

A FILM BY
LAWRENCE SCHWARTZ

OH, JOHNNY!

OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE.
THEY JUST MAKE YOU SMILE.



Directed by LAWRENCE SCHWARTZ

Produced by LAWRENCE SCHWARTZ and NEIL SCHWARTZ

Made with assistance from the Center for
World War II Studies at Brookdale Community College

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LOGLINE

A World War II veteran confronts overpowering emotions when he returns to the battlefields he fought on 75 years earlier.



SYNOPSIS

John Santillo, a World War II D-Day survivor, travels back overseas for the 75th D-Day Anniversary to relive his time at war. Through a story that moves between the past and present, John opens up about the years he spent overseas using his unique blend of charisma, optimism and humor that captivates everyone he meets along his journey.

This film follows two narratives: John's life as a soldier during the 1940s and his 2019 D-Day Anniversary trip to France. Through the interweaving of these two stories, the film contrasts John's time as a young man drafted into the Army with his view on the war now as a 97-year-old veteran. While he faces haunting memories from his past, John comes to grips with how deeply the war affected him.

Technical Specifications

Format
Digital, Color

Resolution
3840 x 2160

Aspect Ratio
16:9

Audio Format
Stereo

Runtime
39 minutes

Language
English

Age Limit
12 and up

Year
2023



BIOS



LAWRENCE SCHWARTZ - Director/Producer

Lawrence is a retired television producer (NBC News), print journalist (New York Post), and educator (Rutgers University, New York City public schools). He is passionately committed to perpetuating the legacy of our World War II veterans. He serves on the Advisory Board of the Center for World War II Studies at Brookdale College in New Jersey, and is a Charter Member of the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

NEIL SCHWARTZ - Producer

Neil is an entrepreneur and educator who is committed to fostering understanding and friendly exchanges between the U.S. and China. He was instrumental in establishing the prestigious Schwarzman Scholars program at Tsinghua University in Beijing, a post-graduate business program for American students. He also served as a researcher at Tsinghua's Center for China in the World Economy, a prominent international think tank. His involvement with "Oh, Johnny!" is the culmination of his lifelong interest in World War II and his concern for the plight of our veterans.



BIOS

JACK DIEHL - Editor/Sound Mixer



Jack is a film editor with a love for telling both nonfiction and fictional narrative stories. His most recent projects include a feature length documentary titled *The 369th: Together, We Rose*, two horror short films, and several film trailers. His own short film "Spirit Hand" won multiple awards, including Best Short Film at the Golden Hour Film Festival and Best Editing at the Halicarnassus Film Festival and the World Film Carnival - Singapore. Jack has also worked as a production assistant for the Marvel Studios blockbuster, *Ant-man and the Wasp*. He is very excited to help share John Santillo's story and to support the untold stories of World War II veterans.

RICHARD RISI - Composer

Richard was born legally blind and hard of hearing (having mid-range hearing loss). With the help of music therapists and through teaching himself how to play the guitar, piano, drums, and even the ocarina, Richard now writes his own musical scores. His most recent work includes writing music for The Boyswater Players' summer performances of the *Wizard of Oz* and releasing his own virtual ensemble compositions. He graduated from Hofstra University with a Bachelor's in Music Performance and performed with the Hofstra Opera Theater, Chamber Choir, and Collegium Musicum. Richard hopes to be a voice for people with disabilities, and is also delighted to help share John Santillo's story and the voice of veterans.



FAQ with Director/Producer Lawrence Schwartz

1. Why make a film about John?

John is a true American hero, a decorated World War II veteran who has dedicated his life to educating younger generations about the courage and sacrifice of his comrades and the horrors of war. I wanted to create a film that serves as a heartfelt tribute to a man and a generation whose heroic legacy must never be forgotten. "Oh, Johnny!" captures John's magnetic personality, his inimitable sense of humor, and his indomitable spirit and zest for life.

2. What is your goal for the film?

In making the film I wish to honor John's legacy and character, while also educating current and future generations about the war. As one student said after John spoke at his high school, "It's important to remember the war and the veterans who fought in it, like Mr. Santillo, because the war was truly a defining conflict that influenced our grandparents' generation, our parents' generation and even our lives today."

3. Was there a change in John after going on the trip?

The trip had a profound effect on John. It left him a deep sense of closure. He frequently spoke about how overwhelmed he was by the outpouring of love, gratitude, and respect he received throughout the trip.

4. Did John travel alone to France?

John was accompanied on the trip by his friend, neighbor and fellow veteran Joe Castrovinci. They were part of a special tour with the Florida Elks.

5. Tell me about the decision to change between two aspect ratios.

The editor and I felt it is important to view the archival footage through a more historical lens that gives credence to John's stories. The modern footage is kept in the 4:3 ratio during the 1940s scenes to keep the audience immersed in the past. The only archival footage presented in 16:9 is during John's landing at Utah Beach to give that sequence a first-person perspective that encompasses the full screen.

6. Did John practice his speeches beforehand?

John delivered his speeches without any practice or notes. He had a general idea of what he wanted to say, but he spoke from the heart and played off the energy of the audience.

7. Tell me about the changes in the color throughout the film?

The film's color is a reflection of the changing decades and tones that take place within John's story. The black-and-white represents the grittier past of John's time at war. The snow scenes contain small bits of color to further enhance the bitterness of the cold snow storms the soldiers had to endure. The 2019 footage of John's trip contains a more "unaltered" look that could be found on a TV broadcast. In doing this we hope the audience is able to experience the trip as if they are there with John rather than as someone watching a cinematic retelling. For the scenes directly relating to post-war, we opted for a technicolor style that matches the post-war era and the decades that followed, and represents the changes and emotions John felt when returning home.

8. What are your hopes for distribution?

"Oh, Johnny!" has been submitted to several film festivals throughout the United States in hopes that the film is selected and screened this summer for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day. The goal is for the film to then screen in museums and overseas, specifically in France. After the festival circuit, I hope to be able to bring John's story to schools where the film can continue to share John's knowledge and experiences with students.

9. What were the influences for the structure and tone of the film?

In order to best reflect John's personality and his passion for music and dance, I envisioned the film not as a typical documentary, but as a nonfiction musical.

10. Tell me about the decision not to use a narrator.

After finishing the assembly cut, the editor and I had complete confidence that John's charismatic personality and storytelling talent could carry the film without a narrator.



John talking to a group of cadets at Pointe du Hoc



John during his speech at the Normandy American Cemetery



John being interviewed by a TV station during the D-Day Memorial Parade in Ste.-Mere-Eglise



John in the D-Day Memorial Parade in Ste.-Mere-Eglise



John signing a visitor's signature book at the Normandy American Cemetery



John reflecting on his landing on Utah Beach



War reenactor hugging John

Credits

STARRING

John Santillo
Joe Castrovinci
Nina Zennaro
Mayor John Ducey
Annette Kaye
Andrew Whitmarsh

CREW

Directed by
Lawrence Schwartz

Co-Produced by
Lawrence Schwartz
Neil Schwartz

Edited by
Jack Diehl

Music by
Richard Risi

Camera Operators
Lawrence Schwartz
Joe Castrovinci

POST PRODUCTION

Sound Editor and Mixer
Jack Diehl

Visual Effects Editor
Jack Diehl

Archival Material from
National Archives and
Records Administration

Archival Film Transfer by
Colorlab Corp.

Additional Assets from
Envato Elements

FILMED ON LOCATION IN

New Jersey, United States
Utah Beach, France
Omaha Beach, France
Saint-James, France
Sainte-Mere-Eglise, France
Paris, France
Saint-Lo, France
Arromanches, France
Mont Saint-Michel, France
Bournemouth, England
Portsmouth, England

SPECIAL THANKS

Greenbriar Veterans Committee
Brookdale Community College
Marc Buonagura
Justin Guerrieri
Brookdale Television
Lauren Concar Sheehy
Sergey Kornienko
Brick Memorial High School
Ann Marie Tarnowski
Township of Brick, New Jersey
Florida Elks

John Basilone
NYPD Pipes and Drums
D-Day Story Museum,
Portsmouth, UK
Bournemouth Pavilion
NJ Troopers Assisting Troops
Jersey Shore BlueClaws
Chad Dell
Vivian Drozd
Thomas J. Watters
Chuck Solomon