



Hell from the Heavens: The Epic Story of the USS Laffey and World War II's Greatest Kamikaze Attack

John Wukovits

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Looking toward the heavens, the destroyer crew saw what seemed to be the entire Japanese Air Force assembled directly above. Hell was about to be unleashed on them in the largest single-ship kamikaze attack of World War II.

On April 16, 1945, the crewmen of the USS *Laffey* were battle hardened and prepared. They had engaged in combat off the Normandy coast in June 1944. They had been involved in three prior assaults of enemy positions in the Pacific—at Leyte and Lingayen in the Philippines and at Iwo Jima. They had seen kamikazes purposely crash into other destroyers and cruisers in their unit and had seen firsthand the bloody results of those crazed tactics. But nothing could have prepared the crew for this moment—an eighty-minute ordeal in which the single small ship was targeted by no fewer than twenty-two Japanese suicide aircraft.

By the time the unprecedented attack on the *Laffey* was finished, thirty-two sailors lay dead, more than seventy were wounded, and the ship was grievously damaged. Although she lay shrouded in smoke and fire for hours, the *Laffey* somehow survived, and the gutted American warship limped from Okinawa's shore for home, where the ship and crew would be feted as heroes.

Using scores of personal interviews with survivors, the memoirs of crew members, and the sailors' wartime correspondence, historian and author John Wukovits breathes life into the story of this nearly forgotten historic event. The US Navy described the kamikaze attack on the *Laffey* "as one of the great sea epics of the war." In *Hell from the Heavens*, the author makes the ordeal of the *Laffey* and her crew a story for the ages.

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