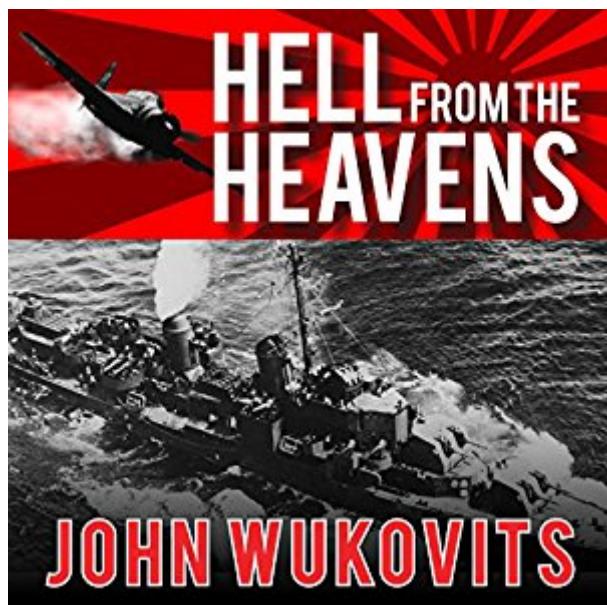


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Hell From The Heavens: The Epic Story Of The USS Laffey And World War II's Greatest Kamikaze Attack



Synopsis

On the morning of April 16, 1945, the crewmen of the USS Laffey saw what seemed to be the entire Japanese air force assembled directly above. They were about to become the targets of the largest single-ship kamikaze attack of World War II. By the time the unprecedented assault was finished, 32 sailors were dead and more than 70 wounded. Although she lay shrouded in smoke and fire for hours, the Laffey somehow survived. The gutted American warship limped from Okinawa's shore for home, where the ship and crew would be celebrated as heroes. Using personal interviews with survivors, the memoirs of crew members, and their wartime correspondence, John Wukovits breathes life into the story of this forgotten historic event.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Many years ago, I read "The Ship That Would Not Die." Written by the USS Laffey's commanding officer, Julian Becton, it told the story of the Laffey's 80-minute ordeal off the coast of Japan during the invasion of Okinawa as seen by Becton. Now, many years later, along comes John Wukovits to tell the story again, this time from the perspective of several of the crew who served aboard this heroic ship. The Laffey participated in the D-Day landings at Normandy, providing support for U.S. troops on Utah Beach. It then went to the Pacific and participated in the landings at Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines and Iwo Jima before becoming part of the naval forces supporting the invasion of Okinawa. Part of the forces arrayed against the U.S. Navy at Okinawa was a vast armada of kamikaze aircraft. These planes and their pilots had one singular goal: to crash their plane into an American ship and inflict as much death and destruction as possible at the cost of their own life.

Originally introduced during the fighting in the Philippines, the kamikazes were a difficult and terrifying menace which chilled the blood of many American sailors. To help fight this menace, advance warning was needed of their arrival and thus ships were assigned to picket duty far out at sea in order to give notice of incoming kamikaze attacks. The USS Laffey ended up at Picket Station No. 1, and on April 16, 1945, the Japanese unleashed a massive wave of kamikazes which targeted her. For eighty minutes, she withstood attacks from 22 separate aircraft in an incredible display of seamanship, heroism, courage, fortitude and a little bit of luck.

On April 16th, 1945, the crew of the destroyer USS Laffey were informed that their ship was being moved to radar picket station #1, north of Okinawa. This station was the closest picket station to Japan and, therefore, the first station that Japanese kamikazes would see on their flight to Okinawa. Over the preceding days, several American ships had been sunk or severely damaged while serving at station #1. The men of the Laffey knew what they were sailing into; an inferno of steel and pilots willing to dive their planes into American ships. For eighty minutes on that fateful April morning, the crew of the USS Laffey faced over twenty individual kamikaze attacks. "Hell From The Heavens" is their testimony. Before that April morning, the USS Laffey had served with distinction in the U.S Navy. Commissioned in February, 1944, the Laffey fought in her initial battle off of Normandy during the D-Day landings. She provided fire support and anti-submarine protection. Next, the Laffey moved through the Panama Canal to the Pacific, where she served in the Philippine campaign and as a carrier escort for raids on the Japanese homeland. Led by Commander F. Julian Becton, the Laffey had become a well-seasoned veteran. Becton and the crew took their assignment to radar picket station #1 as they had in the past; they were prepared to do their best in the task assigned to them. But nothing could have prepared them for the onslaught they were about to face. Over the course of eighty minutes, the crew shot down several attacking Japanese planes, but several got through to crash into the ship. Aside from the kamikaze attacks, the Laffey also sustained bomb hits as well. Over thirty sailors were killed and many others were injured, but the ship would not sink.

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