

John Basilone soon tired of traveling from place to place, selling war bonds. He wanted to be with the Marines, to return to action.

After military leaders finally agreed he could return to active duty, Basilone went to Camp Pendleton where he trained Marines for an upcoming battle in the Pacific. The battle location turned out to be Iwo Jima.

On Iwo Jima's D-Day - February 19, 1945 - Basilone was a machine-gun section leader who came ashore on [Red Beach 2](#). He was part of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division. **(Move the video forward - to 4:56 - for the Iwo Jima segment.)**

Facing unbelievable firing power, from Japanese defenders, Gunnery Sgt. Basilone and his Marines made progress toward their objective - an airfield on the island. Urging his men to keep moving forward (lest they die), Basilone displayed the same type of heroic behavior which earned him the Medal of Honor at Guadalcanal.

Then ... he was hit. There are various accounts of how that happened, but James Brady quotes an eyewitness in his book *Hero of the Pacific*. According to Roy Elsner:

A few hundred yards from Motoyama Field #1 we heard an explosion, which caused us to look a bit to our right, toward the field. We saw Basilone and the three guys who were with him fall. We reached him almost immediately. (Brady, *Hero of the Pacific*, page 203.)

[Bill Lansford](#) (who wrote a story about what he observed in *Leatherneck* magazine) saw Basilone just before the mortar hit. He told James Brady:

I was trying to round up all my guys at the foot of Motoyama Airfield #1 and the assault groups had gone through and there were a lot of Japanese dead lying around.

It had been raining intermittently and I went over to one of the dead to go through the body for papers or maps or whatever, which we did for intelligence. He was wearing a raincoat and their [Japanese] raincoats were better than our ponchos and we would take things like that.

And John Basilone came out onto the plaza near the lip of Motoyama Airfield #1 and he was calling his men together, you know with his hand circling above his head [the 'gather on me' gesture] and five or six guys came over. That was when a mortar shell came in and killed all of them, I don't know, four or five.

I saw the medical report from the people who do the examination and it was one mortar shell. Just one. (Brady, *Hero of the Pacific*, page 205.)

John's wife, Lena Mae Basilone, learned that she was a widow a few weeks later - on her 31st birthday. She never remarried.

Although initially buried at Iwo Jima, John Basilone's body was returned to the States in 1948. His [remains now rest at Arlington Cemetery](#) (in [Section 12, Site 384](#)).

Basilone received the Navy Cross for his heroism at Iwo Jima. The following (split into paragraphs for easier reading) is [the Citation](#) which accompanied that posthumously awarded medal:

For extraordinary heroism while serving as a leader of a Machine-Gun Section of Company C, First Battalion, Twenty-Seventh Marines, Fifth Marine Division, in Action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands, 19 February 1945.

Shrewdly gauging the tactical situation shortly after landing when his company's advance was held up by the concentrated fire of heavily fortified Japanese blockhouse, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone boldly defied the smashing bombardment of heavy caliber fire to work his way around the flank and up to a position directly on top of the blockhouse and then, attacking with grenades and demolitions, single-handedly destroyed the entire hostile strongpoint and its defending garrison.

Consistently daring and aggressive as he fought his way over the battle-torn beach and up the sloping, gun-studded terraces toward Airfield Number One, he repeatedly exposed himself to the blasting fury of exploding shells and later in the day coolly proceeded to the aid of a friendly tank which had been trapped in an enemy mine field under intense mortar and artillery Barrages, skillfully guiding the heavy vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety, despite the overwhelming volume of hostile fire.

In the forefront of the assault at all times, he pushed forward with dauntless courage and iron determination until, moving upon the edge of the airfield, he fell, instantly by a bursting mortar shell.

Stout-hearted and indomitable, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone by his intrepid initiative, outstanding professional skill and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of fanatic opposition, contributed materially to the advance of his company during the early critical period of the assault, and his unwavering devotion to duty throughout the bitter conflict was an inspiration to his comrades and reflects the highest credit upon Gunnery Sergeant Basilone and the United States Naval Service.

He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.

Credits:

Video clip from a U.S. Marine Corps documentary on John Basilone.

Quoted passages from *Hero of the Pacific: The Life of Marine Legend John Basilone*, by James Brady.

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