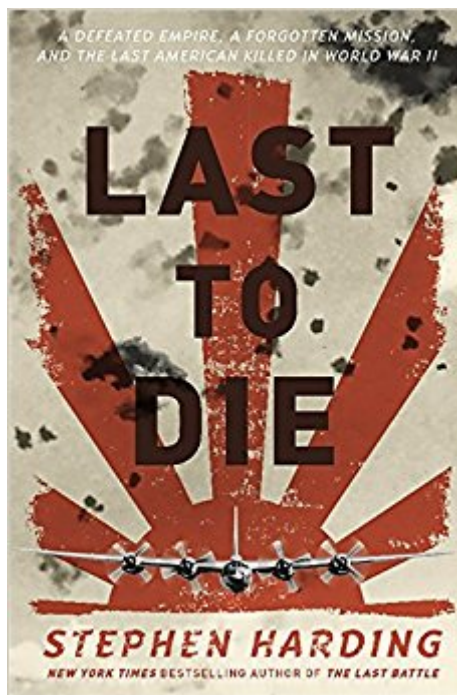




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# Last To Die: A Defeated Empire, A Forgotten Mission, And The Last American Killed In World War II



## Synopsis

On August 18, 1945—three days after Japan announced it would cease hostilities and surrender—U.S. Army Air Forces Sergeant Anthony J. Marchione bled to death in the clear, bright sky above Tokyo. Just six days after his twentieth birthday, Tony Marchione died like so many before him in World War II—quietly, cradled in the arms of a buddy who was powerless to prevent his death. Though heartbreaking for his family, Marchione's death would have been no more notable than any other had he not had the dubious distinction of being the last American killed in World War II combat. An aerial gunner who had already survived several combat missions, Marchione's death was the tragic culmination of an intertwined series of events. The plane that carried him that day was a trouble-plagued American heavy bomber known as the B-32 Dominator, which would prove a failed competitor to the famed B-29 Superfortress. And on the ground below, a palace revolt was brewing and a small number of die-hard Japanese fighter pilots decided to fight on, refusing to accept defeat. Based on official American and Japanese histories, personal memoirs, and the author's exclusive interviews with many of the story's key participants, *Last to Die* is a rousing tale of air combat, bravery, cowardice, hubris, and determination, all set during the turbulent and confusing final days of World War II.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In *Last to Die* Stephen Harding proves that even seventy years later, World War II history can still reveal 'The rest of the story.' The little-known events centering upon Sergeant Anthony James Marchione and his Philadelphia area family include an almost unknown bomber flying a largely

forgotten mission following Emperor Hirohito's decision to surrender in August 1945. With exceptional attention to detail and appreciation for personal drama amid great events, Harding brings the bittersweet story of twenty-year-old Tony Marchione to life—and vividly describes the death of the last American airman to die in the world's greatest war."—Barrett Tillman, author of *Whirlwind and Forgotten Fifteenth*"This poignant story reveals how important it is to track down the truth about World War II events that have become lost to history. In *Last to Die* Stephen Harding does his usual excellent aviation research and lively writing to tell Harding how 'last gasp' wartime efforts—of airmen and their planes—had profound consequences."—Walter Boyne, former director of the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution and current Chairman of the National Aeronautic Association

**Advance Praise for *Last to Die***"The story of Tony Marchione and his tragic, heroic death in the skies over Tokyo a full three days after Japan had supposedly surrendered is as well told as it is heart-wrenching. Marchione reflected America's Greatest Generation perfectly, in terms of his upbringing, patriotism, and sacrifice, and he is superbly memorialized in this moving yet also scholarly book. Anyone who enjoyed Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken* will love this work of history that reads like a thriller."—Andrew Roberts, author of *The Storm of War*"This is a rarity: an entirely new World War II story. It reads like an adventure novel yet is a deeply researched work from the hand of a smart and seasoned historian. A tour de force of discovery and storytelling."—Donald L. Miller, author of *Masters of the Air*

**Booklist**, 6/1/15—Harding, a military-affairs journalist, has woven together letters, interviews with family and friends, and both Japanese and American military records to provide an intense, quietly moving, and, of course, sad chronicle of a young life cut short—Harding treats the youth with admiration and affection that elicits compassion without becoming cloying or melodramatic. This is a superb look at the life and death of one young man among millions of others who loved, were loved by others, and died too soon. —Kirkus Reviews, 6/15/15—[Harding] seems to be making a specialty of the forgotten closing episodes of WWII—In a neat blend of military and technological history, Harding links Marchione's story to the development of the aircraft he staffed, a lumbering target called the Consolidated Dominator—A worthy sortie that explores a curtain-closing moment in history that might have gone very badly indeed. —Publishers Weekly, 6/22/15—[A] meticulously researched account of the days following Japan's surrender—[Harding] relates his gripping account of the fight between Japanese and American forces in breathless detail, and the tale is impressive and inspiring, as is Harding's determination to tell it. —

Stephen Harding is the author of eight previous books, including the New York Times bestseller *The Last Battle*. He is a longtime journalist specializing in military affairs. For nearly two decades he was on the staff of *Soldiers*, the official magazine of the U.S. Army, reporting from Northern Ireland, Israel, Egypt, New Zealand, Bosnia, Kuwait, and Iraq. Currently he is editor-in-chief of *Military History* magazine. His contributions on defense topics and aviation, military, and maritime history have appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Air & Space Smithsonian*, *World War II*, *Jane's Defense Weekly*, and *Air Enthusiast*. He lives in Northern Virginia.

Stephen Harding has done an excellent job of intertwining the stories of the B-32 Dominator-the 'poor cousin' of the B-29 Superfortress, the short and ultimately tragic life of Sgt. Anthony Marchione, and the mindset of the Japanese military and civilian leadership during the waning moments of World War II. Using, amongst other sources, interviews with surviving veterans who flew the B-32, family members of Sgt. Marcione, official military records, and information from Japanese researchers, he has been able to write a book that is both informative and smooth-flowing. For me, Sgt. Marcione has become the face of the thousands of airmen, of all countries but especially America, who died in the skies during WWII. One had to be last and, unfortunately for Sgt. Marchione, he was that one. After reading this book I have a newly found understanding and respect for those thousands who preceded him.

A very good story of the life of an airman, and his death. It is very poignant and makes you think past the histories and the the machinery of war, and look into the eyes of a young man. I read it because my father was to transition onto the B-32, but fortunately the war ended before that happened. The book covers a lot of history of the people and the plane, beyond that last flight. I recommend it highly.

As of this writing, another commemoration has passed of the day that Japan signed the surrender document ending World War II in Asia and the Pacific theater on September 2, 1945. And as that day in history continues to be remembered 70 years and thereafter, historians or the curious readers of the past cannot be denied, especially of the individuals that helped to keep the world at peace and who were not necessarily the larger than life figures that contributed to victory. Stephen Harding writes of that part of history seldom revealed to the general public during the time in which they occurred and years later in books such as *Last to Die: A Defeated Empire*, *A Forgotten Mission*, and *The Last American to Die in World War II*. Harding intertwines the monumental event of

the end of World War II to the life of 18-year old Army Sergeant Anthony Marchione and the men that boarded photo-reconnaissance one of four Dominators and accompanying B-32 Hobo Queen II and Harriet Chariot that met its fate on August 18, 1945 days after Japanese Emperor Hirohito accepted the Potsdam Declaration and announced surrender to the people of Japan and the world. The book provides interesting insight to the events leading to August 18 but begins and ends with Marchione's story. One may ask of what the symbolic importance does this story possess versus what readers already know about the end of World War II within the Pacific theater, the signing of the document of surrender aboard the USS Missouri at Tokyo Bay and dignitaries within global and military proportions present to mark the end of one of the most tumultuous events in history. However, Harding writes with much respect and tribute to one of the unsung heroes that was not a high ranking admiral or general but one of thousands that had gone unnoticed for the past 70 years, the many young men and women called to duty that simply heeded that call without any reserve, especially at such young age of 18 years old; Marchione was that individual who unexpectedly died for his country when the war was already declared over, an originally did not have intention to serve in the military but wanted to be musician. It is this element that inspired Harding to write his story after finding information after 30 years of research to finally include Marchione's place within history. The book begins with a brief biography and concludes with his story, but the proceeding chapters from three to six contain the backdrop to history and what prompted the indiscriminate small group of so-called diehards and disbelievers and disillusioned Japanese military fighter pilots that simply did not agree that the war was over after Hirohito's speech and President Harry S. Truman's declaration of cease fire, Yoko Ku, Saburo Sakai and Sadamu Komachi veterans of the war from the beginning in battles at Coral Sea, Midway, and Rabaul; they continued to fight until the end off the coast of Okinawa and the Kanto Plain. Knowing what occurred, attempts were made by then Supreme Command Leader of Allied Forces in the Pacific General Douglas MacArthur to direct concerns to halt hostilities to Hirohito and the Japanese Imperial Government and Headquarters. The events that played out after the 18th remained hushed. Harding includes great detail within the book to shed light on the life of Tony Marchione and the men of the Hobo Queen II and Harriet Chariot and their encounter and participation in the last air battle in the Pacific theater. And in addition, it is a history that breathes much irony of the United States role in the war and their initial involvement in in 1941 and the eerie end in 1945 that usually plays out in a Hollywood re-enactment.

On August 15th, 1945, Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced that Japan had accepted the conditions of the Potsdam Declaration. The War in the Pacific was over. But for Sergeant Anthony Marchione, his battle with the Japanese would last for three more days, and in the end, would cost him his life. Marchione was part of a crew of airmen charged with photographing and mapping areas of Japan. The purpose of this mission was to identify potential airfields and ports for use by the American occupation forces. Flying the Consolidated B-32 Dominator heavy bomber, Marchione and his fellow crewmen were sent to Japan on August 18th. Upon entering Japanese airspace, the B-32 was intercepted by a group of Japanese fighter pilots who had disobeyed the surrender order. Refusing to accept surrender, these rogue pilots had taken to the skies in order to defend Japan from incoming American flights. Marchione's happened to be one of those. During the confrontation, two of Tony's fellow crew members were injured by Japanese bullets. As he was helping one of these men, Tony was struck in the chest by a Japanese shell. He died shortly afterwards; the last American airman killed in the Pacific War. I found "Last to Die" to be an informative and interesting book. Author Stephen Harding not only describes the action that took place on Marchione's fateful flight, he also describes in detail of several other interesting aspects. Harding's narrative about the B-32 Dominator bomber is especially interesting. Known as the "second-string super bomber", the B-32 was built to compliment the much more successful B-29. But the B-32 was plagued with mechanical problems throughout its career and was never really useful. Harding also discusses the failed coup by the Japanese who still wished to fight and ignore Hirohito's surrender order. It was the revolt by these men that had a direct influence on the death of Marchione, for if all of these Japanese holdouts would have followed Hirohito's surrender order, Marchione wouldn't have died. "Last to Die" is a well-written book about one of the lesser-known missions of World War II. Highly Recommended.

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