



## I'm Staying with My Boys: The Heroic Life of Sgt. John Basilone, USMC

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*I'm Staying with My Boys* is a firsthand look inside the life of one of the greatest heroes of the Greatest Generation. Sgt. John Basilone held off 3,000 Japanese troops at Guadalcanal after his 15-member unit was reduced to three men. At Iwo Jima he single-handedly destroyed an enemy blockhouse, allowing his unit to capture an airfield. Minutes later he was killed by an enemy artillery round. He was the only Marine in World War II to have received the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross, and a Purple Heart and is arguably the most famous Marine of all time.

*I'm Staying with My Boys* is the only family-authorized biography of Basilone, and it features photographs never before published. Distinctive among military biographies, the story is told in first person, allowing readers to experience his transformation, forged in the horrors of battle, from aimless youth to war hero known as "Manila John".

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Everyone should read this book, the story of a true American Hero. I served with John Basilone and I can hear his voice in every page." ?*Thomas O. Nass, 5th Marine Division, WWII*

"This book about the legendary John Basilone is presented in such a personal style that one would believe that "Manila John" is still alive. Not since William Manchester authored his memoir GOODBYE DARKNESS twenty-five years ago has a book been written about one man that seems so authentic." ?*Col. Ken Jordan, USMC, ret.*

"A lot has been written about my brother in the war, but it's important to know his whole story. This book tells the story of John as a boy, a teenager, and a man. Every student should study and learn from it." ?*Carlo Basilone, John's brother*

#### About the Author

**Jim Proser** is a writer and film producer. He lives in California.

**Jerry Cutter** is the nephew of Sgt. John Basilone. His current projects are the documentary and feature film versions of his uncle's story. He lives in Hilton Head, South Carolina.

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1 D-Day, Iwo Jima

0700 hours

W

e heard the diesels .re up. Metal groaned as the bow of our ship split down the middle and the two twenty-ton doors swung open to the black sea. Behind the doors, amtracs were lined up inside the belly of the ship like green, steel beetles.

On deck, the sound of the ship waking up got our minds focused on the assault ahead of us. We were going to be in the .rst waves of men to hit the beach. It all made sense, if you were a war planner who calculated schedules, machines, casualties and such. But we were the ones they made their plans on, so no matter how much sense it made on paper, you're never quite ready to be in that .rst group— even Marines like the boys in my platoon. They were mostly teenagers, a few were in their early twenties, and inexperienced, except for a few vets like me who rode herd. They were gung-ho and itching to get into the .ght but even so, I could read their faces, being the .rst to face enemy .re was making them think things over. My younger brother George, a vet of Saipan and Tinian, saw these kids back in Hawaii and asked me, "Where the hell are the vets? You're gonna get yourself killed. Y'oughta come over to the 4th with me."

"Nothing doin'," I told him. "I'm stayin' put."

"Stubborn fuck, always were." George spit on the deck. Seemed like he didn't give a shit about anything anymore. I guessed it was from Saipan— where they say things got pretty rough. Over three thousand men, including most of his friends, got killed.

We were the 5th Division. Like George said, we had a lot of the younger legs in our outfit. Those young legs would get us across the beach faster to the airfield, our first objective. But we both knew that these youngsters would take the brunt of the dying. When you know how war works, like a wolf pack on the hunt, it made sense. But it still wasn't right. These boys were the bravest we had. They didn't wait to get drafted, they joined the Marines, and that should count for something. But of course, in the logic of war, it didn't.

The boys finished their prayers and the chaplain blessed us. The swabbies powered up more diesels and set to work getting the landing craft—medium (LCMs) and landing craft—personnel (LCPs) that would bring in the supplies after we hit the beach, hoisted up on the davits and swung over the side. All the activity set the boys murmuring to each other, “Here we go,” and “This is it.” For a second some of them looked down, bit their lips, like kids anywhere who were about to be punished. Inside I know some were panicking, feeling their nerve fail, even after all the training and preparation. Their instinct for survival was taking over. They wanted to beg for their lives, or hide in some cubbyhole or ammo crate of our huge transport ship, but they didn't do it. They sucked it up and believed they were ready. They weren't. What can I tell you about these young guys standing out on the cold deck with me? I loved them as much as my own brothers. Some were skinheaded young boots when they came into my platoon, some were fresh out of paratrooper school and were pissed off to be humping metal through the mud instead of floating down from the air under green silk. But all that was over now. The last six months of training together every day made them as tough and tight-knit a fighting platoon as I ever knew. They were the kind of heroes I wanted to be, not the Medal of Honor showboat that Topside wanted me to be.

Then a strange thing happened. As I watched them, I felt something release, all of a sudden. I can't really explain it, but it felt like a knot in my chest, that was there all my life, suddenly came loose. I was free somehow and quiet inside. The voice that had been inside my head since I can remember, the one that whispers all the time and gets loud when you do something wrong, was suddenly gone. When that voice in your head suddenly stops, you notice. At least I did, because I had learned to listen to it. It sounds strange and I don't go in for any sort of mumbo jumbo as a rule, but the voice told me the future, and did it more than once. Three different times I heard it clear as a bell, and it was right all three times. So I guess I learned to listen a little closer than most people. The voice was definitely gone. Maybe I just didn't need it anymore. It was half-light, just as the sun was crowning over the horizon behind storm clouds. It was February 19th, 1945, Monday, the beginning of the workweek. We were scheduled to hit the beach at 0900. Christ almighty, Monday at 9 A.M. just like we were starting a new job, punching a time clock. It made you wonder if God didn't have some kind of dark sense of humor. The heavy seas of last night had calmed down to gentle swells. I was standing there on deck and must have looked like a tourist with nothing to do. I looked up. Storm clouds covered us like dirty wool. They changed their mind every ten minutes whether to rain or not. At the horizon, the clouds broke up. Behind them was a red-orange sky and I remembered, “... Red sky at morning, sailors take warning,” but it was too late for warnings now.

Then the boys heard the amtrac engines ringing up belowdecks and they looked at me like, “What do we do now, Sarge?” Fear was already beginning to numb them. It was a natural reaction. They were like deer sensing the hungry wolves were already too close. They knew it was too late to run so they froze, hoping the wolves would miss them. And there they stood, my platoon of fifty-eight young warriors, still as sticks, looking at me. I told them to get down the gangways and get going.

I knew what was about to happen to them. They didn't know and so they were afraid. But I knew. “All Marines prepare to disembark!” The loudspeaker backed me up. The boys gathered up their things, all in a rush, like they were going to miss something. They weren't going to miss anything. They packed up the heavy 30-cal Brownies, the air-cooled 30s, the mortars, the razor-stropped K-Bar knives and bayonets. They wouldn't need any of these things right now. They would just need their young legs to carry them as far and as fast as they could, across the beach, straight into a nightmare they would never wake up from. The guns and the knives would come later, for those of us who were left to fight back.

They would need me even more, very soon. They would think that hell had opened up a back door just for them. They wouldn't know which way to go. Some wouldn't be able to move and would be surprised that

their legs didn't obey. You couldn't tell which ones by looking at them. The bravest ones in camp sometimes buried their faces in the sand and wet their pants. You just couldn't tell and neither could they. That's when they'll need me. They'll need me to pull them or kick them to get off the beach. Maybe that's why I'm calm, because I know I'll save some of them.

We led down the gangways into the ship's steel belly. Half of my boys loaded into amphibious tractor 3C27 with me. Amtrac 3C27 was an armor-plated, rectangular tub made for delivering men onto a beach. It rode low and slow in the water. The best of them couldn't take much more than a two-foot ocean swell. What we found out was that if they didn't sink in the water, they sank in the loose, volcanic sand. It seemed like war plans never went according to plan.

We climbed into the hold of this steel tank. The engines thundered inside the metal walls of the ship. We rolled down the ramp and plopped into the open ocean. The driver gunned the engine and we churned away toward the island just over a mile in front of us.

The fellas were hunkered down in the hold and some were starting to look as green as the olive-drab metal around us. There was already an inch of water on the deck. Some of the boys were worried about that. We all heard the joke about these things capsizing if two men farted in the same direction. Then the big Navy guns opened up. They threw the big 16-inch shells that weighed as much as a Jeep. They threw them a few miles and we could see them hit the side of Mount Suribachi on shore with a little red wash and gray blossoms of debris thrown up. The force of the cannon fire pushed six-foot waves out from the battleships. These concussion waves rode up under our keel, tossing us up higher and flipping our steak and eggs breakfast over in our bellies.

"It's gonna be alright, boys. They're gonna be dizzy as shithouse rats after we get done pounding 'em," I lied—just like Topside lied to us when they told us it would be over in seventy-two hours. All of us vets knew that seventy-two hours was pure bullshit and said so. It was like an involuntary reaction. The minute it dropped from the CO's mouth, it sounded like a dozen men coughed at once. But it was a dozen mumbled bullshits jumping right off the lips of us vets. We couldn't help it. There were twenty-two thousand Japanese jungle fighters straight ahead who had been digging in and calibrating their guns for the past three months. That meant they had coordinates for every square inch of beach and could put Japanese steel on any point almost instantly. Maybe they thought we were all young boots who hadn't seen action yet.

We also expected mines and railroad ties raked at a 45-degree angle in the shallow surf that could punch through the bottom of our amtrac like a tin can. Before we got in the boats we smeared white wash cream on our faces, a thick grease that smelled like a garage floor. This was to protect us from the drums of gasoline that might explode under our tracks as we got close to the beach.

We didn't know it at the time, but the Japs also had new weapons: an array of huge mortars and an early version of a buzz bomb—a r...

## **Users Review**

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