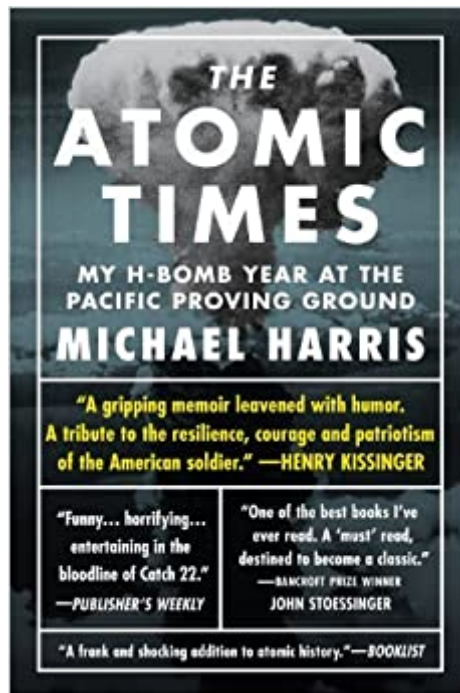




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# The Atomic Times: My H-Bomb Year At The Pacific Proving Ground



## Synopsis

SHOCKING, FUNNY, SAD AND RAUNCHY The biggest and baddest of America's atmospheric nuclear weapons test series, Redwing mixed saber rattling with mad science, while overlooking its cataclysmic human, geopolitical and ecological effects. But mostly, Redwing just messed with guys' heads. "A gripping memoir...Leavened by humor, loyalty and pride of accomplishment, this book is a tribute to the resilience, courage and patriotism of the American soldier." • Henry Kissinger "One of the best books I've ever read!" • Destined to become a classic. • John G. Stoessinger, Ph.D., winner of the Bancroft Prize for International Affairs, member of the Council on Foreign Relations, former Acting Director for the Political Affairs Division at the U.N. "Shockingly honest...Deeply personal and politically profound." • Sen. Charles Schumer "Hard to put down...Touching, horrifying and uproariously funny." • Dr. Robert Jervis, Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics, Columbia University "Brilliantly conceived, elegantly rendered and persuasively authentic." • Robert B. Parker, author of the Spenser and Jesse Stone series "An entertaining read in the bloodline of Catch-22, Harris achieves the oddest of victories: a funny, optimistic story about the H-bomb." • Publishers Weekly "Absurd and terrifying....Bored, frightened, angry, and sexually frustrated, the men turn cruel, violent and suicidal. Harris' frank and disturbing descriptions of the criminally irresponsible proceedings on Eniwetok and the physical and mental pain he and others endured constitute shocking additions to atomic history." • Booklist

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

MICHAEL HARRIS began writing *The Atomic Times* in 1955 when he was an army draftee stationed on Eniwetok and finished fifty years later. In between, he married novelist Ruth Harris and spent years as a public relations executive at CBS Television, eleven of them on *The Ed Sullivan Show* • he was the first person to welcome the Beatles to America on their initial trip to the United States. Mr. Harris's *Always On Sunday: An Inside View of Ed Sullivan, the Beatles, Elvis, Sinatra & Ed's Other Guests* is also available on Kindle.

This was deja vu all over again for me! I served at Eniwetok during operation Hard Tack in 1958 which was the next operation after the one in this book. I had the good fortune to be stationed on Parry Island which is where most of the scientists and civilians were billeted and so did not have to deal with the military/ Also, my term of service was only 4 1/2 months.. Michael Harris' descriptions of the island and the activity were spot on. We worked a 54 hour week and spent most of our time off drinking - booze was cheap and abundant. And no women! Little did I know the kind of danger we were all being exposed to and the devastating power of the bombs was truly awesome. I did not think the scientists were especially incompetent, but their yield estimates on the shots carried an error factor of 25-33% which is a lot when you are talking about 30 megatons of explosive force. This is a good read.

The men-and they were all men-who served as human Guinea pigs for the military's nuclear bomb tests in the South Pacific had no idea and less information about what the military was exposing them to. Rather than a tropical paradise, they were marooned on a desert-like island with few diversions except mail call, B-movies, and a disgustingly crappy local bar. Michael Harris gives an unvarnished look at the daily boredom, the petty tyrants, explosive violence, and uncertainty of knowing that they were being exposed to radiation - when no one really knew the long-term effects. The book essentially covers his year of duty on the island. It is told in a conversational style like he's telling you war stories around a kitchen table. A little editing could have tightened up an already-interesting story. Thank you for your service, Mr. Harris.

*The Atomic Times: My H-Bomb Year at the Pacific Proving Ground* by Michael Harris is, to put it mildly, a VERY interesting read. Any student of Cold War history will be captivated by this story of

the men who, without knowing it, put their lives in grave danger during the United States nuclear bomb testing in the Pacific. Having read much about the various tests conducted during the fifties, I was always curious about what had happened to the various soldiers, sailors and airmen who were *ſſ* close and personal *ſſ* on the remote islands near the various test sites. Thanks to Harris, we now have part of the answer. Michael Harris tells us of his time on Eniwetok Island where we are introduced to his mates, their day to day lives, and how they each dealt with the isolation (without women), the personality conflicts, and of course, the constant worry about radiation. The book is at times, funny, sad, and always deeply disturbing, as it shows just how little knowledge there was at the time considering the effects of radiation on humans. A prime example always comes to mind; although the ex-German Navy heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen had been blasted by atomic bombs as part of the first post-war anti-ship testing, when the locals had requested permission to salvage the ship *ſſ* propellers, they were refused. Authorities were concerned that that radium used in the ship *ſſ* instruments might pose an environmental hazard to aquatic life. The Atomic Times is a fascinating read for anyone, and will prove to be a surprising *ſſ* perhaps even shocking read for younger people today who have no idea of what took place not that long ago, or very far away.

"Catch-22 for the Nuclear Age" is, indeed, an apt description of this delightful, hilarious but also deeply dark, haunting work by an author whose other claim to fame was, incongruously, as unauthorized biographer of. . . Ed Sullivan? No plans to read that bio, but the darkness in this memoir comes from without -- the terrible, horrifying, enormous mushroom clouds from multi-megaton thermonuclear weapon tests detonated all too close to soldiers who stood formation on the beach, without goggles (only officers had goggles!) to "witness" the blasts (naturally they were unwitting biological parts of the tests, not witnesses) -- and within. For, against a backdrop of weapons physics and engineering details perhaps not found anywhere else, Harris tells a story of men trapped by the Army on tiny Eniwetok Island for precisely one year. Their combat was against fallout, loneliness, and boredom. It brought out the best and worst of humanity, so this is also evocative of "Lord of the Flies", yet with a light touch and brilliant, if dark, humor.

Harris is a real pro and one does not have to read his resume to see that. As a veteran of 20 years of military service I have spent one-year chunks on a rock or similar assignment in this world. What is amazing is the fact that I knew many servicemen that fit the mold of some of the characters in this book. Totally engrossing was Major M...I knew him as an Air Force major in Tripoli, Libya. He

spouted hackneyed slogans and platitudes...but that's another SNFU not worth pursuing here. What is worth pursuing here are the many merits due to the story. The attitude toward the worth of enlisted and drafted soldiers during atomic bomb testing in the Pacific was disgraceful ... military planners and scientists bungled through problems at which they had no real expertise. Thus, they exposed soldiers in order to amass data on radiation exposure. The most outrageous assumption was that any level of safety was possible after the evidence of the danger of atomic weapons revealed by the problems that arose in Japan. This one's worth reading again.

How would you write a story about the testing of hydrogen bombs in the South Pacific by the US in the 1950's? From the point of view of the nuclear physicists, the White House advisers, or the generals/admirals? If you think it would be more interesting to read it from the point of view of an Army private then this book is for you. If you think the Army took safety seriously and did everything it could to keep the soldiers safe, then you may find some of the revelations in this book disconcerting. Just finished this book and ready to loan it to a friend whose father flew B-17's during WWII.

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