



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

*Jim Proser*

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"I'M STAYING WITH MY BOYS..." is a first-hand look inside the life of one of the greatest heroes of the Greatest Generation.

Sgt. John Basilone was lauded by General Douglas MacArthur as "...a one man Army", awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions on Guadalcanal and celebrated by the nation.

It was the turning point of the war and Basilone's foxhole was the site of the turning point in that battle. That was just the beginning of his legend.

Distinctive among military biographies, the story is narrated by Sgt. Basilone himself allowing readers to experience the development of Johnny Basilone, the aimless youth, into Gunnery Sergeant "Manila John" Basilone, the clear-eyed warrior, undefeated light-heavyweight boxer and nationally revered war hero.

This publication is the only family-authorized biography and features many never before published family photographs. Basilone, along with his first commanding officer in actual combat, Chesty Puller, are arguably the two greatest icons in Marine Corps history. The story of "Manila John" is part of every Marine's boot camp education.

The story is woven with surprising personal details. He clearly foresaw his future three separate times. Each time his visions came to pass - including the last - foretelling his death. But his place was with "...my boys", so he ignored the vision and returned to battle at Iwo Jima. Manila John was killed on the beach defending his boys and earned the Navy Cross for his bravery - an emotional true story.

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

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**USMC Jim Proser**

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## **From Reader Review I'm Staying With My Boys...: The Heroic Life of Sgt. John Basilone, USMC for online ebook**

### **Jen says**

I've seen the HBO series "The Pacific" (excellent!) and read other books about events during this time in World War 2, but none quite like this. The first person perspective really brought it to life for me. Highly recommend this book if you're interested in WW2.

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### **Wendy says**

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".

After seeing The Pacific (HBO miniseries), I wanted to read this book.

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### **Tom says**

Knowing that John Basilone died at Iwo Jima, made me wonder how this book could have been written in the First Person. As it turns out, Jim Proser wrote the book that way based on interviews and other books.

It is the story of Sgt. John Basilone USMC starting with his youth, to his Army days, and then to his time in the Marine Corps. His life was not all that simple or trouble free. His Army days netted him nothing but grief in the Philippine Islands other than meeting a girl that he regretted not marrying.

knowing he was a born fighter, he enlisted in the Marine Corps prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He trained a squad of Marines and together they fought at Guadalcanal where he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

This was almost his undoing as the powers to be exploited him to be a poster boy and to sell war bonds. He struggled with this life as he was rather shy and unable to face the press. He finally made his way back into a combat unit and as I stated before, he died at Iwo Jima.

If you saw the series "The Pacific" you may be familiar with his exploits on the "Canal" and his death on Iwo. But the book tells more of his life than his combat experience.

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### **Kristy K says**

After reading 50% of this book, I decided to just skip to the last chapter. My biggest issue with *I'm Staying with My Boys* is that it is written in the first person even though this is not an autobiography. There is also no evidence that Basilone kept a journal or diary, which makes this (to me) read more like historical fiction than an actual biography. I was really interested in learning about Sgt. Basilone's life, specifically his time in the service and his tragic death, but unfortunately I felt this book dragged.

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### **Samuel Smith says**

I'm disgusted with the writer. As a US Marine reading this story made me sick to my stomach, because its just that, a story. Jim Poser should be ashamed. He fictionalized an iconic war hero to sell a story and not fact. He went as far as to make up deep thoughts as if he was actually John Basilone. Hes never even met the man. Unfortunately the real hero was not fairly literate and didn't record most of his thoughts and feelings. The writer exploited this and made up his own story and is misleading the public. It was to damn good of a story, but it needs to be recognized as that. This is a fiction book and nothing else. Do not be mistaken the acts recorded in the book did occur for the most part as this blood thirsty war hero and his team fended off waves of Japanese onslaught. He was a Marine's Marine and needs to be remembered as so.

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### **Brad Hayes says**

I was initially skeptical about a biography written in the first person, but I was pleasantly surprised by how well it worked.

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### **Max Cantor says**

It's so difficult to talk or write or even think about media about war. I can't tolerate most of it; I have long believed that serious subjects are best considered with lightness and humor, but war--specifically, the story of the soldiers--has always felt different to me. Perhaps it is because any depiction of World War II that does not include the grotesque and unnerving transformation from man to warrior seems disingenuous to me. Any such portrayal puts us at risk of being entertained by war without considering every part of it, and that is very dangerous.

"I'm Staying with My Boys" is so clear and honest that reading it was a religious experience. More than just the record of a brutal conflict, it is also the compelling and tragic story of Sergeant John Basilone. Any person who has ever reflected on their life and wondered if they are pointed in the right direction can connect to Sgt. Basilone; throughout the biography, he struggles mightily to do right by God, himself, his family, his country, and his fellow human beings.

Further commentary feels strangely inappropriate. When presented with a picture of someone's very soul, what is there to say? "I'm Staying with My Boys" is humbling, funny, terrifying and inspiring. Everyone

should read it.

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### **Andres says**

Right on the cover of this book is the first warning that what you are going to read may not be completely true: "authorized biography". The second warning comes when you find that one of the authors is Basilone's nephew. The third warning comes when you start to read the book and find it written from the first-person POV of John Basilone himself.

With these facts in mind, any reader (with their critical thinking cap tightly worn) interested in learning about Basilone and his life will find this book an engaging and very readable "auto" biography. The first-person POV does make the story more immediate and fresh but does lend itself to moments of confusion, such as when 'Basilone' says "I had nothing against Japanese people then and the truth is I got nothing against them now..." When, exactly, is this 'now'? Since we're never sure of when (from Basilone's POV) this narration is taking place, or who exactly is recording it, this awkwardly reminds the reader that someone else is doing all the writing and makes the book more of a novelization than a straightforward biography.

But really, if you can accept the autobiographical premise, and realize that the more personal and family-oriented material may be more true than those parts which nobody but Basilone could really know, the book is a rewarding read.

It may help to know some of the contemporary history surrounding Basilone but the authors helpfully insert relevant information from time to time, outside of John Basilone's narration.

The book does end with Basilone's death with no further information about reactions to his death or what became of the people in his life. James Brady's *Hero of the Pacific: The Life of Marine Legend John Basilone* does give some additional information, plus lots of criticism about information found in this book and other sources, but has its own problems as well.

A good read indeed if you keep in mind all its potential drawbacks.

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### **Jack P says**

I'm staying with my boys is about John Basilone an American hero who received the metal of honor during the war in the Pacific. Basilone grew up in a small New Jersey town. His father wanted him to stay at home and work the family business. However, Basilone enlisted in the US Army and was stationed in the Philippines during the late 1930s just before World War 2 started. Soon after Basilone returned home, World War 2 broke out. John was reluctant to go back, but nonetheless he enlisted in the Marines to fight the Japanese. I'm staying with my boys is about the horrors of War, PTSD, and the life of the everyday marine in World War 2.

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## **John Edwards says**

Basilone is one of the most famous Marines of all time. He is being featured as one of three main characters in HBO's upcoming series The Pacific. This is told through Basilone's eyes through interviews conducted by the nephew of Basilone with his family, friends, and fellow soldiers. As a result it doesn't have the immediacy or impact that E.B. Sledge's "With the Old Breed" has. It is difficult to convey accurately the thoughts, emotions, feelings, and despair of another person especially in war second or third hand. Still it has its moments and some of the more interesting ones are his war bond fund raising tour in America after he wins the Congressional Medal of Honor and his time spent in Australia.

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## **Kathy says**

in Staying With My Boys: The Heroic Life of Sgt. John Basilone, USMC by Jim Proser with Jerry Cutter was a letdown. Sgt. Basilone is a great soldier and I learned a lot about him but I hated the book.

I picked up this book because it had a high rating and I knew this year, I should pay homage to my graduate advisor (Goldy). Donald Goldstein helped to write so many books about World War II. His work with Gordon Prange and Katherine V. Dillon has some of the best documented work about the World War II when you are talking about the fights against the Japanese. They wrote At Dawn We Slept, God's Samurai, December 1941: Twelve Days that Began a World War and others. Goldy is right it's too easy to focus on the Holocaust and you lose the larger picture especially at the time, it was about fighting the Japanese (who were most commonly referred to as Dirty Japs). We forget that US citizens were imprisoned for the mere fact they were of Japanese and Asian descent. We entered the war due to the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor. Plus we had some of our largest battles in places like The Miracle of Midway, Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal. So this year, I want to see read more about the parts of World War II not related to the Holocaust (except some books that are about the OSS).

This book drove me nuts. I'm sorry but a first person narrative with lots of internal thought is not appropriate for a biography especially when Sgt. Basilone died in battle. This is the first time I had to check the genre a couple of times hoping it was misclassified by Amazon. It read like historical fiction. In fact, if it would have been called historical fiction then the book would have been fine. It would have allowed using your best guess at what was going through his mind (especially during battle) without seeming like he was making it all up.

Then I read the citations, hoping that there was a diary or something along those lines. I was sorely disappointed. The book was under-research in many ways. While it had the help of Basilone's family, there was little to really see believe what was being said as being Basilone's mental state. It only had thirteen books in the bibliography and one was self-published (which according to academic standard is a second tier research book). I won't lie, I was hoping Goldy would have been cited. But I can't believe that it was allowed to be published with so few resources. I am one who does read the bibliographies even for my historical fiction. I like knowing how much faith I can put into the book as being an expert especially when I'm doubting the writer.

The other thing that drove me absolutely nuts was the organization to the book. At first, it made perfect sense to flashback to childhood. But it should have been done only once and there shouldn't have been done when talking about events from the same trip to Manila. The constant back and forth seemed random and then

ended suddenly once it got to Gaudalcanal, it stuck to a constant time line. I would have loved to restructure the book.

In the end, I hated the book when it's billed as a biography. It was not written in an appropriate manner which you can take for fact. If it was done as historical fiction, it would have been a much better book ( I would struggle with the organization but it would have been a lot better). Billing matters. Being honest with the reader matters (just like taking the time to edit a book properly matters).I enjoyed learning about Sgt. Basilone's life, the book itself was pretty bad.

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### **Taylor Burrows says**

So this book is a pretty straightforward account of the Pacific campaign through the one man perspective of John Basilone, a congressional medal of honor recipient. It is written through a first person perspective so I can see where some people take issue with a first person biography that isn't actually an autobiography. However, it also happens to be on the Marine commandant's reading list and for good reason.

A lot of the book revolves around what happened through the course of his lifetime and not just his battle time. So, even though a loose analysis of the book may criticize how impossible it is to know what Manila John was thinking at a given timr during battle, that really isn't the important takeaway from the book.

I even find that much of the book is very relatable. Marines still like all the same things as they ever did: cursing, drinking, fighting, popping some caps, and just generally being together (with certain ~7 month limitations). We even still look to Lewis Puller for heroic guidance just as John did.

Another event speaks to me even more clearly to the relevance to today's Corps: Recently, at an event in ~2014 of which my unit took part, we encountered Dakota Meyer, another recipient of the medal of honor. As far as I know events of combat were never even discussed (as was also Basilone's preference in this book), and he was simply happy to be back with other Marines and not in a spotlight. Likewise, both seemed to feel like there was a shared deservedness of honors with their unit.

Thus, this book is less about how Sgt Basilone felt during the one chapter of battle description (if this was what you read the book for, I recommend his award citation instead; it's much shorter) as much as it was about how Basilone demonstrated our core leadership traits selflessness/unselfishness (as well as courage and all the others) all the way to the end.

That said, I'm sure his family really appreciates a book casting him in a light reminiscent of his life rather than his time during two battles as is demonstrable by Carlo Basilone's comment about the book itself claiming that students should learn and study from this book.

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### **Patrick McCoy says**

I'm Staying With My Boys... is a biography written by Jim Prosser with Jerry Cutter of the life of the late Marine Sargent John Basilone who died in the battle of Iwo Jima. His story was one of three featured in the HBO miniseries The Pacific. I've already read the other two, Robert Leckie's memoir Helmet For A Pillow and Eugene Sledge's memoir With The Old Breed. I understand that some incidents had to be altered for

continuity, but there seems to have been a fair amount of whitewashing in relation to Basilone and Leckie in particular in terms of their drinking, gambling, and skirt chasing. But I think they choose three good representations of what war was like in the Pacific theater. I still feel the need to read a definitive, comprehensive account of the Pacific theater, but all of these books have given me greater insight into the brutal, protracted battle with the Japanese in the Pacific theater and what it would have been like if they had tried to invade the mainland. It also discusses how the Japanese adapted from the banzai no surrender-fight-to-the-last-man attacks of Guadalcanal to the bloody cave fighting of Peleliu and Iwo Jima which prompted the development of the flame thrower to clear out caves, which were dangerous to take in the fighting. Basilone's story was unusual in that after his heroics at Guadalcanal he was drafted into helping sell war bonds and eventually asked to be sent back to his company, something that I was unaware of. The miniseries chose to use a full episode to show what life was like in Australia after Leckie and Basilone (in separate companies of course) were stationed there after Guadalcanal. And there was significant screen time given to his war bond drive and family life interactions to give a broad scope of the life of Basilone. There's still one memoir on my shelf, R.V. Burgin's (a member of Sledge's Company K who was featured in his memoir *With The Old Breed*) autobiography *Islands Of The Damned* that a friend lent me. I have also been re-watching the ten part HBO series recently.

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### **Joseph says**

Captivating read, especially as it's told from the first perspective. Definitely refined my views on what it means not only to be a true American warrior but also a true leader—irrespective of color or creed.

I was personally struck by Basilone's compassion; his take on the Imperial Japanese while he was still in the Army:

"The news came from time to time while I was in Manila—the enemy was on the march. Then the news came about their tactics. I hadn't imagined anything about the cruelty that was reported. They used bayonets and swords on civilians. Why would they do that? I didn't understand it. If this was part of God's plan for me, I didn't want any part of it. I could be a soldier. I could fight. I just didn't understand the cruelty of the enemy. Why the cruelty against civilians?"

Contrast that with Basilone's courageous actions in the Pacific theater of war and his indomitable fighting spirit. Finding either of these qualities alone, particularly with how many in my generation in the Western world are living in virtual realities, is extraordinarily uncommon; to see how the two integrated into a single man's spirit has been humbling, to say the absolute least.

I found this book particularly powerful because of how it might represent the hearts and spirits of those largely misunderstood as "baby-killers" by the oblivious or misrepresented as "badass demigods" by politically driven imperial media moguls: today's combat veterans. Though I'm not holding my breath for anybody to make this connection, I believe it to be the case.

The book definitely brims with a "feel-good" aspect to it (as does almost any posthumous biography about a war hero—especially an American one) but if you're like me, you read these sorts of things because you want to see through to the quintessence of somebody, not for how it'll make you feel.

Terrific biography.

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## **Dachokie says**

The Voice of a Long Lost Hero ...

A recent re-viewing of HBO's epic mini-series "The Pacific" made me realize that the one book I had yet to read was a book about the most decorated Marine depicted in the series: Medal of Honor recipient, Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone. Choosing the right book was not easy and I took a chance on Jim Proser's unique first-person perspective: I'M STAYING WITH MY BOYS. I believe I made a wise choice.

While there are several books that detail the short, but full life of Basilone, the manner he was portrayed in "The Pacific" was as poignant as it was heroic. The fact that he is one of the most revered servicemen in the Marine Corps to this day speaks volumes. The series brought Basilone to life and so does Proser's book.

I was somewhat skeptical with I'M STAYING WITH MY BOYS being written in autobiographical form; Basilone died on Iwo Jima in 1945. Basilone "speaks" to us through Proser's diligent work in utilizing first-hand accounts with Basilone's family and the men he served with. We see the man, not only as a World War II hero, but as a son, brother and husband. That the Basilone family not only contributes to the book's contents but authorizes the book as accurately portraying Basilone as they knew him is significant. So, rather than a flattering historical recap of his battlefield exploits, we have some perspective of how he lived and experienced life. I found the book both interesting and enjoyable to read; much different than the typical military biographies that occupy so many of my bookshelves. This is not a chest-thumping story. Basilone is depicted as humble, loyal and somewhat lost; it is the military (first Army, then the Marine Corps) that gives him the sense of purpose he was looking for in life. I liked how Basilone was characterized in "The Pacific" and this book seems to explore his life through the same poignant lens. I found the storyline believable, sincere and somewhat depressing, as we know how the story ultimately ends. But, through Basilone's family and friends, we get a clear understanding why this small town hero's short life still resonates to this day. It is hard to read this book and not feel saddened that he never lived to tell his remarkable story, but this is next best thing.

While it is easy to find historical recaps detailing what made John Basilone famous (like his Medal of Honor citation), I'M STAYING WITH MY BOYS gives readers a view of who the man was rather than focusing solely on what he did. I've seen a number of reviews that malign Proser's book and I find that somewhat odd considering this book is authorized by the Basilone family. If this book characterizes John Basilone's life as his family and fellow Marines actually experienced with him, how can its authenticity be questioned by those who NEVER knew him?

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