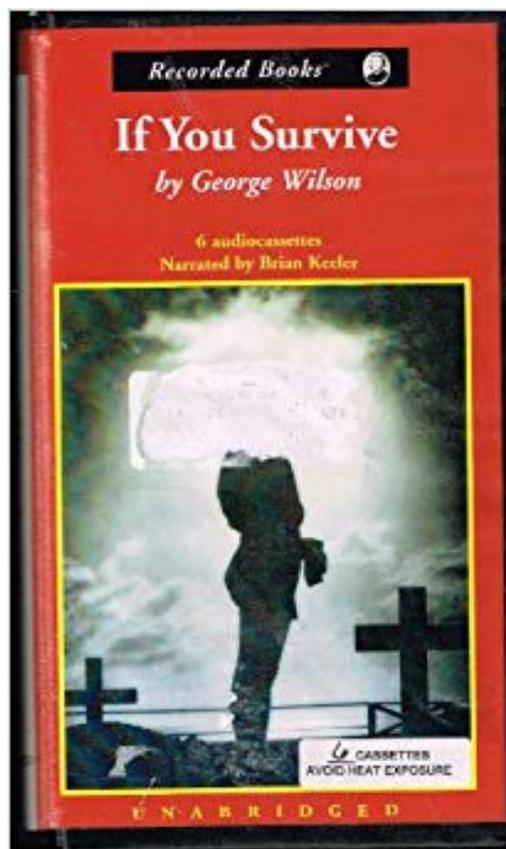


If You Survive *by* Brian Keeler,George Wilson



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Great audio cassette set!



Reviews of the *If You Survive* *by* Brian Keeler,George Wilson

Cezel

After beginning this book I quickly recognized that the author, George Wilson, had a knack for writing. The book was published in 1987 when he was 58 years old but he writes like the young man he was when these events took place. This is not the narrative of an old man reflecting on his life. The immediacy of his senses is in the range of diary entries but this is not a compilation of notes from a diary. This is a well written first hand account of George Wilson's experiences during WWII. After an adequate introduction and some background for the author the narrative moves along at a steady pace. Throughout the book Wilson provides relevant details and shares his perception of events as they unfolded followed by some hindsight. George Wilson's experience in WWII is rare. In a sequence of harrowing events few survived and in at least one instance he is the only survivor. This book deserves to be listed as one of the best written on WWII. This is a story of one individual's experiences in the infantry. It is one of the best written memoirs. Like most soldiers during WWII, George Wilson was just a regular guy taking part in an historical event. Even though George Wilson is clearly a true hero demonstrating skill in leadership, battle strategy, poise and courage under great duress we do not easily forget he is just a regular guy doing the best he can with what has been handed to him. His humanity is ever-present in his words. Upon finishing the book I

immediately did some research to see whether he had written other works and hoping he was still alive. Unfortunately George Wilson passed away in 2005 at the age of 84 and this is his only book.

Rgia

The average life expectancy of a combat infantry officer in the U.S. Army during WW2 was ninety days. By that time lieutenants and captains could expect to be W.I.A. (wounded in action) K.I.A. (killed in action) or an N.B.C. (non-battle casualty). In essence, pinning the gold or silver bars to ones' collar was a deferred sentence: you knew you'd be clobbered eventually, the question was merely when and how badly. This grim knowledge hung over George Wilson, the author of *IF YOU SURVIVE*, from the moment he landed in Normandy in July of 1944, and it followed him until the end of the war. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Wilson beat the odds just because he lived to tell his tale: this is a man who paid full homage to the grim logic of war.

Wilson was a more or less apple-pie American from Michigan who was selected, after completion of basic training, for O.C.S., the so-called "shake 'n bake" school which turned enlisted men into second lieutenants after a 90-day course of instruction. He shipped into Normandy after D-Day during the horrific hedgerow fighting that followed, during which the U.S. Army alone, independent of the others, lost 20,838 killed, 94,881 wounded, 10,128 missing (a total of 125,847 casualties) in just three months. Wilson, of course, didn't know how bloody the campaign would prove to be when he arrived, he was simply told by his commanding officer, "If you survive your first day, I'll promote you." Some welcome, huh?

IF YOU SURVIVE is, despite its grim subject matter, a highly enjoyable and fast-paced book, the journey of an American everyman from a green-as-grass private soldier to a battle-hardened captain who became a past master at infantry tactics.

Wilson takes us from the brutal slog through the hedgerows, in which gains were measured in yards per day, to the sudden triumphant steeplechase across France that led to the liberation of Paris, to the green hell that was the Battle of the Huertgen Forest. Having emerged from that slaughterhouse intact, he found himself thrust into the Battle of the Bulge, and finally a long, punishing march eastward to the Rhine and beyond. The fact that he survived all of this -- the man had a positive knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time -- is a medium-sized miracle in and of itself, and Wilson is keenly aware of it. This book is not the work of a braggart or a glory-hound, but a totally ordinary guy thrust into horrific circumstances that showed just how extraordinary he truly was. I was constantly reminded of the fictional Captain Miller in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*: a hero who is all the more heroic because he is so totally undistinguished.

IF YOU SURVIVE is a narrative written in a plain but entertaining style, and there are numerous images which stand out in my mind: the night in Normandy his position was bombed by the Luftwaffe, his disgusted reaction to the mounds of German corpses he saw rotting in the Falaise Pocket, the time he was almost refused entry to a snobby officer's restaurant in Paris because he was still wearing combat fatigues (no infantrymen welcome!), the massacre of an American battalion he witnessed in the Huertgen when an attack went wrong, the rage he felt when the Germans were allowed to occupy a position unmolested because he couldn't convince headquarters what he was seeing was real. These and a hundred other incidents -- funny, tragic, horrifying, disgusting, thrilling -- come together and give us a picture of an infantry officer's life, a life in which friendships were created in seconds and measured in weeks, where goodbyes to dead comrades were a constant refrain, where sanity was constantly tested and sometimes found wanting, and where hunger, cold, exhaustion, brutality and terror were everyday occurrences. And Wilson, to his credit, doesn't fall into the trap of glamorizing or romanticizing his experiences, even when they are nakedly heroic, as some vets are prone to do when time has dulled their emotional memories. You know that this is a guy who remembers everything perfectly -- stench, discomfort, fear, grief -- and never wants himself or anyone else to have to go through war again.

I've read a hell of a lot of war memoirs, and I've certainly read ones that were better written or struck more profound notes of observation or wisdom, but IF YOU SURVIVE nevertheless became an instant favorite of mine. It's simply the unembellished story of one man who managed to do just that....against the heaviest possible odds.

Balladobine

I was really shocked at how good this was. I'd never heard of it before, and it rates right up there with Company Commander and Dick Winters Memoirs as far as excellent detail. It was about a 7 hour read time for me, and quite worth it. Excellent coverage of the Hurtgen debacle, a different look at the Ardennes defense than we usually see. Very worthwhile book.

Kifer

I enjoyed this personal story from someone who was there on the ground fighting in France and Germany during WW II. I am grateful the author took the time and effort to write about his experiences in such a cogent and thoughtful manner. The book really illustrates the horrific, difficult and brutal nature of war, and the imperfect nature of the military. Thank goodness this nation had men like him to defeat Hitler and to remain strong and sensible under such heinous conditions. The author comes across as making a sincere effort to be unbiased and fair in his telling of events and descriptions of shortcomings. This should be required reading for all high schoolers.

Gtonydne

I've been in combat myself, as a platoon sergeant and a tank commander. Lt. Wilson perfectly tells of the fear, the heartache, the confusion, the stupidity, the frustration and, yes, the heroic of that experience. I recognized and remembered much of that experience. My "enemy" really didn't want to "play," for which I am most grateful, and the Lt. brought home to me what meeting a real enemy could be. I don't know if I, as an ageing Marine Gunnery Sergeant, could have endured what he did. A heart felt "OOH RAH!" an a snappy salute to him.

His story is, also, exceptionally well written, engaging, and we'll worth the time.

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