

Kaitlin Dupon
Great Granddaughter of Ralph Engelsman, LAS
2008 Recipient of USS Indianapolis/Gwinn “Angel” Scholarship

Q. 1. *How has being a child/grandchild/great-grandchild of a USS Indianapolis Survivor (or LAS) affected your life? Please include details of your specific Survivor’s experience that you can obtain through a person interview with either him or another relative (his wife, siblings, etc.).*

My great grandfather, Ralph Engelsman, was lost at sea on July 30, 1945. Being the great granddaughter of non-survivor of the USS Indianapolis has affected my life in more ways than one. I do not have the privilege of being able to ask questions about the war or my great grandfather’s experience. Unlike others, I don’t get to know things about my great grandfather. I don’t get to know what his favorite movie was or his favorite color. These simple facts about my great grandfather are things I wish I knew. I am saddened when I think of all the times I will never get to share with my great grandfather or all the stories I will get to hear about or share. All I can rely on is what my great grandmother can tell me about my grandfather. Recently my great grandmother created a scrapbook in order to preserve the memory of my great grandfather. I have spent the last few days looking over the letters sent home, the schedules, and the photographs of my great grandfather. In every letter he ends by saying how much he loves everyone at home and how much he misses them. This love shows me how much he truly missed his family and how much he wanted to be with them. The longing to be with family comforts me because it shows my great grandfather’s true emotions and what he was really like. Looking through the book is humbling because this man gave his life to create a better life for the rest of us. This sacrifice of life for another is amazing to me, that sacrifice is what impacts me the most. The sacrifice of life is something that means the most to me. My great grandfather left behind his loving family to go and serve his country. He didn’t complain or run away but he stepped up to the task which was his to complete. My great grandfather was called into the service a month after my grandpa was born. He was assigned to the USS Indianapolis and he traveled throughout much of the Pacific. There is one letter in which he describes his schedule of about six months. During this time period he describes when he arrived and left different countries and what he did in each area. This is the closest I can come to knowing what life was like for my great grandfather. These letters or schedules are as close as I can come to knowing what a daily routine was like for my great grandfather. When the USS Indianapolis was attacked in 1945 my grandpa was two and a half years old and my great uncle was four years old. My great grandmother was left behind to take care of two young boys by herself. My grandpa has always been very interested in the USS Indianapolis and its history. He is the one who wants everyone to know what happened and pay respects to the crew. I have learned much of what I know about the Indianapolis through my grandpa and he has opened the door to knowing a little more about my great grandfather. My great grandfather received several awards which my grandpa is now in possession of. My great grandfather earned the American Defense Service Medal, the World War II Victory Medal and the Purple Heart. There were also several citations

written to my great grandfather's memory. These awards have become somewhat sacred in my family; we have learned to treasure what little we have of my great grandfather. My grandpa had to grow up without a father and when he talks about the USS Indianapolis you can see the sadness in his eyes. No one should have to go through life not knowing their father. Seeing my grandpa's sadness has affected me greatly, I have learned not to take my own father for granted. The more I learn about the Indianapolis and the more I see what my grandpa has had to go through, the more I am eternally grateful to have my dad. I can't imagine not being able to see him every morning when I wake up and every night before I go to sleep. I can't imagine going camping and not having my dad to hike with, or going to the beach and not having my dad to bury in the sand. When I look back at my past experiences almost every good memory includes my father, this makes me pity my grandpa for all the times he missed out on. Pity is not the only emotion which overcomes me when I think about my grandpa, I also think of strength. My grandpa had the strength to keep going throughout his life, even though every other boy he knew had a father around. My grandpa never let not having a father slow him down; this makes me admire him tremendously. My grandpa's strength has impacted me now because I realize that whenever I think I can not achieve something, I think of him and what he has accomplished and I know I can. My great grandfather's death is not in vain then, for it has made my family stronger. Both my great grandmother and my grandpa have learned to develop strength and perseverance in life. I can only hope that I too can learn to become stronger and more perseverant. I do believe that through learning about my great grandfather and his life I will be able to accomplish becoming stronger. I am filled with sadness and despair when I read and hear about my great grandfather, but I am also filled with joy and hope. I am certain that my great grandfather would not want me or my family to dwell on just his death, but to dwell on his life and what his death meant to us. He did not die just to die, he died while trying to create a better life for all of us and I never want to forget that as long as I live.

Q. 2. Understanding the miraculous and heroic story of the USS Indianapolis and its crew is one way to ensure that the service and sacrifices made by the men of the ship will not be forgotten. Please choose one of the following themes: miracle of the sighting, heroism, loyalty and brotherhood, service to country, forgiveness, righting a wrong, survival against all odds. In approximately 500 words, share your understanding of the tale of the USS Indianapolis.

One of the last telegrams that my great grandfather, Ralph Engelsman, ever sent was as follows: "SORRY CANT COME HOME TRIED EVERYTHING DEEPEST LOVE AND PRAYER LOVE=RALPH." Yes it was a simple message, only a sentence long, but the meaning runs much deeper. One can assume that when faced with the image of death a person would do all they could to survive. That's how I like to envision my great grandfather, as a fighter who wanted to live and return home to his family. Sadly my great grandfather did not make it home and it almost seems that the message he sent foreshadows his coming death. "Sorry can't come home tried everything..." On July 30, 1945 the USS Indianapolis fell below the surface of the water, with my great grandfather on board. The ship had been attacked by a Japanese submarine, which fired two shots at the Indianapolis, causing the ship to sink almost instantaneously. It is believed that my great grandfather died a quick and

painless death. He was believed to be in his bunk when the blasts hit, his bunk was located right above where the bomb struck the ship. When one thinks of the USS Indianapolis, one thinks of terror, panic and death. Within that image of horror it is almost comforting to know that my great grandfather did not have to suffer anymore than what was necessary. When my great grandfather was pronounced missing in action and later pronounced dead, it was my great grandmother who began to suffer. Not only did she lose her one true love in the world, but she had two small children to look after, my papa who was two and a half and my great uncle who was four. However, my great grandmother did not give up on life; instead she embraced it and continued on. My grandmother did not become bitter against the war instead she accepted the news and knew and still knows she will one day see her love again. The concept of God and the afterlife is something that is a deeply important belief in my family and in many of my great grandfather's letters he talks about how we will all meet again in heaven. I think that's what has kept my grandmother going, that belief of knowing it wasn't the end, and of knowing she will see my great grandfather once again. My great grandfather truly demonstrated service to his country; he paid the ultimate price to help create a better world and society. Without my great grandfather and people like him, who knows what would have happened to the world or even the United States. The men aboard the USS Indianapolis are true heroes; they agreed to go on a mission which they knew nothing about. This mission proved to be the true start of the end of the war. On the men's mission they delivered part of the atomic bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima. The atomic bomb's dropping ceased World War II. I and all other members of society have the men aboard the USS Indianapolis to thank for preserving our freedom.

Kaitlin lives in Grand Rapids, MI and plans on attending Ferris State University in the fall as a Graphic Design major.