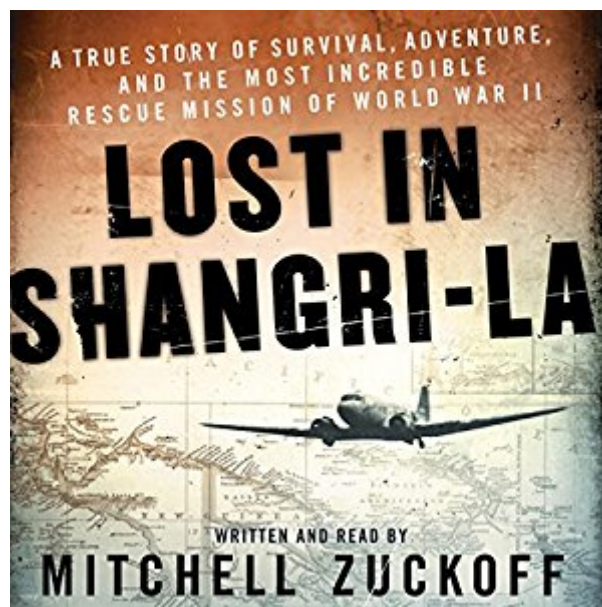


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# Lost In Shangri-La: A True Story Of Survival, Adventure, And The Most Incredible Rescue Mission Of World War II



## Synopsis

On May 13, 1945, 24 American servicemen and WACs boarded a transport plane for a sightseeing trip over "Shangri-La," a beautiful and mysterious valley deep within the jungle-covered mountains of Dutch New Guinea. Unlike the peaceful Tibetan monks of James Hilton's best-selling novel *Lost Horizon*, this Shangri-La was home to spear-carrying tribesmen, warriors rumored to be cannibals. But the pleasure tour became an unforgettable battle for survival when the plane crashed. Miraculously, three passengers pulled through. Margaret Hastings, barefoot and burned, had no choice but to wear her dead best friend's shoes. John McCollom, grieving the death of his twin brother also aboard the plane, masked his grief with stoicism. Kenneth Decker, too, was severely burned and suffered a gaping head wound. Emotionally devastated, badly injured, and vulnerable to the hidden dangers of the jungle, the trio faced certain death unless they left the crash site. Caught between man-eating headhunters and enemy Japanese, the wounded passengers endured a harrowing hike down the mountainside - a journey into the unknown that would lead them straight into a primitive tribe of superstitious natives who had never before seen a white man - or woman. Drawn from interviews, declassified U.S. Army documents, personal photos and mementos, a survivor's diary, a rescuer's journal, and original film footage, *Lost in Shangri-La* recounts this incredible true-life adventure for the first time. Mitchell Zuckoff reveals how the determined trio - dehydrated, sick, and in pain - traversed the dense jungle to find help; how a brave band of paratroopers risked their own lives to save the survivors; and how a cowboy colonel attempted a previously untested rescue mission to get them out. By trekking into the New Guinea jungle, visiting remote villages, and rediscovering the crash site, Zuckoff also captures the contemporary natives' remembrances of the long-ago day when strange creatures fell from the sky. A riveting work of narrative nonfiction that vividly brings to life an odyssey at times terrifying, enlightening, and comic, *Lost in Shangri-La* is a thrill ride from beginning to end.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours 32 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: HarperAudio

Audible.com Release Date: April 26, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B004XXVSYW

Best Sellers Rank: #3 in [Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Australia & Oceania](#) #5 in [Books > History > Australia & Oceania > Oceania](#) #49 in [Books > History > Military > Aviation](#)

## Customer Reviews

What a fascinating story! This is one of those hidden pearls that opens readers to a tale most don't know. That alone makes it a five-star work in my world. The descriptions of how a hidden valley, unknown to 99.9% of the world during World War Two is fascinating on its own level. This area is smack dab in the middle of Papua/New Guinea. While the world is being laid to waste, there is a hidden society under the noses of the Japanese and Allies. The original, modern day explorer, Richard Archbold would be the first in the twentieth century to travel to the interior of this lost country. Colonel Ray Elsmore would follow up in 1944, one year before the ill-fated crash of the Gremlin Special. What should have been a normal sight-seeing tour turned into anything but. The plane, for whatever reason, plowed into a cliff killing nineteen of the twenty-four passengers in a fiery crash. John McCollum, Ken Decker, Margaret Hastings, Earl Walter Jr. became the only three to walk away. Two other passengers survived yet hung on for only a short time from massive burns and internal bleeding. Enter Captain Earl Walter Jr. His father was becoming a hero in his own right as he stayed behind after the Philippine Islands fell and organized a guerilla force to fight the Japanese. Jr. wanted nothing more than to get into the fray. Yet circumstances and the progress of the war were keeping him in the rear. When he was approached about the crash site and the difficulties of getting to the survivors with no feasible exit plan, he jumped at the opportunity. For most of us who have read countless World War Two accounts, this seems trivial and almost unbelievable. How could an area be this isolated in the twentieth century? There were no roads. The closest lake is thirty miles away. The jungle terrain is virgin territory and the inhabitants are known or thought to be cannibalistic. Now, how many volunteers do we have? Top that off, two of the survivors have debilitating injuries. Margaret has third degree burns on her calves and face. Decker has a terrible head gash. Both of their wounds become gangrenous. An excellent tale of survival, ingenuity and the fighting spirit. I highly recommend this work to any World War Two buff! Five Stars

This offering is filled with drama, the characters of this book HAD to live! Each scene, every chapter

was a part of their lives, written on their souls! Now we, living in the 21 st century get to vicariously experience a small portion, of what it must have been like for them!! found myself reading when I should have been asleep. I haven't done that since I was a child, hiding under the covers, reading by the dull glow of the flashlight, praying my mom wouldn't catch me, at least not until I finished the next chapter! She usually caught me! Anyway, there's much to admire about these people, native and military, and the writer gives each person a complete fleshing out. Even the smallest detail, culled from old records, or a personal recollection was given its own liveliness. It took true grit to survive the incredible ordeal that was thrust upon them. They not only survived, they triumphed! The most poignant of all the scenes portrayed, is the solemn funeral service held in air. Not only did I thoroughly enjoy this book, I liked it so much, I sent it to a loved one as a present.

Living history at its greatest. This is an incredible story, a tribute to all those involved, and a fascinating study in the cultural collision between Western Civilization and a tribe of South Pacific islanders not very far removed from the Stone Age. Well written and obviously well researched, this is an account of a little known tempest in a remote corner of the proverbial teapot that was WWII in the Pacific. Perhaps the author's most significant achievement is his ability to tell this story in a relaxed and easily understood way while bringing to the fore in vivid mental images, the lush and unforgiving landscape, the nature and culture of the Dani people, as well as all the danger, fear, loss, uncertainty, courage, determination, and strength of will evidenced in this remarkable story.

Both my husband & I read Shangri-La & loved the enhanced edition. We've bragged about the miracle of the rescue, the courage of the survivors, the overcoming of impossibilities, & recommended it to several friends. Great book! We love TRUE stories.

I absolutely love books that tell me something I didn't know. Lost In Shangri-La is full of new information...From the roles of women in the armed services during WW2, to the base on New Guinea, to the episode that this book centers on~I didn't know any of it. I'm awed by the intrepid men and women who served our country during that war (and all others), but this story...! I just couldn't believe I had never heard it before, but apparently the end of the war, the atom bomb, and so much else going on in the world overshadowed it to a degree; and the heroine was a reluctant famous person who soon put it all behind her. I got this book at a bargain price and got so much more than I bargained for. My only regret is that I hadn't finished it when we took a trip to Washington DC and stopped briefly at the Air and Space Museum. If I had finished the book, I

would have gone straight to the WW2 era section, and looked for...well...read the book, and when you get near the end, you'll know exactly what aircraft I would have looked for. I am so grateful to Mitchell Zuckoff for writing it. It'll be my next book club selection.

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