

Sgt. Edgar Alvin Harrell

October 24, 1924 – May 8, 2021

Murray native Sgt. Edgar A. Harrell was the last surviving Marine out of nearly 1,200 men tossed into the Pacific Ocean after the American battleship USS Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese submarine on July 30, 1945. It only took 12 minutes to sink the Indianapolis, but it resulted in the greatest single loss of life at sea from a single ship in the history of the US Navy.

Harrell and around 900 survivors battled shark attacks, dehydration, saltwater poisoning, and fear. The temperature soared to 110 degrees. There were no supplies other than life preservers and a few rafts. They were rescued when a plane preparing for a bombing run on Japanese submarines accidentally spotted them in the water four days after the ship sank. Eventually, a Navy seaplane landed, and survivors, including Harrell, used it for shelter. When a ship arrived for rescue, there were only 317 men still alive.

Harrell had been promoted to sergeant while stationed on the ship, but it hadn't been officially processed. Those documents were lost, along with the ship's wreckage.

Harrell later wrote "Out of the Depths" with his son David, and he is reportedly the only survivor to have authored a book on the disaster.

In 2017, seven decades after the ship sank, the remains of the USS Indianapolis were found in the Philippine Sea. Harrell soon became a bit of a celebrity and made a trip to Utah for an appearance. While there, he met Capt. Scott Montefusco, organizer of the Utah Military History Group. Montefusco took swift action after learning that Harrell had never been recognized for his sergeant rank.

In August 2018, Sgt. Harrell was finally awarded the three chevrons indicating his new rank.

In 2020, Harrell and the seven other survivors of the crew were honored with the Congressional Gold Medal on the 75th anniversary of the ship's sinking.

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<https://www.britannica.com/topic/USS-Indianapolis>

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2018/08/10/uss-indianapolis-edgar-harrell-tennessee-survivor/923478002/>

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