

John Basilone – “Manila John”

BLUF: John Basilone was a United States Marine who served during World War II. In 1940, Basilone enlisted in the Marine Corps, eventually achieving the rank of gunnery sergeant. He received the Medal of Honor and Navy Cross for his heroism throughout the war. Basilone was the only enlisted Marine to receive both of these decorations in World War II. Before enlisting in the Marine Corps, Basilone served in the U.S. Army with duty in the Philippines. This enlistment left him with the nickname “Manila John.” Basilone was killed in action on 19 February 1945 on Iwo Jima.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS DISPLAYED: Justice, **Judgment**, **Dependability**, **Initiative**, **Decisiveness**, Tact, Integrity, **Endurance**, **Bearing**, **Unselfishness**, **Courage**, Knowledge, **Loyalty**, and **Enthusiasm**.

SETTING THE STAGE: Basilone was born in Buffalo, New York, on 4 November 1916. Salvatore and Theadore Bencivenga moved to Raritan, New Jersey, where Basilone grew up. At age 15, he dropped out of school and worked as a golf caddie to earn money for the family. Basilone enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1934, serving back-to-back two-year enlistments. Following his Army service, Basilone drove a truck in Maryland for two years. On 11 July 1940, he joined the Marine Corps.

Basilone attended boot camp at Parris Island, also completing training in Quantico and New River. The Marines sent him to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in March 1941, then reassigned him to Parris Island on 1 May. While at Parris Island, Basilone was promoted to the rank of corporal. He achieved the rank of sergeant while stationed at MCB New River in 1942. In October 1942, Basilone was with "D" Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division as they prepared for the invasion of Guadalcanal.

THE STORY: During the fighting at Guadalcanal, his unit came under attack by a regiment of about 3,000 Japanese soldiers. On 24-25 October, Basilone commanded two sections of machine guns. Moving from gun to gun, he provided ammunition and support while killing Japanese soldiers as he moved. Without rest, water, and food, Basilone kept up a constant fire on the Japanese. Only Basilone and two other Marines from the platoon were alive at the end of the battle, though the Japanese regiment was destroyed. Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Following Guadalcanal, Basilone was ordered to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Third War Loan Drive. After the drive, Basilone was promoted to the rank of gunnery sergeant and assigned to Camp Pendleton. Basilone extended his enlistment on 3 July 1944 for two additional years. While at Camp Pendleton, he met Sgt. Lena Mae Riggi, who was with the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. They were married in Oceanside, California, returning to their duties at Camp Pendleton after a short honeymoon.

At the end of 1944, Basilone requested a return to fleet duty. He was assigned to "C" Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division, on 31 December 1944. On 19 February 1945, the first day of the invasion of Iwo Jima, Basilone was serving as a machine gun section leader on Red Beach II. While the Marines landed, the Japanese concentrated their fire at the incoming Marines from heavily fortified blockhouses staged throughout the island. Basilone made his way around the side of the Japanese positions with his unit pinned down until he was directly on top of the blockhouse. He attacked that position with grenades and a demolition charge, single-handedly destroying the entire pillbox and the defending garrison. Basilone and his platoon then fought toward Airfield #1 and aided a Marine tank trapped in an enemy minefield. He guided the heavy vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety, despite heavy weapons fire from the Japanese. As he moved along the edge of the airfield, he was hit in the neck, arm, and groin by Japanese small arms fire. For his actions on Iwo Jima, Basilone was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

AFTERMATH: John Basilone was buried on Iwo Jima in the 5th Marine Division cemetery. His remains were returned to the U.S. and buried in Arlington National Cemetery. The *USS Basilone* (DD-824) was named in his honor by the U.S. Navy in 1949. The ship's keel was laid down on 7 July 1945 in Orange, Texas, and launched on 21 December 1945. His widow, SGT. Lena Mae Basilone, christened the ship. Lena Basilone never remarried, and when she died in 1999, she was buried wearing her wedding ring.

QUESTIONS

1. Which leadership traits were displayed the most by John Basilone during his life in the Marine Corps?
2. Why is John Basilone considered one of the most outstanding Marines of all time?
3. Would John Basilone fit in today's Marine Corps? Why or why?

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