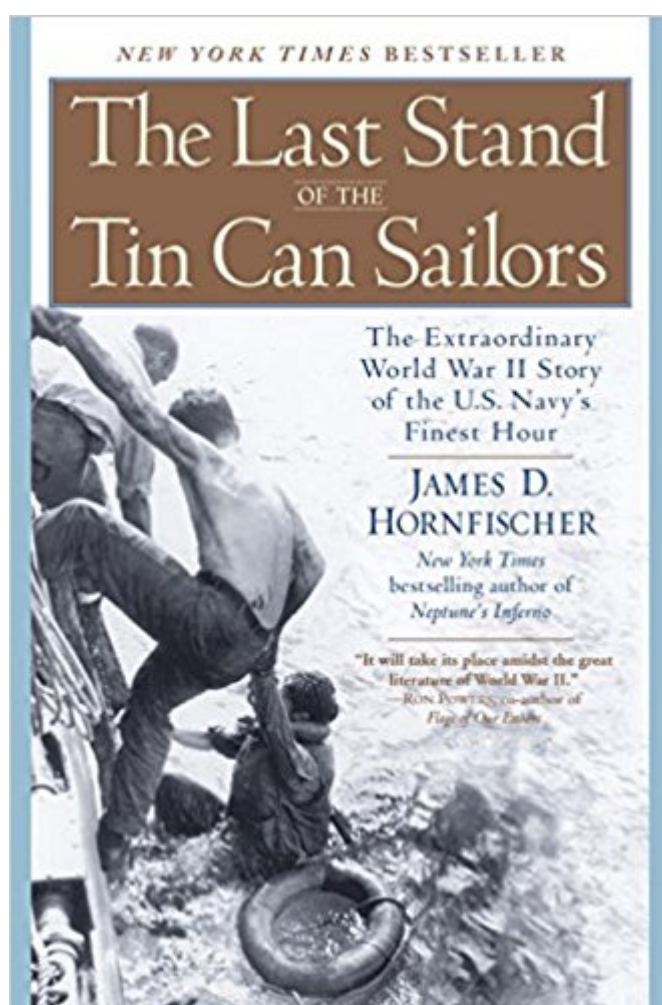


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The Last Stand Of The Tin Can Sailors: The Extraordinary World War II Story Of The U.S. Navy's Finest Hour



Synopsis

“This will be a fight against overwhelming odds from which survival cannot be expected. We will do what damage we can.” With these words, Lieutenant Commander Robert W. Copeland addressed the crew of the destroyer escort USS Samuel B. Roberts on the morning of October 25, 1944, off the Philippine Island of Samar. On the horizon loomed the mightiest ships of the Japanese navy, a massive fleet that represented the last hope of a staggering empire. All that stood between it and Douglas MacArthur’s vulnerable invasion force were the Roberts and the other small ships of a tiny American flotilla poised to charge into history. In the tradition of the #1 New York Times bestseller *Flags of Our Fathers*, James D. Hornfischer paints an unprecedented portrait of the Battle of Samar, a naval engagement unlike any other in U.S. history—and captures with unforgettable intensity the men, the strategies, and the sacrifices that turned certain defeat into a legendary victory. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

Paperback: 499 pages

Publisher: Bantam Books; Reprint edition (March 29, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0553381482

ISBN-13: 978-0553381481

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (780 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #14,870 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > History > Military > Naval #121 in Books > History > Military > World War II #152 in Books > History > Military > United States

Customer Reviews

"This will be a fight against overwhelming odds from which survival cannot be expected. We will do all the damage we can." - Lieutenant Commander Robert W. Copeland, from the dust jacket. One of the saddest truths about the turn of the new Millennium is the realization that the veterans of the so-called "Greatest Generation," those who defeated Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, are now rapidly passing into history. As such, it has become even more important that the stories of their heroism and sacrifice be written down for posterity while the heroes themselves are still around to tell them. With his new book, "The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors," literary agent and author

James D. Hornfischer has documented one such lesser-remembered World War Two tale with a reverence befitting the brave men who fought and died for America's freedom. The events of the book take place during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, which stands as the largest naval engagement in world history, and was fought between the Japanese and American navies in the vicinity of the Philippines as General Douglas MacArthur's forces were invading to take the archipelago back from the Japanese. The Leyte Gulf campaign has been well documented in other books about the Pacific war, so Hornfischer focuses most of his attention on one particular engagement off Samar Island. There, a small task force of American escort carriers and destroyers (the "Tin Cans" of the title), held off a far superior enemy fleet of battleships and cruisers with a combination of near-suicidal bravery and spectacular seamanship coupled with a healthy dose of sheer good fortune. "Tin Can Sailors" is exhaustively researched, which gives the narrative the kind detailed nuance that elevates it above the level of mere reportage into inspired storytelling.

This is an excellent illustration of leadership, courage and heroism. While the major forces of the American navy went after a diversion to the north, early on the morning of October 25, 1944 a powerful Japanese fleet surprised a much smaller American force protecting nascent American gains on Leyte. While historians will long argue the errors that led to this surprise, none can argue that the response from the American forces was dramatic, powerful, effective and almost suicidal. Yankee ingenuity, respect for their leaders, and old-fashioned stick-to-it-iveness made up in quality what the Americans lacked in quantity. Three small destroyers dashed into harm's way and leveled mortal blows before they succumbed to withering, overpowering -- but often inaccurate -- Japanese fire. While some would flinch at calling these acts 'suicidal' against cruisers and battleships, the sense of purpose and patriotism, combined with the small chance that a good offense is the best defense seemed to drive these men to heights of fury and fight against the thunderstorm of Japanese ships. Storms actually played a positive role in this fight, hiding both the smaller American ships, sometimes at lucky moments, as well as those pesky American fighter planes darting in and out of the clouds. But what really seems to have mattered was accurate firing, productive -- if incomplete -- intelligence, good leadership, and the absolute audacity of the crews aboard the American ships and planes.

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