

Bud R. Greathouse

U.S. Navy, Seaman First Class

1925 - 1945

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Few American naval tragedies compare with the sinking of the USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35), which during World War II suffered the greatest loss of life from any single vessel in American history. Struck by Japanese torpedoes near the Caroline Islands July 30, 1945, the ship sank with a merciless speed that drowned hundreds of men. Sailors not killed outright suffered exposure to the elements and shark attacks for the next five days before rescuers arrived. Only 316 sailors of *Indy's* 1,195-man crew survived. Among the casualties was Seaman First Class Bud Richard Greathouse, only a few months short of his 20th birthday.

Bud was born October 7, 1925, to Noel and Beulah Greathouse. The family lived in Flemington, West Virginia, about a dozen miles away from Taylor County's seat of Grafton. Bud was the youngest of three boys.

Flemington, a coal mining town with a population of about 600 when Bud was a child, also served as a stop for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) between Grafton and Clarksburg. Bud's father, Noel, owned a variety store which would have sold discount goods to the working-class families of miners and other residents.

Such a business might have helped insulate the Greathouse family from financial difficulties when the Great Depression struck in 1929, but Noel died that same year leaving Beulah and her three children without support during the nation's dire economic crash. Shortly thereafter, Beulah married Arden Lynch, an attendant at an oil and gas station. Arden brought his own six children to the marriage. The combination of the two families brought 11 people together under one roof to house and feed.

Bud graduated from Flemington High School in 1943 and went to work for the B&O. As an able-bodied man at the height of World War II he quickly left the railroad and joined the U.S. Navy, serving

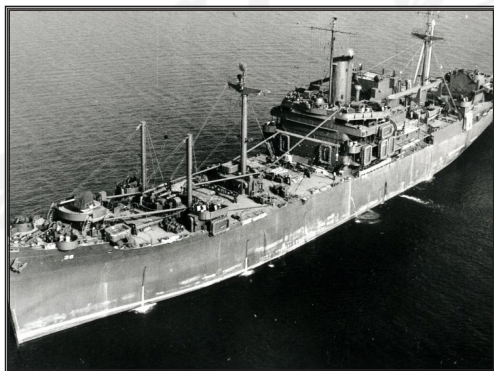


Bud Greathouse's senior portrait. While nearly all of the other boys in his 34-student graduating class aspired to adventurous jobs, Bud simply listed his ambition as "farmer." 1943 Flemington High School yearbook, courtesy of MyHeritage

Bud R. Greathouse



In the senior class “will,” Bud dedicated his “pleasing smile and personality” to teacher (and principal’s wife) Mrs. Talbott. 1943 *Flemington High School yearbook*, courtesy of MyHeritage



The attack transport USS *Cambria* (APA-36) as it appeared in 1943. NavSource.org

briefly aboard the USS *Cambria* (APA-36) and then as Seaman First Class (S1C) on the USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35).

Cambria was an attack transport designed to hold a wide variety of landing craft in support of amphibious landings. Its first major campaign, during which Greathouse was probably serving aboard, was as the command ship for the seizure of Majuro, an atoll in the Marshall Islands. Admiral Harry Hill made *Cambria* the flagship of his 14-vessel task force when it departed Pearl Harbor in late January 1944. Bud’s first cruise was a fortunate one, since Majuro had been abandoned by Japanese forces and the American ships and troops faced no opposition. The atoll was to be used as an airfield and anchorage for further attacks against fortified Japanese positions in the Marshalls.

Greathouse probably transferred off *Cambria* when it returned to the United States for refitting after the campaign, since he joined the *Indianapolis* in May 1944. That summer he participated in the assault on the Mariana Islands, which included raids on Saipan and the “Marianas Turkey Shoot” where Navy pilots and ships downed 402 Japanese aircraft as part of the Battle of the Philippine Sea. In early 1945, the ship supported the ground landings at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Receiving bomb damage during the pre-landing bombardment of Okinawa, the *Indianapolis* proceeded to the Mare Island Navy Yard for repairs.

Following its overhaul, *Indianapolis* received orders to proceed to the Tinian Islands near Guam. Unbeknownst to the sailors onboard, the ship carried the internal components of the newly created atomic bomb, “Little Boy.” A result of the Manhattan Project, the United States’ top-secret operation to create deployable atomic weapons, the Little Boy bomb would soon decimate the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The bombing killed 140,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians, and, in tandem with the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, brought an end to the war against Japan.

None of that was known to *Indy*’s sailors in late July 1945, however, after the ship delivered Little Boy’s parts to the Tinian Islands. The cruiser returned to Guam and then laid course for Okinawa to report for further duty.

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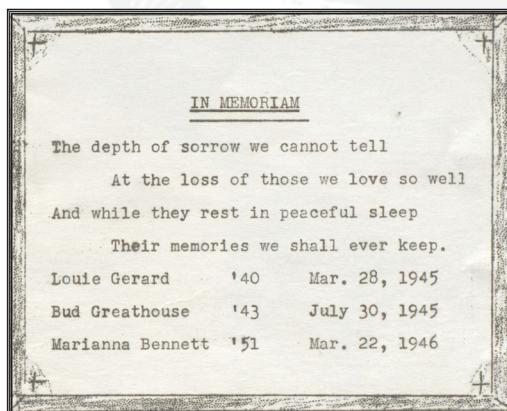
USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) in mid-1945, not long before tragedy befell the ship and crew. *NavSource.org*

Around midnight on July 30, en route to Okinawa, the Japanese submarine *I-58* made visual contact with the *Indianapolis* and fired two torpedoes. Both “fish” scored devastating hits. Within 12 minutes the ship listed and went down. Sailors not killed in the blasts struggled in the water to find life preservers. Few rafts or other flotation devices made it into the merciless ocean with the surviving crew, who then faced days in the water exposed to predators and the intense daytime heat and nighttime cold.

It is unclear whether Greathouse made it off the ship after the initial blasts. Given the fate of most of *Indianapolis*’s crew, those who perished with the ship might be considered lucky. Bud Greathouse was not one of the survivors and his remains, like three-fourths of *Indy*’s brave men, are unrecovered to this day.

In August 2017, a team of civilian researchers led by entrepreneur and philanthropist Paul G. Allen discovered the wreckage of the *Indianapolis* more than 18,000 feet (nearly 3.5 miles) below the surface of the Pacific Ocean.

For his service, Bud Greathouse received the Purple Heart. He is memorialized at the Manila-American Cemetery at Fort Bonifacio in Manila, Philippines, and at the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown. There is also a memorial to the men of the *Indianapolis* in its namesake Indianapolis, Indiana.



The 1946 Flemington High School yearbook contains a dedication to three classmates who passed the previous year. Bud’s loss would have been deeply in such a small community. *Courtesy of MyHeritage*

Sources

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section MA
Site 98

Interment Date: May 22, 2013

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

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