

Death Railway

TOURS

USS Indianapolis (2016)

Men of Courage

(Nicholas Cage, Tom Sizemore et al) – a film by Mario Van Peebles

Filmed in Orange Beach Alabama USA, this film demonstrates the loss of the USS Indianapolis, a Portland Class Heavy Cruiser in 1945. Previously she had been in battles across the Pacific from bomb support at the Iwo Jima and Okinawa invasions to attacks on Tokyo – the first since the Doolittle raids with her 8 inch guns¹. She sank the Japanese Merchant Ship 'Akagane Maru' in 1943 with all Japanese hands lost.

In March 1945 during the action at Okinawa she shot down six Japanese Fighters where one dropped a bomb on her killing 9 crewmen and severely damaging the ship – the bomb was dropped by the pilot from 7 metres where he crashed and died on the port stern into the sea.

"The bomb plummeted through the deck, into the crew's mess hall, down through the berthing compartment, and through the fuel tanks before crashing through the keel and exploding in the water underneath. The concussion blew two gaping holes in the keel which flooded nearby compartments, killing nine crewmen. The ship's bulkheads prevented any progressive flooding." (Wikipedia 2017).

She was tasked with the delivery of parts of the Atom Bomb (Little Boy) to Tinian island in the Pacific – as the ship's cargo was Top Secret, she was not provided an escort.

Subsequently after the payload was delivered she attempted to return to previous service. This film gives us a glance of the 'Enola Gay' sitting on the flight deck during early parts of the film.



¹ ww2db.com/ship_spec

Death Railway

T O U R S

Charles B. McVay is the Ship's Captain and well played by Nicholas Cage who does these roles with aplomb. He did mention at the start of the film the 'Manhattan Project' – would McVay have known at that time about that project given its secrecy? He didn't get his orders until he was heading out to sea according to the film?

She left the San Francisco Naval Shipyard on 16 July 1945 after repairs from an earlier Kamikaze attack², arrived on Tinian on 26 July 1945, delivered parts and Uranium that was to be dropped later on Hiroshima³. After delivery, she headed for Leyte to re-join Taskforce 95 on Okinawa. She didn't make it.

Just after midnight on 30 July 1945 she was spotted by an I-58 Japanese Submarine where she was struck by two Type 95 Torpedoes under the command of Sub Captain Mochitsura Hasimoto. These bombs caused extreme damage and in 12 minutes the ship completely rolled over – 300 men went down with the ship with over 1,000 plunged into the water with little lifeboats and jackets.⁴

Sadly, sharks menaced the men and took many lives; I read on IMDB that the sharks in these waters would have been Oceanic White Tip and Tiger Sharks – not the Great White Shark as highlighted by the movie. Also, a couple of goofs from the movie include the magazine that shows a Great White in the water – this photography was later only possible by Cousteau and others decades later; along with coloured Sailors mixing with white Sailors – integration occurring in the late 40's.

“Hoping to keep some semblance of order, survivors began forming groups—some small, some over 300—in the open water. Soon enough they would be staving off exposure, thirst and sharks”. (Smithsonianmag)

Check out this scene from Jaws (1975) with the Boat Captain relaying his experience on the USS Indianapolis. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9S41Kplsbs>



² ww2db.com/ship_spec.

³ Wikipedia

⁴ www.ussindianapolis.org

Death Railway

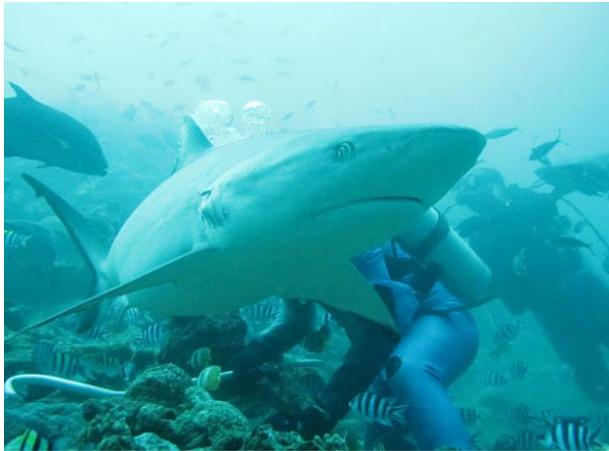
T O U R S

There was also the 1991 TV Movie 'Mission of the Shark' starring Stacy Keach, Richard Thomas and a young David Caruso (the latter also had a cameo in Sly Stallone's 'First Blood' and career of course in CSI Miami).



Death Railway

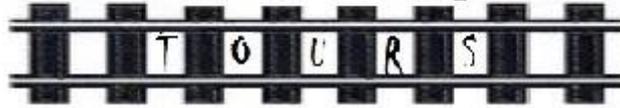
T O U R S



In 2012 I dived in Fiji on the Coral Coast in an Advanced Dive on the Beqa Waters; our Dive Masters hand fed the Bull Sharks at 30m; the school would have consisted of around 6-8 well-fed and girthy Bulls. Reef and Lemon Sharks were plentiful on those two dives. Top left picture is a Grey Reef Shark and all the others are Bull Sharks. Unlike the Sailors of the *Indianapolis*, us tourist divers had protection of Instructors and Dive Masters with prodding sticks in case sharks got too close for comfort – our boat debriefs prior to going overboard were informative with the blood pressure rising as we neared making our decent. There is a resident 6 metre Tiger Shark adequately named 'Big Mamma' who cruises the area – unfortunately she did not make herself known on my two dives.

"Ocean of Fear", a 2007 episode of the Discovery Channel TV documentary series *Shark Week*, states that the *Indianapolis* sinking resulted in the most shark attacks on humans in history, and attributes the attacks to the oceanic whitetip shark species. Tiger sharks might have also killed some sailors. The same show attributed most of the deaths on *Indianapolis* to exposure, salt poisoning and thirst, with the dead being dragged off by sharks. (Wikipedia 2017)

Death Railway



The Oceanic White Tip Shark

The final scenes of this movie with McVay and his Submarine Adversary Hasimoto (following the McVay Court Martial) are captivating; it's an indictment of the establishment back in those days to find a scape-coat for the tragedy.

Some of the CGI moments with Japanese Airpower vs Indianapolis is well done however sometimes CGI 'balance' can be over-cooked and too much.

"Navy command had no knowledge of the ship's sinking until survivors were spotted three and a half days later. At 10:25 on 2 August, a PV-1 Ventura from VPB-152 flown by Lieutenant Wilbur "Chuck" Gwinn and co-pilot Lieutenant Warren Colwell spotted the men adrift while on a routine patrol flight. Of the 880 who had survived the sinking, only 321 men came out of the water alive; 317 ultimately survived". (Wikipedia 2017)

USS Indianapolis (2016) movie: Watch the official trailer here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDPE-NronKk>

References:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2032572/>

Wikipedia

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-worst-shark-attack-in-history-25715092/>

<http://www.ussindianapolis.org/>

Death Railway

T O U R S



The USS Indianapolis – circa 1944 and the real Captain McVay.



The USS Indianapolis Memorial in Indiana – source: Wikipedia

RIP