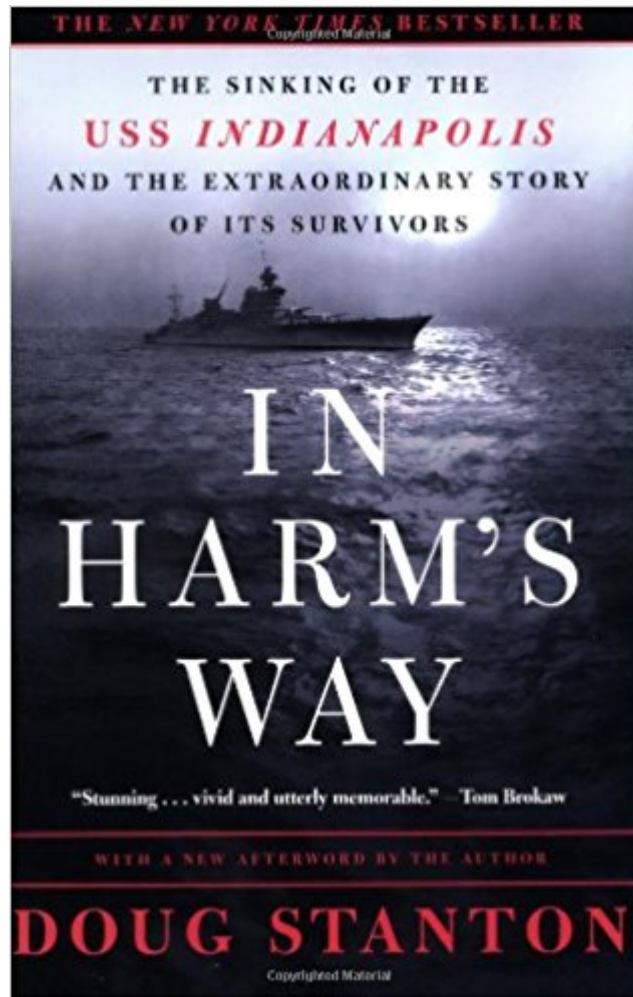


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# In Harm's Way: The Sinking Of The U.S.S. Indianapolis And The Extraordinary Story Of Its Survivors



## Synopsis

Now available for the first time in trade paperback, the bestselling account of America's worst naval disaster--and of the heroism of the men who, against all odds, survived. On July 30, 1945, the "USS Indianapolis" was torpedoed in the South Pacific by a Japanese submarine. An estimated three hundred men were killed upon impact; close to nine hundred sailors were cast into the Pacific Ocean, where they struggled to stay alive, battered by a savage sea and fighting off sharks, hypothermia, and dementia. By the time help arrived--nearly four days and nights later--all but 317 men had died. How did the navy fail to realize the Indianapolis was missing? Why was the cruiser traveling unescorted in enemy waters? And how did these 317 men manage to survive? Interweaving the stories of three survivors--the captain, the ship's doctor, and a young marine--journalist Doug Stanton has brought this astonishing human drama to life in a narrative that is at once immediate and timeless. The definitive account of this harrowing chapter of World War II history--already a bestseller in its hardcover and mass market editions--"In Harm's Way" is a classic tale of war, survival, and extraordinary courage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

My father, Albert Ferguson, stepped off the fantail of the USS Indianapolis the night she was torpedoed. He had served aboard her the entire war, as a Chief Machinist Mate in her engine room. He survived the sinking and lived to share the tale with his children. This book propels the reader through a 3-D experience of serving aboard the Indy, her sinking, and the too familiar attempts to lay the blame on those who were targeted by the command staff. My father testified on behalf of

McVay at his courts martial, and I have a carbon of the original transcript. IN HARM'S WAY is a riveting tale of honor, sacrifice, and ultimate betrayal of the American fighting man. So what else is new?

Like, I'm sure, most of you, I first heard of the USS Indianapolis and the horrific events surrounding its sinking in the movie Jaws. You'll recall the Robert Shaw character telling about being adrift in the waters of the Pacific as sharks circled and attacked the helpless men. This story has such a compelling fascination that it has spawned a series of books, documentaries and even a TV movie. Doug Stanton's new account can take its place with the very best of them. Drawing heavily on interviews with survivors and on Captain Charles Butler McVay's account of the sinking and the ensuing ordeal, Stanton presents the story with an immediacy and intimacy that makes it all the more terrible. The men of the Indianapolis were the victims of an entire series of oversights and foul ups, few of their own making. First, the ship had just delivered components of the Little Boy atomic bomb (which was dropped on Hiroshima), and so had been traveling in great secrecy. Then when they set out from Guam to join up with Task Force 95 at Okinawa, they sailed alone and were not warned about known Japanese submarine activity, for security reasons. Thus, when the submarine I-58, commanded by Mochitsura Hashimoto, torpedoed them, they didn't even realize what had happened at first. From there, unfortunate coincidence turns to bitter irony and real tragedy. Damage to the radio rooms was so great and the ship sank so fast, that they did not get a chance to radio for help. Meanwhile, again for security reasons, port authorities had been ordered not to relay messages every time a ship arrived and had interpreted the order to mean that they shouldn't report non-arrivals either. Of the 1196 men on board, 300 probably died immediately, but while the other 900 struggled in the water, no one yet knew of their dilemma. Eventually sharks, salt water, hypothermia, injuries sustained in the sinking, fights among the men, and a host of other maladies, left just 321 men alive to be rescued, four of whom died almost immediately. Stanton renders the crew's five day holocaust in heart breaking detail, with much of the narrative supplied by ship's doctor Lewis Haynes and Private Giles McCoy. Finally, as even these stalwart souls were preparing to give up, they were discovered by Lieutenant Commander George Atteberry in a Ventura bomber, which could do little more than drop some supplies and radio for help. He was followed by Lieutenant Adrian Marks in a PBV-5A Catalina, which Marks heroically set down in the water. Marks and a few succeeding planes were able to start picking up the survivors while they waited for rescue ships to reach the scene. One would think that the awful story had run its course at that point, but the Navy added insult to tragedy by court-martialing Captain McVay, the only captain to that point in US

Naval history to be court-martialed for losing being sunk. The Navy, pretty clearly trying to avoid admitting its own mistakes, failed to share much information which would have been helpful to his defense and took the extraordinary step of summoning Commander Hashimoto to testify about the incident. The prosecution's theory of the case was that McVay's failure to zig-zag had been responsible for the sinking, and, despite contrary testimony from both Hashimoto and the prosecution's own expert witness on this issue, he was convicted. In the succeeding years crew members gathered for reunions (organized by McCoy) and worked to clear McVay's name. These efforts went for naught until a High School student in Florida, working on a class project, got involved. On October 12, 2000, Congress passed an amendment exonerating McVay and recommending citations for the crew. It was too late for McVay though, he had killed himself in 1968. This is a terrific book, filled with all the drama you could ever ask for, remarkable moments of human endurance and despair, stupidity and loyalty, heroism and despair. I'm not big on all of the current Greatest Generation stuff, but there is something to the idea that the shared experience of war (and Depression) that this generation shared somehow gives them a common identity and a sense of accomplishment that their successors have lacked. The men of the USS Indianapolis and particularly their captain, Charles McVay, are deserving of our respect and their story should never be forgotten. Doug Stanton's book makes it a painful pleasure to remember the sacrifices they made. GRADE : A

In contrast to the strip of glassy smooth water that is a ship's wake, the sinking of the Indianapolis has left nothing behind but roiling emotions. Still easily brought to the surface after all these years - anger at the navy being the most common expression, and as *IN HARM'S WAY* shows - it is most appropriate. The 1,196 men who went into the water on the morning of July 30, 1945 were abandoned to their fate by the navy. They were left adrift for 5 days, eventually being spotted and rescued by chance; by this time only 321 were left alive, four of whom died shortly thereafter. The navy then rubbed salt into this open wound by blaming one of the survivors - Captain Charles McVay - for "hazarding" his ship. This book is much more a story of men battling the sea and finding the courage to survive than it is a history of the war. As such it is less about the Indianapolis and its mission but more to do with personal drama of the men. It succeeds by drawing on the stories of three survivors - Captain McVay, ship's doctor Lewis Haynes, and Private Giles McCoy. The facts of the tragedy only put the achievement of survival into its proper perspective. > The ship was sunk by a torpedo from Japanese submarine I-58; the explosion killing about 300 of the crew instantly; the wounded as well as the uninjured jumped into the sea. Escaping a fiery death only brought on other

dangers "from dozens of probing bacteria and organisms which, as the men drifted, began gnawing at their flesh. The salt water itself was a caustic brew...not unlike immersion in a mild acid bath."> Perhaps as many as 200 men were eaten alive by sharks. Morning and evening were the sharks feeding times; twice a day for five days the men were preyed on.> Many faced hypothermia and mental and physical exhaustion; for others suffering was in the form of hallucinations and delirium which caused them to swim away to an imaginary rescue or giving up, they drank down sea water which only guaranteed an agonizing death. The author puts it best when he says what this tragedy means to the survivors; "the disaster of the Indy is their My Lai massacre or Watergate, a touchstone moment of historic disappointment: the navy put them in harm's way, hundreds of men died violently, and then the government refused to acknowledge its culpability." Perhaps the only good that this tragedy has produced is that it has spurred young writers like Doug Stanton to preserve these stories of human courage before all the remaining survivors slip under the waves of time. The author at 39 is a little younger than I am, but by writing and by reading these books, we, as a generation can honor the men who fought, died, and survived WWII. The only glory in war is surviving. "All the glory of the world would be buried in oblivion, unless God had provided mortals with the remedy of books." (Bishop Richard De Bury)

I got so engrossed in this great book, I literally read through the night, and realized at 6:00 a.m. it was getting light out. The writing is so immediate, I got a clear mental picture of the horror that was going on as these brave men endured the unimaginable. I had heard of the Indianapolis tragedy, but many have not. When this ship failed to arrive at its destination on time, after being sunk by the Japanese, it is through a series of inexcusable snafus that no one realizes they are missing, and they have to float helplessly in rafts, while one after another, they are eaten by sharks. The author did a fantastic job researching the entire story so many years later. He spoke at length to some heroic survivors, and their families. This book should be must reading in school history classes. I can't recommend it enough. Just don't start reading it if you have somewhere you have to be soon. :-)

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