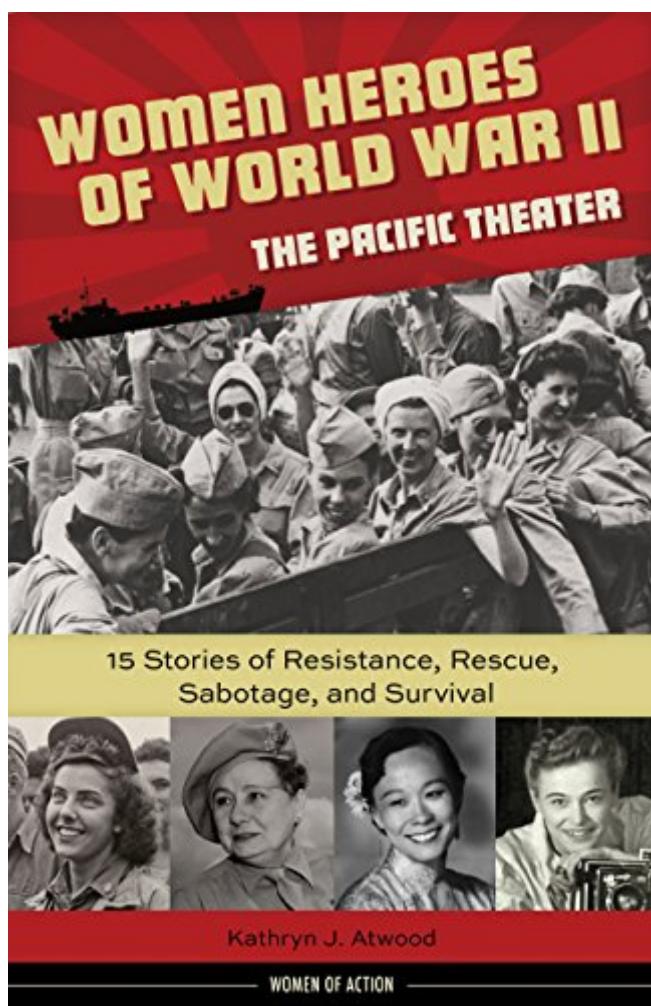


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# Women Heroes Of World War IIâ€”the Pacific Theater: 15 Stories Of Resistance, Rescue, Sabotage, And Survival (Women Of Action)



## **Synopsis**

After glamorous American singer Claire Phillips opened her own night club in Manila, using the proceeds to secretly feed starving American POWs, she also began working as a spy, chatting up Japanese military men and passing their secrets along to local guerilla resistance fighters. Australian Army nurse Vivian Bullwinkel, stationed in Singapore then shipwrecked in the Dutch East Indies, became the sole survivor of a horrible massacre by Japanese soldiers. She hid for days, tending to a seriously wounded British soldier while wounded herself. Humanitarian Elizabeth Choy lived the rest of her life hating only war, not her tormentors, after enduring six months of starvation and torture by the Japanese military police. In these pages, readers will meet these and other courageous women and girls who risked their lives through their involvement in the Pacific Theater of Operations during World War II. Fifteen suspense-filled stories unfold across China, Japan, Malaya, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines, providing an inspiring reminder of women and girls' refusal to sit on the sidelines around the world and throughout history. These women—whose stories span from 1932 through 1945, the last year of the war, when U.S. Marines landed on Iwo Jima—served in dangerous roles as spies, medics, journalists, resisters, and saboteurs. Nine of the women were American; seven were captured and imprisoned by the Japanese, enduring brutal conditions. Author Kathryn J. Atwood provides appropriate context and framing for teens 14 and up to grapple with these harsh realities of war. Discussion questions and a guide for further study assist readers and educators in learning about this important and often neglected period of history.

## **Book Information**

File Size: 3612 KB

Print Length: 240 pages

Publisher: Chicago Review Press; 1 edition (October 1, 2016)

Publication Date: October 1, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01HU8DVUA

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #240,410 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #1 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > History > Australia & Oceania #18 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > History > Asia #19 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > Education & Reference > History > Military & Wars

## Customer Reviews

Atwood offers insight into the lives and achievement's of some of the most noteworthy heroines of Pacific World War II. Given how little we hear about this part of history, following these women's point of view was a refreshing way to explore the vast landscape and timeframe.

Kathryn Atwood has already written two great books about women and war — women heroes from the Second World War and from the first. Now, we have a third — Women Heroes of World War II — the Pacific Theater: 15 Stories of Resistance, Rescue, Sabotage, and Survival. The books are aimed at the young adult audience but readers of any age will not fail to be moved and horrified in equal measure by the stories contained within these pages. As Kathryn writes in her foreword, she's tried not to make the stories too graphic but we're talking about the Rape of Nanking here, young girls forced into being comfort women, and the much-feared Kempeitai, Japan's military police. So we approach with caution because what some of these women had to endure is mindboggling. Yes, there are tales of incarceration, torture and rape but this book is not a horror-fest. Instead, what we have is a very sympathetic portrayal of these incredibly brave and resourceful women and what they went through in the name of justice and humanity. Atwood begins with a brief overview of Japan's relationship with the West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She reminds us that Japan fought on the side of the Allies during the First World War. But post-war Japan was treated dismissively by their European allies — much of it based on racism. She summarises Japan's development into a fascist, one-party state, and how young Japanese boys were hardened and desensitized by brutal and compulsory military training. We tend to think of the Second World War as having started on 1 September 1939, the point Germany attacked Poland. But some historians now consider 7 July 1937 to be a more accurate date — the Marco Polo Bridge Incident which started the war between Japan and China. On 7 December 1941, the Japanese attacked several Western strongholds in the Far East, and, most notoriously,

the US Navy stationed at Pearl Harbor. Two months later, Japanese forces humiliated the British by taking Singapore. Atwood book covers all these pinch points and several more within the Pacific theatre of war. Atwood gives us 15 tales of women who, each in their own way, fought against Japanese aggression. Take Vivian Bullwinkel, for example. Vivian was one of 22 Australian nurses who, on 12 February 1942, was forced by Japanese soldiers into the waves off Bangka Island in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). They smiled at each other, aware of what was about to happen. Their matron, Irene Drummond, managed to call out, "Chin up, girls. I'm proud of you and I love you all" before the machine guns opened fire. Vivian, although shot, survived. The only one. Then we have Wilhelmina "Minnie" Vautrin. Minnie was working in a women's college in the Chinese city of Nanking when the Japanese invaded in December 1937. The college became a designated refugee camp. Designed for about 300 students, by the end of the year, 10,000 terrified women had squeezed in, desperate for sanctuary from Japanese soldiers intent on raping every female they could find, however young or old. Tortured by what she had witnessed in Nanking, Minnie returned home to Indianapolis where, in May 1941, she took her own life. Another chapter relates the story of Sybil Kathigasu, a Malayan nurse, who, together with her surgeon husband, helped scores of wounded guerrilla fighters. But she was arrested and interrogated and tortured by the Kempeitai. Sybil survived the war but the injuries sustained at the hands of the Kempeitai were too severe and she died in 1948, aged 48. Fortunately most of the women from these tales survived the war and lived to an old age. Elizabeth Macdonald, who worked as an undercover agent during the war, died in 2015 having made it past her 100th birthday. Atwood, as always, writes well, her admiration for these women evident. She's not afraid to tackle the horrors they had to endure but manages to do so with great sensitivity, and avoids becoming overly voyeuristic. These 15 extraordinarily courageous women deserve to be remembered. Kathryn Atwood's fine book helps ensure that they will be.

Kathryn Atwood has written another fascinating book in her series covering women heroes of the world wars. From Claire Phillips who ran a Manila nightclub to get funds to feed American prisoners of war to Jane Kendleigh, who ministered to wounded soldiers in the air as one of the first Navy flight nurses, Atwood presents compelling stories of real women in the thick of the war. Women Heroes of World War II - The Pacific Theater begins and ends with general information on the war in the Pacific Theater and then moves to focus in on the stories of specific women, presenting an excellent mix of information about the women's lives before the war, their actions during the conflict, and a brief description of their post-war life. This book will be a useful resource for biography

projects, though depending on the class, this one might need to be used with caution. No stories of war are pleasant, but some of these stories are particularly dark, including the torture and starvation of prisoners and the use of imprisoned women as "comfort women" for the Japanese troops. Each eight to eleven page biography includes pictures of the woman covered, sidebar information about the war that directly relates to the story, and sources to use to find more information. The study guide in the book will be especially helpful for teachers wishing to use the book in their classrooms. It provides discussion questions and also suggestions for further, more in-depth projects using additional resources. I received a complementary copy of Women Heroes of World War II - The Pacific Theater from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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