

The Sinking of the *USS Indianapolis*

Out of the Depths is a book about the aftermath following the sinking of the *USS Indianapolis* on July 30, 1945, shortly before the end of World War II. It was written by David Harrell as told to him by his father, Edgar Harrell, of the U.S. Marine Corps, one of 317 survivors from the ship's crew of 1,196.



The *USS Indianapolis* served as flagship for Admiral Raymond Spruance while he commanded the Fifth Fleet in their battles across the Central Pacific. She holds a place in history due to the circumstances of her sinking, which led to the greatest single loss of life at sea in the history of the U.S. Navy. Shortly after delivering critical parts for the first atomic bomb to be used in combat to the United States air base at Tinian, the ship was torpedoed by the Imperial Japanese

Navy submarine *I-58*, sinking in 12 minutes. The Navy learned of the sinking when survivors were spotted four days later by the crew of a PV-1 Ventura on routine patrol.

About 900 remained alive after the initial blast, but over a five-day period, the cold, oil-soaked waters of the Philippine Sea claimed the majority. A mixture of shark attacks, salt-water poisoning, hypothermia, dehydration and crew members sacrificing for one another took their toll.

In the book's foreword, Oliver North, lieutenant colonel, United States Marine Corps (retired), writes: "Our definition of 'hero' has been stretched to include all manner of people ... the athlete who just set a new sports record ... the 'daring' movie star ... the adventurer out to be the first solo climber to scale a mountain. They may have shown courage and bravery – but they don't meet the definition of hero."

North goes on to write how Harrell and his fellow survivors deserve to be called heroes, how the crew members who had been serving their country began serving one another. Selfless, not for glory or pure personal satisfaction, they worked together as a team to help each other escape the experience alive. They sacrificed their own lives striving to save the lives of comrades.

Two contributors to the book, Loel Cox and Sherman Booth, combined to give one example. "We saw the sharks from day one, and after a short while the sharks became aggressive. In saturated life jackets, with legs dangling, we became easy targets. We would hear screams, water would turn red, and men would be pulled under. On the fourth day, when a boy from Oklahoma saw the sharks eat his best friend, he placed his 12-inch-long knife in his mouth, like Tarzan did in the movies, and started chasing sharks to save others."

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Monday is Memorial Day. It is a federal holiday designed to call to remembrance with thanksgiving for the men and women who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces. It originated after the American Civil War to commemorate the Union and Confederate soldiers who died during that conflict. By the 20th century, Memorial Day (as it was originally called) had been extended to honor all Americans who have died in all wars.



What greater example of duty, honor and love – for their country and for one another – can be found than these who perished in the chilly waters off the Mariana Islands?

They, and all our men and women down through the years who gave the ultimate sacrifice, deserve our respect and our commitment to make this the nation worthy of the price they were willing to pay.

– Beecher Hunter