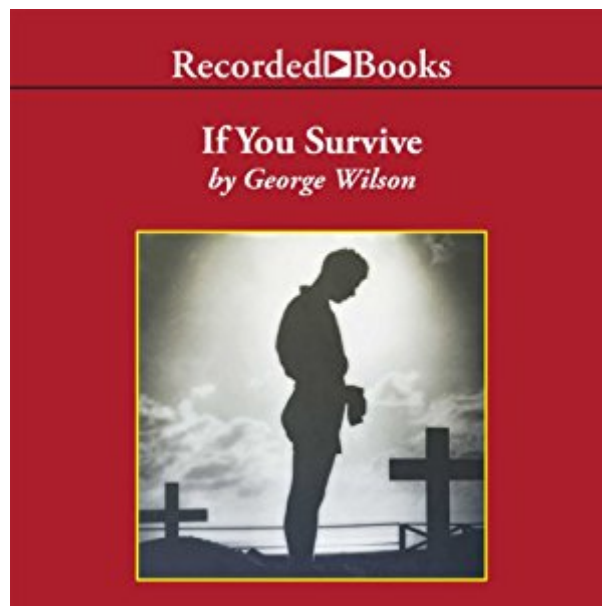


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If You Survive: From Normandy To The Battle Of The Bulge To The End Of World War II - One American Officer's Riveting True Story



Synopsis

George Wilson has garnered much acclaim for this shattering and enlightening memoir. Detailing his odyssey from July, 1944 until the following summer, *If You Survive* is a startling first-person account of the final year of World War II. Wilson was the only man from his original company to finish the war. As a Second Lieutenant, he went ashore at Utah Beach after the D-Day invasion amidst burned vehicles, sunken landing craft, and broken fortifications. From the breakthrough at Saint-LO, to the Battle of the Bulge, to the final push on Germany, Wilson survived ferocious battles and bitter weather. After earning several decorations and a promotion to First Lieutenant, Wilson was wounded. But he healed quickly and returned to duty. Wilson's account is an incredibly moving, continuous stream of devastating combat experiences that will make listeners wonder how any infantryman could have survived this war. Brian Keeler's narration thoughtfully conveys this riveting tale of survival in the face of impossible odds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the only book about WWII ground soldiers I've yet read. Suffice it to say, it was a good start. Three things really struck me about this book; 1. The author's uncanny memory of events, 2. The events themselves - offering glimpses into every aspect of being a ground soldier, including bravery, strategy, stupidity, cowardice and tragedy. 3. The shocking carnage. The book's title is derived from a comment a superior officer made to the author before sending him off to battle shortly after the Normandy D-day invasion; "As officers, I expect you to lead your men. Men will

follow leaders and I expect my platoon leaders to be right up front. Losses could be very high. Use every skill you possess. If you survive your first battle, I'll promote you. Good luck." With that mortifying send-off, author George Wilson and his fellow officers were sent into battle. Out of all the officers and men starting out in his company, only Wilson finished. The book presents the author's brave, bloody journey in a straight-forward linear fashion. It is very well written, yet not burdened by attempts at literary greatness. The author, though clearly licensed to preach, spares us the sermon and simply tells it like it was. Not until the very end of the book does he tell you "Out of all this damned useless war I hope I am entitled to a few simple observations". What follows is a decidedly brief statement that may at first seem to be too brief. Only after reading the last line do you realize that you've already read the most important anti-war statement the author could make; his recollections in the previous 267 pages.

If you are looking for an action packed, non-fiction story of front line combat during WWII then look no further. I have read quite a few personal histories written by former GI's describing their experience in Europe, but very few have been as explosive and action packed as this one. Wilson fought from the St. Lo breakout in July, through France to the Hurtgen, Held the edge of the Bulge in the Ardennes and fought his way across the Rhine into Germany. He was mainly a platoon leader and was therefore, out of necessity, on the front line most of the time. He doesn't write about his home life or even much about camp life seeming to stick to his experience of confronting the enemy and teaching his men to do the same. This book is very cheap and a very easy read so it would be a shame not to pick it up. You won't regret it!

Author George Wilson was a replacement assigned to F Company of the 22nd Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division on 7/12/44. Joining the only 5 men left of the original 40 of the 2nd platoon, he was soon caught up in the breakout at St. Lo. The action quickly moves beyond Paris to the heartbreak of the Hurtgen Forest. This is the finest telling of that engagement this reviewer has read. No winter wear, nearly constant and merciless artillery and mortar fire, murderous tree bursts and epidemic trench foot were only part of their suffering. On the morning of 11/30, his company started out with 140 riflemen, two medics, 3 noncoms, and 5 officers. At day's end, they had lost the medics, all noncoms, 4 officers and 90 riflemen. By the next day, there were only a total of 12 men left to the company after reaching their objective, the Cologne Plains. Thoroughly decimated and only partially reinforced, and in a near final irony, they were relieved and given R and R in the Ardennes only days before the start of the Bulge. Unbelievably, the battle weary men of the 4th Div.

stopped the Germans cold in their section and managed to set the southern boundary to the 75-mile breakthrough. George Wilson was never given the decorations or the field promotion he had been promised.

George Wilson was one of the fellows that waded ashore at Normandy and fought his way up the slopes into France. Of his company, he was the only survivor that made it all the way to Berlin. As he fights his way across Europe, you'll witness heroism, cowardice, stupidity, and brilliance in the face of battle. This is singularly THE best infantry-level book I've ever read, and I don't normally read this subject area (I prefer air combat). Overall, a good book for reading on vacation, at home, or anytime when you have a moment to spare. But be warned - once you start you won't want to put it down.

Wilson doesn't spend two paragraphs explaining how the snow clung to the trees. He tells you about how the bombs sounded as they landed near him and how he saw his friends get cut down in the prime of life. You get a pretty good feeling for what it must have been like to dig a foxhole and wait for the mortar fire. It's scary the way he relates having come upon on a bunch of lost Germans who could have killed him had he paused a few seconds. When he describes the onset of winter and his men without the proper protective gear losing digits to frostbite, you can just imagine some bureaucrat sitting by a toasty fire promising to get on that tomorrow. It's amazing that Wilson could write such a detailed history forty years after the events occurred, but maybe even more amazing that he doesn't embellish the situations. There is little reflection on an event because he's off describing the next firefight or lost buddy. The most frustrating parts of the book were seeing raw officers replacing fallen soldiers rather than promoting the battle proven officers in the field. It was not only unfair, but unsafe and yet the bigwigs away from the fighting didn't know the difference. The title refers to a commander who told Wilson before he went into battle that he'd be promoted if he survived. The promotions were slower coming than his successes and yet the war is such a long way away from this retired insurance salesman that he doesn't seem that upset about his treatment. It turned out to be the experience of his life.

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