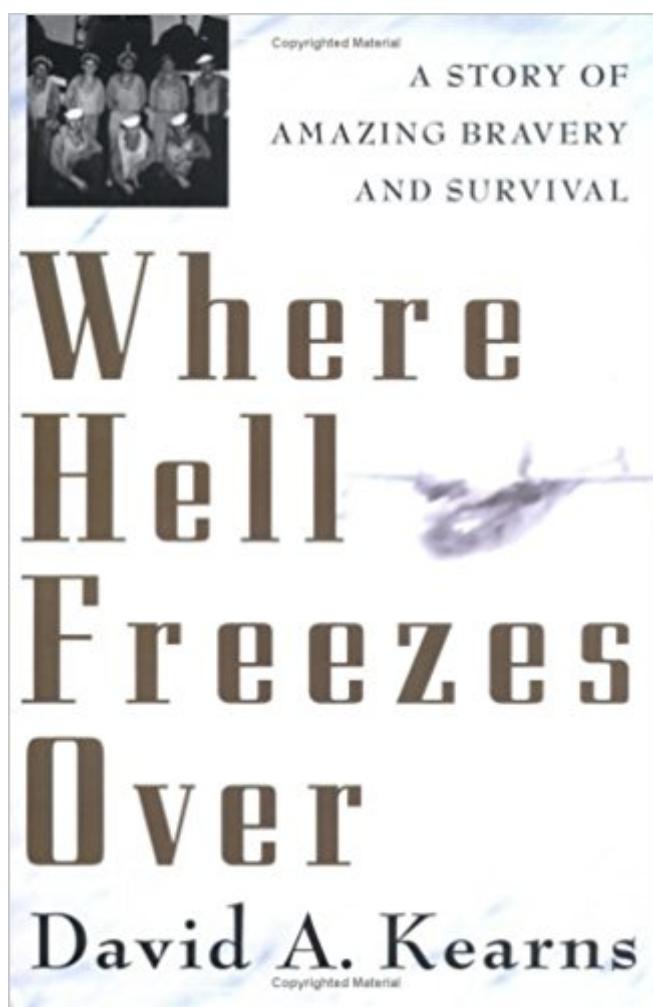


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# Where Hell Freezes Over: A Story Of Amazing Bravery And Survival



## **Synopsis**

At the tail end of 1946, the United States navy sent an expedition into the stark cold of Antarctica to photograph the terrain from the air and lay claim to the huge continent at the bottom of the globe. Many of the navy's men on the expedition were fresh from service in the recently ended World War II. This is the story of nine of those men, betrayed by an enemy of another kind. As their plane flew above that desolate continent, the weather threw a "whiteout" - a combination of a slanting sheet of ice on the land and low clouds that make it seem the air ahead is clear when it is not. The blinded plane slammed into a mountainside and exploded. Three men were killed; others were injured, most of them seriously. Their only shelter was the badly damaged fuselage. They had a food supply intended for a few-days trip, and no way to communicate with their rescuers. For thirteen days the men waited for discovery - or death. Even when they made contact with another seaplane, which led them from the air, they had to struggle, wounded as they were, several miles through blizzard winds, snow, and ice to reach safety. David A. Kearns is the son of Bill Kearns, the pilot who was at the controls when George 1 crashed. He embarks on this harrowing tale fueled by extensive research, including interviews with survivors and their families. With a compelling narrative drive and a lot of heart, Kearns trumpets this breathtaking survival story as a shining moment in 20th century American history.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Though Kearns's gripping debut is not the first account of the crash of the Martin PBM seaplane George 1 in Antarctica in December 1946, his is the most recent and most complete, unfolding with

page-turning immediacy. The plane was part of Operation Highjump, a mammoth U.S. Navy survey expedition that set out to photomap Antarctica under the leadership of hardy polar perennial Adm. Richard E. Byrd. The George 1 crashed in a whiteout, and three of the nine crewmen died. The others survived their injuries and two weeks of Antarctic weather, thanks to personal ingenuity, hardihood, courage, the leadership of Capt. Henry Caldwell and the salvaging of adequate food. Their radios didn't work, but a shoestring search-and-rescue operation finally spotted their smoke signals. All were flown out safely and returned home, although pilot Ralph LeBlanc lost his legs. Copilot Bill Kearns lived to become the author's father. With intimate access to surviving sources, plus a depth of personal commitment, the author makes a compelling addition to survival literature. (Nov. 15) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Kearns' account of the crash of the flying boat George I in Antarctica in December 1946 (Kearns is the son of one of the survivors) is, nearly 60 years later, a history of technology as much as an enthralling and inspirational record of survival. Employed in Operation Highjump, a full-scale mapping and survey expedition, George I crashed in a whiteout with nine men aboard. Six survived the crash, some with serious wounds, and then successfully endured three weeks on the Antarctic ice, thanks to their strength and ingenuity, and the leadership of Captain Henry Caldwell. Their radios didn't work, but their smoke signals were eventually spotted, and all were rescued. This is a story likely to interest readers far beyond the ranks of survival-narrative fans. Frieda Murray  
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We forget (or may never have fully realized) how far technology and our knowledge of the world has progressed in the past half century. This is a great story of the bravery, spirit, and ultimate sacrifices of some members of our parents' generation. The crew who crashed in Antarctica in 1947 were there, not for the commercial endorsements or riches, but like Sir Edmund Hillary at Everest, because it was there. Their lack of knowledge of what they were getting into was amazing in today's context but that some survived at all was ultimately inspiring. This is a good story well written.

In combat it's said no plan survives contact with the enemy. For the men of the George 1, many of them combat veterans from the recently ended Second World War, contact with a different kind of enemy killed three of their crew and threatened the lives of all of them when their seaplane crashed in Antarctica. David Kearns' book is not the first telling of this survival story, but it may well be the

most dramatic. As the son of one of the surviving crew members, naval aviator Bill Kearns--who was twenty-two at the time, the author had unique access to the members of that ill-fated mission who are still alive. His story is rich in detail, and those details are revealed in a narrative that is compelling. I've been meaning to write this review for a while. I bought the book when it was first released. So I won't rehash what has already been said about it. If you like survival stories, you will enjoy this one. Frankly, the most surprising thing to me about "Where Hell Freezes Over" is that no Hollywood producer has snapped up the movie rights yet. For America has some unfinished business that would practically guarantee the film's success. The remains of three Americans were left behind in that frozen world, trapped by fate and their own bad luck. I can see a movie producer underwriting an expedition--I'm sure the Navy would be interested in helping--to bring them home. Imagine the scenes: the opening shot of the wing still buried deep in the ice, the names barely visible; the narrative of the crash and those desperate days on the ice, interspersed with film of the recovery effort; the rescue of the survivors, and finally a memorial service with any of the surviving members of the crew and their descendants as Lopez, Hendersin and Williams are returned to their homeland one last time. Read the book to understand. This recounting of the crash of the George 1 is written with candor and passion. It's a difficult thing for any son to write a book about his father. David Kearns has met the challenge admirably.

In the days after World War II Admiral Robert E. Byrd, was able to convince the United States Government that the frozen continent of Antarctica was of important and possible strategic value to the country. Operation Highjump was conceived, ships were detailed and sailors were assigned to undertake the mission: To photograph, map and generally explore the frozen continent at the bottom of the world, before anyone else could. At this time in history, there were really only a few reasons to do this. Exploration was on that list but it does not appear to be the primary motivator for the Truman government. We were in a nuclear society, and speculation had it that the Antarctic continent may contain natural resources they could possibly be exploited. A hidden agenda? Where Hell Freezes Over was written by David Kearns (the youngest son of one of the survivors). It is another chilling chapter in the continuous exploration of the earth's polar regions--an account of death, life and unequalled heroism, which has sifted its way into obscurity, over time. Many of us learned in school the tales of Admiral Byrd and his Arctic expeditions. We experienced the cold dry continent, learned about penguins and seals, saw icebergs and frigid waters. Never were we told about the flight of George 1, a PBM flying boat, from the USS Pine Island. This plane was the first aircraft from Operation Highjump to fly over land, and through a sequence of poor visibility and slight

pilot errors, crashed in the frozen snows of Antarctica. Six of nine crewmen survived for two weeks amongst the burnt and charred hulk of their destroyed aircraft. The ingenuity of the crewmembers, the die-hard tenacity of the Pine Islands Captain, along for the ride, make this a reality adventure story that we should all remember. Unlike other historical regurgitations of historic events, Where Hell Freezes Over is told in a timeline style that feeds information to the reader at appropriate times, making it a wonderful dedication to the men of George I and Operation Highjump. Armchair Interviews says this is a wonderful book for history buffs....

In late 1946 a survey crew photographing Antarctica from the air crashed. The co-pilot Lt. (jg) William H. Kearns, Jr. was the father of the author. After the crash, it was a truly harrowing experience. Three men were dead, others injured, there was little chance of rescue. In 1946 there was very little activity in the antarctic at all. as the elder Kearns said, "Our biggest fear, with no one else on the continent at the time, was being left alone in six million square miles of ice and snow." Eventually the Navy got another plane landed in a lake some 12 miles from the crash site. The survivors walked, crawled, and pulled their compatriots along to reach the rescue plane. Except for the three killed in the crash, they all made it. One minor technical complaint. The plane was a PBM-5 Mariner. At one point the author calls it a 'Ventura' which is a different plane altogether. Other than this I found the book well written and a very interesting read. But I have to say that it didn't make me want to go to Antarctica at all.

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