

# The Fighting Sullivans: How Hollywood and the Military Make Heroes

Bruce Kuklick

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## ★ *The Fighting* ★ **SULLIVANS**

HOW HOLLYWOOD AND  
THE MILITARY MAKE HEROES

BRUCE KUKLICK



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**Bruce Kuklick : The Fighting Sullivans: How Hollywood and the Military Make Heroes** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Fighting Sullivans: How Hollywood and the Military Make Heroes:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. TwoBy V. KoloI am dropping a star on this book as I read two better accounts of the Sullivans.John Satterfield's book "We Band of Brother's -The Sullivans and WWII"Dan Kurzman's "Left to Die - The Tragedy of the USS Juneau"Kuklick sources much from them and engages in too much revisionist

history. More on this to come... Okay here is the more (Added 8-18-17) At the end of chapter one the author says It is yet impossible to reconstruct in any detail or with great accuracy the family's history, including the biographies of the five boys before the war. There is not much evidence pertinent to the Sullivans and precious little that is reliable. p. 16 Later he says, Any reconstruction of the lives of the Sullivans, including my own is shaky and debatable. p. 16 From this he seeks to understand how American culture transformed the boys How can you understand a transformation of something you admittedly know little about? In the Pacific the United States shared the blame for war. The Americans had been unwilling to defer to Japanese plans for racial and commercial hegemony in Asia, especially in China. From 1939 on the United States had coupled exhortation about Japan's moral failings with growing economic sanctions that choked the Japanese. American officials had a hard time getting it into their heads that Japan might respond militarily, and certainly they underestimated the abilities of a nonwhite armed force. Thus, the United States recklessly pushed its adversary. December 7, 1941 displayed the aggression of the Japanese but also the meddling self-righteousness in the American national character and its results. P35 Did the author ever hear of the Nanking Massacre committed by the Japanese Army? From this paragraph, we can see where this book is going and his revisionist bent. The author on page 148 says, To some extent the troubles in Waterloo showed the stress between East Side Catholics and West Side Protestants, unsavory immigrants versus old stock WASPs. The author spends a lot of time trying to paint an unflattering picture of the Five Sullivan Brothers but for this one sentence and on page 76 Where overnight the newspapers transformed the boys to Protestant respectability he never explores the Anti-Catholic influence of the newspapers. This is a momentous oversight in my opinion. Anti-Catholic and Anti-Irish sentiment are a part of American history. The author glosses over it. In the bibliographic essay at the end of the book he says, I have regularly exploited an interpretative form of logical inference: Abduction. For a full explanation, I would direct you to the article at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abduction/> The New World Encyclopedia online gives us a down to earth explanation. Abduction means determining the precondition. It is using the conclusion and the rule to assume that the precondition could explain the conclusion. Example: "When it rains, the grass gets wet. The grass is wet, it must have rained." Anyone with a little IQ can see other viable conclusions. The grass is wet, someone watered it. The grass is wet from the morning dew. The grass is wet from yesterday's water main break. This is a shaky way to do history. Using this type of logic does not produce history, it produces speculation. Using this logic on the author what can we logically infer about the motives of a historian who admits that his reconstruction of the history of the Sullivan Brothers is shaky and debatable? The author is in my opinion guilty of the same thing he is railing against, retelling a story for profit. The whole premise of his book is that a story was made up about the Five Sullivan Brothers for war time benefit. (I think most sensible people can tell the difference between a movie and reality.) The author basically does the same thing himself, retells the story but more for his own profit than serious history. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By margitta beanblossomlove it saw the movie had to get the book so glad I found it on 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Still Fighting!!! By Michael McCrann Wonderful book about the Sullivans and the movie and the real details about the family. If you love the film you will really enjoy this behind the scenes look at the family. The reality - warts and all - might dim the film a bit but knowing everything is still the best!

In November of 1942, the five Sullivan brothers from Waterloo, Iowa, were killed when a Japanese torpedo sank their ship during the most ferocious naval engagement fought in the South Pacific. The family's loss, the most extraordinary for the United States in its military history, was immortalized and valorized in the 1944 film *The Fighting Sullivans*. This book tells the story of how calamity, with the help of Hollywood and the wartime publicity machine, transformed a family of marginal and disreputable young men, intensely disliked in their hometown, into heroes. The Sullivan boys joined the armed forces after Pearl Harbor, and the US Navy accepted that they would all serve on one ship, the light cruiser USS *Juneau*. The five brothers gave the navy great publicity, but when the ship went down and survivors were not rescued, the service faced a serious problem. *The Fighting Sullivans* examines the campaign that followed, as the navy and its partners in Hollywood turned a tragedy of errors into a public relations victory. Bruce Kuklick shows how the myth of the Sullivan family was created using bits and pieces of real events, but with twists that turned the boys into superhumans and their beleaguered parents into self-sacrificing patriots. He explores the close relationship between Hollywood studios and the military, which aimed to boost morale and support for the war. A study in mythmaking, *The Fighting Sullivans* offers a behind-the-scenes look at the manufacture of heroes in twentieth-century wartime America.

"An unusual and interesting book about mythmaking." Choice "This is a much-needed collective biography of a classic World War II story. It blends traditional biography with important concepts of memory. It clearly adds to our understanding of the important period and the efforts of the government and media to create heroes and write the story of the Greatest Generation. Highly recommended." Kyle Longley, author of *The Morenci Marines: A Tale of Small Town America and the Vietnam War* "Who gets celebrated as a hero, and why? *The Fighting Sullivans* probes such questions by tracing the creation and renewal of mass media and popular stories about the Sullivans. An engrossing and timely book!" Emily S. Rosenberg, author of *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor and American Memory*

"Bruce Kuklick's *The Fighting Sullivans* is not just a readable account of the tragic brothers and how they were made them into national heroes. It is also a case study of public mythology and historical memory that reflects the complicated relationship between film, society, and history." Scott Alan Metzger, co-author of *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies* "Covering a family, town, nation, and war theater, Bruce Kuklick inquires into how we remember heroes, but most critically, how they are manufactured. This story of sacrifice is also one of incompetence and lies, with an overlay of crass promotionalism, official duplicity, oversimplification and misleading narratives, and mawkish spin. In short, the glamorizing of the famous so-called Fighting Sullivans is an American story converting tragedy into triumph, no matter how hollow and deceptive the result. War sells, especially when involving such American tropes as a small-town upbringing, brotherhood, enshrining tragedy, and a cover-up of mistakes by those in power. *The Fighting Sullivans* provokes us into an uncomfortable, unvarnished exploration into myth-making and historical verity. Kuklick compels us to see the past within our present-day affliction with individualism, military worship, and Hollywood-made heroicism. This book is about us, a nation that often turns the ordinary into cynical ploys for fame, influence, and profit. A masterful and keen-eyed rendering of history and culture, by a master historian." Thomas W. Zeiler, author of *Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II*

About the Author Bruce Kuklick is Nichols Professor of American History Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania. He is most recently the author, with Emmanuel Gerard, of *Death in the Congo*.