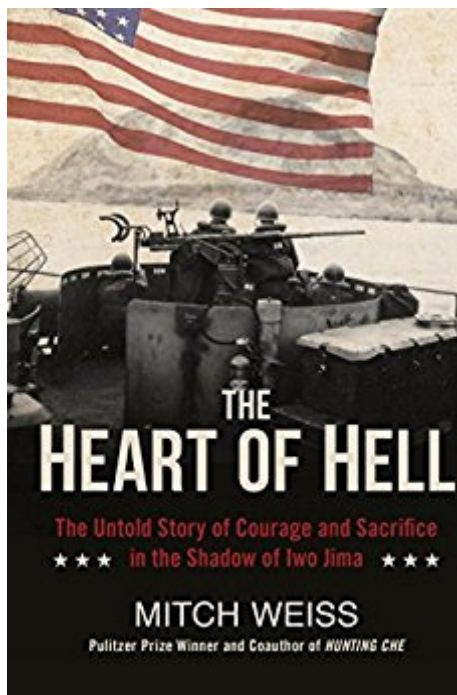




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# The Heart Of Hell: The Untold Story Of Courage And Sacrifice In The Shadow Of Iwo Jima



## Synopsis

The Battle of Iwo Jima, a major event in the Pacific Theater of World War II "and one of the bloodiest in United States history" began on February 19, 1945. But what happened two days earlier has largely been a footnote, until now... On February 17, Landing Craft Infantry 449 was among a dozen gunboats helping to prepare the area for their invasion two days later. U.S. military leaders thought they had weakened Japanese forces in the area so they were not expecting any action. From the towering slopes of Mount Suribachi, Japanese forces opened fire, forcing the U.S. commanders to recalculate battlefield plans. They shelled and bombed the newly discovered enemy positions. It was a move that saved countless lives two days later, when tens of thousands of Marines stormed the beach. The Heart of Hell is the untold story of the crew of Landing Craft Infantry 449. Based on 130 exclusive interviews with sailors who survived the battle, the families of the men killed in the fight, and more than 1,500 letters the sailors mailed to loved ones during their long months at sea, this is a story of duty, brotherhood, love, and courage.

## Book Information

File Size: 15153 KB

Print Length: 434 pages

Publisher: Dutton Caliber (March 1, 2016)

Publication Date: March 1, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00Z8VT8BS

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #456,754 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #114

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Military & Wars >

Branches > Navy #127 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > Japan #202

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## Customer Reviews

This is an inspiring telling of the lives of young men that were merged into each other's lives aboard the confines of a small gunship, LCI 449. As the LCI 449 traversed the vast expanse of the Pacific they shared the familiarities of everyday living and much more. They shared loves, fears and feelings of dread as they approached their rendezvous with the heart of hell at Iwo Jima. They sometimes read letters from home out loud to each other. As the young men become fully embedded and invested in each other's lives, so does the reader. The LCI 449 and the small flotilla that accompanied them were sitting ducks as they absorbed a devastating artillery pounding from the Japanese fortifications on Iwo Jima. They heroically held their position within in range of shore artillery to protect and retrieve the frogmen sent ashore to perform reconnaissance essential for the invasion landing that would come two days later. The horrific mayhem aboard the LCI 449 as it was being pounded and the heroic responses of many are incredible and sobering. It is a testament to the commitment they had to one another and to their mission. At the end it became apparent why many of the survivors never talked about it and others only reluctantly. What makes this book is not just the personal stories of those aboard derived from exhaustive research of Dennis Blocker, the grandson of one of the survivors and not just the way Mitch Weiss was able to put it all altogether in a manner that brought me aboard the LCI 449. It is the follow through. I very much wanted to know what happened afterwards to the survivors after they visited the heart of hell, and to their families and love interests of both the survivors and those who did not. I was not let down. The epilogue tells us and it is both sad and uplifting.

My initial interest in reading "The Heart of Hell" is that one of the characters is Cliff Lemke who is from my home town of Park Falls, Wisconsin. From the first chapter I was pulled into the pages and became familiar with the experiences of the officers, sailors and the brotherhood they all shared. There is something for every reader: Adventure, mystery, romance, but most of all courage and sacrifice. This book was thoroughly researched by Dennis Blocker II and wonderfully written by Pulitzer Prize winner Mitch Weiss. I will read it many times. I'd give it a 10 star rating if I could and will predict it will be a best seller. I thoroughly enjoyed this true story of a band of brothers on Landing Craft Infantry 449 headed for Iwo Jima during WWII.

"I picked up the book to read today and I did not put it down until it was finished. The introduction to the cast of characters was spectacular. I feel as if I have known these men my whole life! Mitch Weiss did a wonderful job of introducing these people to this reader. On the day of February 17 1945, Weiss made me feel as if I was watching everything that transpired that day to the point as a

veteran myself almost as if I was alongside of the men on the 449. Most important, questions have been answered as to what really happened that day. One thing I would like to give a tip of the hat to the family of Leo Bedell. He told my grandparents what had happened to my uncle Lee Young after the war but he was an officer and a gentleman because he held back the true horror of that day from my grandparents. For that I will always be grateful. Now I would like to get on my soap box. If half of what I read is true the Silver Stars of Leo Bedell and Arthur Lewis should be upgraded to the Medal of Honor. The Silver Stars of Henry Beuckman and Robert Duvall should be up graded to The Navy Cross. the bronze Stars of Frank Blow Jr, Paul Vanderboom and Daniel Skluzacek should be upgraded to Silver Stars. I firmly believe the heroic actions of these men on February 17 1945 are more than deserving of the upgrade! The information has already been researched and needs to be submitted to the Secretary of the Navy. For those of you that do not have the Heart of Hell, get it! It would be a great gift for any WWII history buff as well descendants of the men on the 449."

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