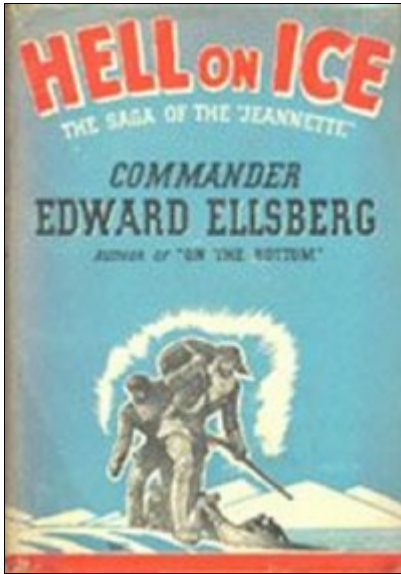


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Edward Ellsberg

The cover of Ellsberg's book *Hell on Ice*.



The Willimantic Cemetery is the last resting place of Commander Edward Ellsberg—a name instantly recognizable to many. Ellsberg (1891-1982) was a famed writer of adventure novels set at sea, but was better known as a naval salvage expert who gained fame with his daring exploits rescuing sunken submarines.

Edward Ellsberg was born in New Haven, Connecticut on November 21, 1891, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. His father became a dairy farmer in Colorado, but Edward returned east to join the navy, and during the early 1920s he met Willimantic-born Lucy Knowlton Buck, the niece of Edwin Buck, a prosperous local businessman and a First Selectman of Windham. Lucy Ellsberg died in 1978, and was buried in the

impressive Buck family plot located in the northwestern corner of the Willimantic Cemetery. Ellsberg was buried beside her four years later. Edward Ellsberg graduated from the Annapolis Naval Academy in 1914, the head of his class as a naval engineer. During World War One he refitted a number of captured German passenger ships, converting them into American troop transports. He was a lieutenant commander at the Brooklyn Naval Yard in 1925, when the submarine S-51 sunk 135 feet to the bottom of the ocean after a collision with the steamer City of Rome. The crew perished, but Ellsberg donned a diving suit for the first time in his life, and worked to get the sunken submarine raised. He was successful, and became the first peacetime recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal. Ellsberg was also involved in the raising of US Navy submarine S-4 off Provincetown several years later. Rescue equipment designed by Ellsberg was used in many rescues, including the raising of the "Squalus" in 1938.

During World War Two he was placed in charge of salvage operations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. He was also involved in setting up the famous floating mulberry harbors during the invasion of Normandy in 1944, which enabled the relatively safe landing of Allied forces. After the War Ellsberg worked as a consulting engineer and writer. In 1933, Hollywood produced a movie based on one of his books. The film *Hell Below* starred Walter Houston, Jimmy Durante and Sterling Holloway. It was based on Ellsberg's book, "Pigboats."

One of Ellsberg's most acclaimed books is *Hell on Ice: The Saga of the Jeanette* (1938), about a tragic Arctic expedition in 1879. It was one of the most popular titles published as an Armed Services Edition (ASE) during World War Two. ASE publications were based on New Deal attempts to raise morale through literature and art during the Depression. The ASE subsequently published over 1,300 titles in an oblong paperback

format to lift the moral of American Serviceman. They cost 10 cents apiece and provided adventure and education for America's fighting forces. Hell on Ice was also adapted as a radio play by Orson Welles' famed Mercury Theater Players. The dramatic adaptation of Hell on Ice was broadcast on October 9, 1938, just three weeks prior to Welles' more famous radio adaptation of H. G. Wells' War of the Worlds. The realism and documentary style of the War of the Worlds play convinced many Americans that their country was being invaded by Martians. Traffic jams occurred on New Jersey roads, as listeners panicked and tried to escape from the Martian warships!

Sylvia Earle, a renowned marine scientist, conservationist and developer of research vehicle submersibles, credits Edward Ellsberg and Jacques Cousteau as childhood heroes. She quotes Ellsberg in her recent book, *Sea Change: A Message of the Oceans*. Ellsberg had stated that, "Nothing that the ingenuity of man has permitted him to do is more unnatural than working as a diver." Ellsberg worked in diving suits which consisted of a copper helmet and breast plate secured watertight to a flexible, canvas-covered rubber suit, all weighted down to ensure a descent to the bottom. Such designs were later adapted and modified by NASA for use in the space program.

Edward Ellsberg was widely known in Willimantic during the 1920s and 1930s, when he courted and married local girl Lucy Buck. He was also a friend of George A. Bartlett, a former publisher of *The Chronicle*. His other books included *Under the Red Sea Sun* (1949), *The Far Shore* (1949), and *No Banners, No Bugles* (1949). Ellsberg's affection for his adopted town was reflected in his decision to be buried in Willimantic. So, resting among Willimantic's movers and shakers, mill owners, businessman, veterans of foreign wars and Civil War soldiers is one of America's most accomplished naval engineers and writers.

<http://www.edwardellsberg.com/>