all served in World War II. Vincent was called to duty and was proud to serve but he had a medical condition which prohibited him from being inducted. Regardless, the six Granito brothers went off to war.

In early 1945, Dominic received a medical discharge from active duty, returned home and came up with the idea to start an American Legion post. He gathered the signatures necessary, filed the documents, and in May 1945 was granted a charter for American Legion Post 1296, no other name.

On June 2, 1945, the Granito family was notified that their son Carmine had been killed on April 27 in Okinawa. He was a combat infantryman, a member of the Fighting 69th Division and served in the battles of Meagan Island and Taipan, just before his death.

A second New Brighton resident, William Smith, was also killed in Okinawa on April 18. The two men, both from New Brighton, knew each other all their lives, and died just 9 days apart in the same place. They went to PS17 Grammar School and Curtis High School together. Two men who made the ultimate sacrifice would now be remembered and honored forever, because in June 1945 the post Dominic chartered was officially named Carmine Granito-William Smith American Legion Post 1296.

In November 1945, just months after the post received its charter, Dominic and some of the other members of the post came up with the idea of creating a statute to honor the fallen heroes. Dominick found a sculptor from Italy who was living in New Brighton, and asked him to create the statue. They used a photo as a model, and brother Frank volunteered his boots for the final detail. The result was GI JOE, an infantryman in full combat gear. With the help of the Venditti family, who contributed the concrete work, the six-foot statue was placed on a four-foot concrete base.

In June of 1946 the monument was dedicated, in testament to the 28 members of New Brighton who made the ultimate sacrifice in World War II. All their names were inscribed on the monument block. Each year brother Dominic painted their names in gold. Following the Korea War, seven names were added to the statue base.

Originally placed in the center of New Brighton where it stood for 28 years, it was later moved two blocks away to the courtyard at the Church of the Assumption in 1974. In 2012, the statue was moved two blocks away to Goodhue Park, where it now stands. Today, all who come to the park can see the monument.

In September 2013, Lafayette Street, the road Goodhue Park is on, was named Granito-Smith Way. For the last consecutive 73 years we have celebrated Memorial Day with a mass at the Church of the Assumption and a ceremony at the monument.

In 1948, the post established the American Legion Auxiliary. Mary, the only Granito sister, served as president for two terms and remained active in the post until her death in 2008. All the wives of the veteran brothers were members. The Auxiliary has been a vital part of the post's success.

Our entire family has been involved over the years, as well as our surviving veterans. Today, the sons and grandsons of the original members are active in post activities. Although our numbers are dwindling, we still have 240 members; 125 are sons and grandsons of our hero veterans and 115 are veterans from World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Brother Dominic was a member of the Seabees, building airfields for the war effort. He was the founder of the post, served as commander for three terms, mentored the succeeding presidents, and was active in the post until his death in 1984.

Brother Frank served with the 563rd antiaircraft company. He spent most of the war in Europe, and most notably was in the Battle of the Bulge. He served as commander for two terms and held other positions over the years until his death in 1988.

Brother Philip was a tank driver in North Africa, serving as the US drove Rommel out of Africa and was injured during the battle of Anzio. He held various positions in the post over the years until his death in 1995.

Brother Anthony was a member of the Army Air Corps and achieved the rank of sergeant. He remained stateside using his civilian talents in the mess hall, and was one of the last soldiers to leave Camp Hood in Texas. He held several positions in the post over the years until his death in 2003

Brother Vincent, who was not a veteran, couldn't be a member of the post but was a civilian supporter until his death in 1979.

I am Ralph Granito, the last surviving member of the Granito family and wrote this article with nephew Frank Granito (son of brother Anthony). My war service was uneventful, spending all of my time stateside. I have served as post commander and held other positions through the years. I am 91 years old and am serving as treasurer and finance officer, a position I will hold as long as I can.

Throughout the years, our post has remained integral to the community, sponsoring programs for those who are less fortunate, visiting hospitals, attending funerals and speaking at schools about honoring our country.

Charles Navarino, his son Anthony and their staff deserve a special thanks for the great job they have done preserving the post traditions and history.

Submitted by:

Frank Granito