



## The Wind Is Not a River: A Novel

By Brian Payton



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*The Wind Is Not a River* is Brian Payton's gripping tale of survival and an epic love story in which a husband and wife—separated by the only battle of World War II to take place on American soil—fight to reunite in Alaska's starkly beautiful Aleutian Islands.

Following the death of his younger brother in Europe, journalist John Easley is determined to find meaning in his loss. Leaving behind his beloved wife, Helen, he heads north to investigate the Japanese invasion of Alaska's Aleutian Islands, a story censored by the U.S. government.

While John is accompanying a crew on a bombing run, his plane is shot down over the island of Attu. He survives only to find himself exposed to a harsh and unforgiving wilderness, known as “the birthplace of winds.” There, John must battle the elements, starvation, and his own remorse while evading discovery by the Japanese.

Alone at home, Helen struggles with the burden of her husband's disappearance. Caught in extraordinary circumstances, in this new world of the missing, she is forced to reimagine who she is—and what she is capable of doing. Somehow, she must find John and bring him home, a quest that takes her into the farthest reaches of the war, beyond the safety of everything she knows.

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## The Wind Is Not a River: A Novel By Brian Payton Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

### Author One-on-One: Nancy Pearl and Brian Payton



**Nancy Pearl** is a librarian and lifelong reader. She regularly comments on books on National Public Radio's Morning Edition.

**Nancy Pearl:** How did you become interested in this pretty much unknown aspect of World War II?

**Brian Payton:** I first came across the story of the war in the Aleutians when I lived in Alaska in the early 1980s. In my late teens and early twenties, I found that there had been several histories written about the war in Alaska, but could find little fiction. I've known since then that the events of 1942-1943, in what was then the Territory of Alaska, could serve as an incredible backdrop for a novel.

The facts themselves are remarkable. On June 3, 1942, the Japanese Imperial Navy bombed Dutch Harbor in Alaska's Aleutian Islands. Four days later, a force of nearly 2,500 Japanese troops seized and held Attu and Kiska, two of the outermost islands. The people of Attu—U.S. citizens—were taken prisoner and sent to Japan. The remaining Aleut people were evacuated by the U.S. military and interned in southeast Alaska. For the next eleven months, U.S. forces sustained an aerial campaign against the Japanese-held positions. Then, in 1943, one of the toughest battles of the war took place to recapture Attu. In proportion to the number of men engaged, it ranked second only to Iwo Jima as the most costly American battle in the Pacific Theater. It was the only battle fought on North American soil.

**NP:** Why do you think these pretty horrific events in the Aleutian Islands aren't more widely known?

**BP:** At the time, it was impossible to hide the basic facts of these events from the general public, but the powers that be worked to ensure they were downplayed or ignored. Journalists were ordered out of the Territory, military censorship was drum-tight, and most of the campaign was fought beyond view of the

civilian press. What information was available was tightly controlled. There are numerous reasons for this, including the government's desire to not raise the alarm among the civilian population of the west coast of North America. It was important for civilians to believe that the war was being fought overseas. The idea was that we should fight and settle it "over there" before it reached our shores. The war in Alaska threatened that narrative. From the U.S. perspective, the campaign itself was fraught with problems and was seen as something of an embarrassment. The U.S. military gambled on the fact that they could contain and ultimately defeat the enemy there. History proves them right.

Because there was relatively little press about it at the time, these events quickly faded from public consciousness after the war.

**NP:** You've written both fiction and nonfiction before. Did you ever consider writing this as nonfiction?

**BP:** I wanted to tell this story in the form of a novel. The historical, nonfiction account of the events had already been written. In my work, I wanted to get at something else. I wanted both the writing and reading experience to be felt deeply, personally. To help us make sense of what happened in the past, we often reach for fiction in order to help try and grasp the meaning (or face the meaninglessness) of certain events. The great war novels help us understand WWII, the Vietnam War, etc., in ways nonfiction rarely does.

Many of the servicemen who served in the territory came home to a country that had heard little or nothing about their fight and their sacrifice. Many of the men returning from the Aleutians were met with blank stares and sometimes disbelief when they told their stories to the people back home. When I began work on this book, I wanted to shine light into a hidden corner of history and to answer some questions. Why were the journalists expelled from the war in Alaska? What happened to the American and Japanese soldiers? What became of the civilians caught in between? I set out to write the definitive, dramatic history of this chapter of the war.

But a funny thing happened along the way to completing that book. The story began to take on a life of its own. The characters came alive, asserted their hopes, fears and dreams, and the novel bloomed into something far more beautiful—a personal story of physical and existential survival. A story about the limits of the human spirit and the enduring power of love.

Amazon.com Review

**An Amazon Best Book of the Month, January 2014:** At the start of this ambitious and earnest novel, a World War II journalist named John Easley parachutes safely from his doomed plane and finds himself on the Japanese-occupied Aleutian island of Attu, "unaccountably, alive and whole." Adds our narrator: "And so it begins." Indeed it does. Like all great novels, *The Wind Is Not a River* (a vague title that doesn't serve its story well enough) is many things at once: a mystery, a war story, a love story, and, at its core, a tale of survival. Scenes alternate between Easley and his wife, Helen, who leaves their Seattle home to join an Alaska-bound USO troupe, hoping to somehow find him. While Helen's efforts are a necessary counter-balance to Easley's days of strife, the scenes on Attu are the most compelling, and heartbreaking. In fact, the island itself becomes a character, a desolate, ancient, grumpy mound of ice and rock, sand and grass. Easley joins forces with a fellow survivor, and, like Tom Hanks in *Castaway*, they craft a makeshift home in a cave, foraging for seaweed, mussels, the occasional fish or sea bird. Both men are soon wasting away, in mind and body. Payton pens some lovely, sober moments. Scanning the horizon for ships, Easley sees an empty sea and "only smug birds skirting the shore. More of nothing, nothing more." Though we learn Easley is mourning a younger brother, killed in the war in Europe, he is initially unknowable. Even his comrade wonders, "who the hell are you?" In his fight for survival, sustained by an unearthed photograph of a young Aleutian woman, Easley finds an answer to that question. --Neal Thompson

From [Booklist](#)

Part adventure tale, part love story, this beautifully written novel offers a moving portrait of a couple whose lives are forever changed by the only battle of WWII to take place on American soil. Following the death of his brother in the war in Europe, grieving journalist John Easley feels an obligation to report on the war and talks himself onto a plane doing a bombing run over the Aleutian Islands. When the plane is shot down on Attu, he finds himself in a fight for his life as he battles hunger and the cold while hiding out from Japanese soldiers, who have shipped the natives off to internment camps and taken over the island. Meanwhile, back in Seattle, John's wife, Helen, lies about her lack of experience and joins a USO troupe set to entertain American soldiers in the Aleutians, determining that she will be more likely to locate John and bring him home if she is closer to the battle action. Payton, in the loveliest of prose, illuminates a little-known aspect of WWII while portraying a devoted couple who bravely face down the isolation, pain, and sacrifice of wartime. --Joanne Wilkinson

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Thomas Garcia:**

Nowadays reading books be a little more than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. Advantages you got of course the knowledge the actual information inside the book that improve your knowledge and information. The details you get based on what kind of book you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with training books but if you want feel happy read one along with theme for entertaining including comic or novel. Often the *The Wind Is Not a River: A Novel* is kind of guide which is giving the reader unstable experience.

#### **Michael Becker:**

Do you have something that you like such as book? The reserve lovers usually prefer to pick book like comic, small story and the biggest an example may be novel. Now, why not seeking *The Wind Is Not a River: A Novel* that give your satisfaction preference will be satisfied through reading this book. Reading addiction all over the world can be said as the opportunity for people to know world better then how they react in the direction of the world. It can't be claimed constantly that reading routine only for the geeky particular person but for all of you who wants to become success person. So , for all you who want to start reading through as your good habit, it is possible to pick *The Wind Is Not a River: A Novel* become your own starter.

#### **Dolores Schreiber:**

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**Nancy Leto:**

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