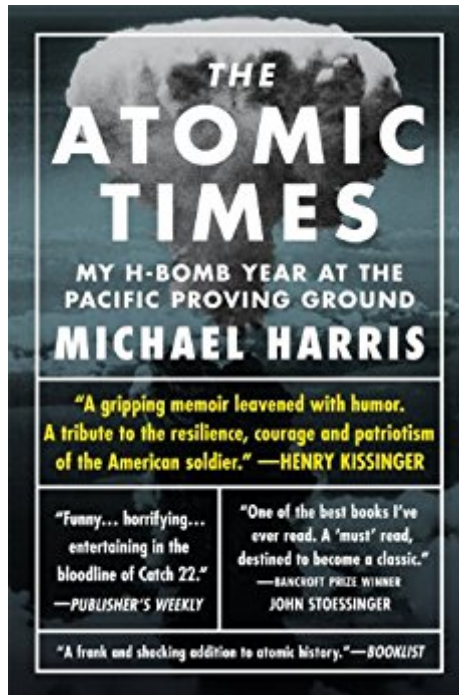


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The Atomic Times: My H-Bomb Year At The Pacific Proving Ground



Synopsis

Catch-22 with radiation. Area 51 meets Dr. Strangelove. Except it really happened. Operation Redwing, the biggest and baddest of America's atmospheric nuclear weapons test regimes, mixed saber rattling with mad science, while overlooking the cataclysmic human, geopolitical and ecological effects. But mostly, it just messed with guys' heads. Major Maxwell, who put Safety First, Second and Third. Except when he didn't. Berko, the wise-cracking Brooklyn Dodgers fan who was forced to cope with the H-Bomb and his mother's cookies. Tony, who thought military spit and polish plus uncompromising willpower made him an exception. Carl Duncan, who clung to his girlfriend's photos and a dangerous secret. Major Vanish, who did just that. In THE ATOMIC TIMES, Michael Harris welcomes readers into the U.S. Army's nuclear family where the F-words were Fallout and Fireball. In a distinctive narrative voice, Harris describes his H-bomb year with unforgettable imagery and insight into the ways isolation and isotopes change men for better "and for worse." A gripping memoir leavened by humor, loyalty and pride of accomplishment. A tribute to the resilience, courage and patriotism of the American soldier." — Henry Kissinger

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Customer Reviews

Vic Pelletier, Nassau County, N.Y. I picked up THE ATOMIC TIMES because it looks like an interesting book and it is, but it's much more than that. I used to be an English teacher, and I was very impressed by Michael Harris' distinctive writing style, not like any other author I've ever read. In addition to the unique way he puts words together, the book also manages to be sad and hilarious at the same time - as a reader, I can't recall experiencing that before. The book also has a collection of memorable characters (especially the pompous and absurd Major Maxwell) and is a fascinating story about Operation Redwing - and reads just like a novel, complete with cliffhangers. I told my wife she would also love THE ATOMIC TIMES, but she was skeptical. She hates military books and she was sure she would read more about the H-bomb than she wants to know. She only agreed to read it when I suggested a bet - if she loved it, she'd take me out dinner. If not, it would be my treat. She made the reservation in her name when she was only half way through. I'm willing to bet other women will feel the same way. Not to mention men.

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.

Midwestern Booklover, Columbus, Ohio*****I read about a book a week, and this is one of the best I've read this year. I went straight through in one night, which I rarely do, and I didn't mind being tired the next day. I was absorbed by the story of the author's childhood (he was the victim of sexual abuse) and the way he surprised even himself by coming to terms with a difficult past during the H-bomb tests. I understood the power and the dangers of hydrogen bombs in a way I never did before and the importance of halting nuclear proliferation. I can recommend this to anyone looking for "a good read" and a book about a really important subject that matters to us all.

This is an excellent book that in non-technical language gives the reader some insight into the relationships that existed on this sparse island, Eniwetok, among the members of joint task force 7 during operation red-wing. Since this reader has never served in the armed forces and had an absentee father from the age of nine, I never was able to experience life in the armed forces. This book clearly explains what living would have been like, what having friends would have meant both in a positive and negative sense, and some of the everyday challenges and obstacles that were faced by the military men in the Marshall Islands. In addition to these very valuable insights, the book provides a humor and optimistic point of view that makes light of some of the very difficult circumstances encountered. Besides having strong political implications for the future as to what can happen to all of us, as well as the system under which the armed forces continues to operate, the book gives us a insight into human behavior under these circumstances that is clearly profound. The book was read in two sittings and has not only been talked about in some of my psychology classes, as I try to convey real-life situations of psychological dilemmas, but has also been recommended to colleagues, peers, and friends. It is a must-read book that will have you internally racing!

This is kind of a breathless expose' of the nuclear testing in the early fifties. The author holds the thread of the narrative together pretty well, and the book moves along. These are subjective reflections of a very young man, from the distance of many years. I know some of the history from prior reading. I too believe the atomic bomb to be an abomination. That said this story is really that of the military mindset - rigid, mistrustful, willfully dishonest at times. Soldiers are expected to get in harms way, and that they did! Deliberately exposed to ionizing radiation, the young men - some died - were expected to go on as if they had been in combat. All of the risk, none of the glory. This is not a bad book. It contains the reflections from afar of a young relatively unsophisticated young observer to a traumatic set of events, and should be read as such.

In the course of telling us the story of the madness of H-Bomb testing, the author introduces us to unforgettable characters and gives fascinating autobiographical insights with sometimes astounding candor. Humor and horror are present in appropriate proportions. One misadventure follows another as the military brass weaves and dodges, never quite letting the truth shine forth. One special piece of madness was the decision to issue protective goggles to the officers at the test site, but not to the enlisted men, for reasons that you would not believe unless you read it in the context of the full narrative. I strongly recommend this book to anyone with a penchant for exploring obscure corners

of our history that do not necessarily reflect well on us.

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