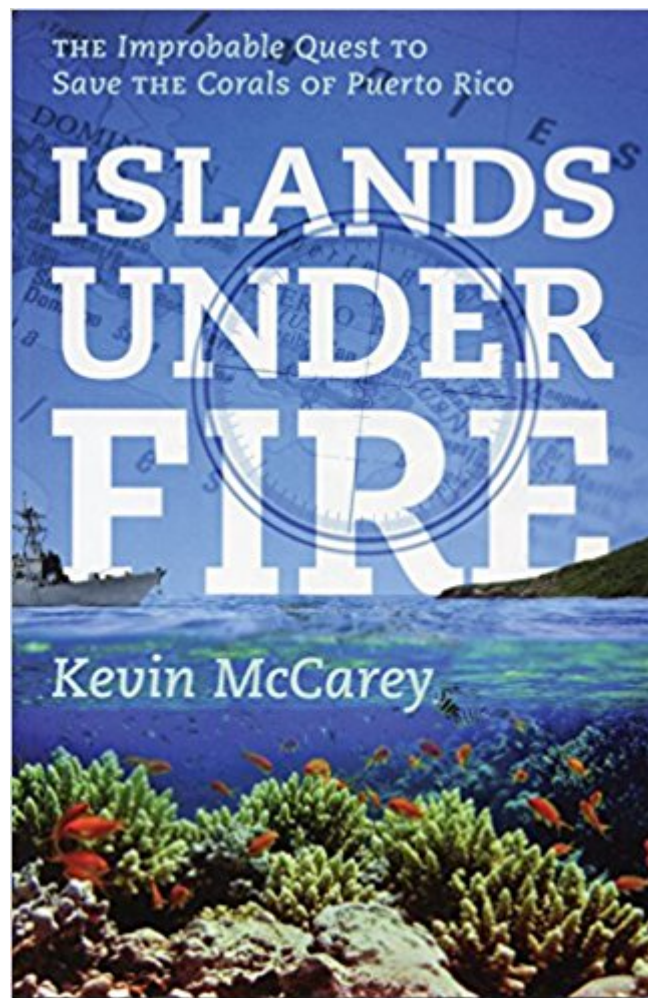




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# Islands Under Fire: The Improbable Quest To Save The Corals Of Puerto Rico



## Synopsis

A portrait of an often overlooked part of Americaâ•Puerto Rico and the Spanish Virgin Islandsâ•this is the little-known story of how the U.S. government, in particular the Navy, almost destroyed a pristine coral reef to provide a target for gunners. The authorâ™s true and humorous account of his role in this sometimes bizarre tale reveals how locals, politicians, and mariners came together to save a coral reef from certain destruction, and how the need to protect the fragile marine environment can bring meaning and direction to anyoneâ™s life, young or old. The conservation efforts represent a perfect example of what highly motivated citizens and political leaders can achieve when taking action to protect what they love. The author, hired as captain of a small research vessel, led the underwater search for evidence of the coral reef damage that would be used to convince the U.S. government to stop its bombardment of the island. While he did not have a direct role in the legal activities of Washington, DC, his efforts to collect factual evidence that would be used by the lawyers proved to be of immeasurable importance. His role enabled the Culebrans, the residents of this tranquil island paradise, to gather proof of the destruction, which ultimately convinced everyoneâ•including President Nixonâ•to stop the carnage. This triumphant tale serves as an inspiration for anyone wanting to make a difference in environmental conservation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"It is flat-out brilliant. I especially love the beauty of the ending . . . McCarey's ability with bringing characters to life, weaving in history, and the apposite quotation, is inspiring."Â (T. C. Boyle,

author, *Tortilla Curtain* and *When The Killing's Done*) "Although it extols the urgent necessity of finding a new way of dealing with non-human life, it does not belabor the reader or preach at him. It gets across the message so skillfully imbedded in a damn good story that I for one could not put it down. The message comes through but almost subliminally." (Farley Mowat, author, *Eastern Passage*, *Otherwise*, *Never Cry Wolf*, and *A Whale for the Killing*) "It is a new kind of narrative: part *Liar's Club* and part *Lonely Planet* bundled into one terrific book." (David Hamlin, executive producer, National Geographic TV and Film) "This is an exuberant tropical adventure regaled with gusto, and with exquisite prose that brings the colorful Puerto Rican characters to vivacious, chromatic life." (Christopher P. Baker, author, *Moon Cuba* and *Mi Moto Fidel: Motorcycling Through Castro's Cuba*) "This memoir, part travelogue and part natural history, is rich with humor, misadventure, and triumph. McCarey's writing is a pleasure, his penchant for simile and skill with dialogue particular delights. . . . [This] is an engrossing and joyful trip." (Publishers Weekly, STARRED REVIEW (January 7, 2013))

Kevin McCarey is an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker whose films have been shown on the National Geographic Channel, PBS, NBC, and the Turner Networks. He is also a published author. Raised in New York's Hudson Valley, Kevin McCarey attended SUNY Maritime College. During the Vietnam War, he served as a deck officer aboard merchant ships carrying "booze and bombs" to the war zone. These misadventures are recounted in *Oceans Apart: The Wanderings of a Young Mariner*. Later, McCarey took a job as boat captain of a research vessel in Puerto Rico. There he took part in the efforts to stop the bombing of Culebra. This led to work as an oceanographer on a variety of expeditions from the North Atlantic to the South Pacific. Since 1996, McCarey has traveled the world for National Geographic Television and Films. He has written, directed, and supervised and/or produced some eighteen films on subjects ranging from giant squid to the lions of the Kalahari. He also teaches filmmaking at the Savannah College of Art and Design.

If you know Puerto Rico this book is going to bring you back there. If you've been to Culebra, you're going to love this book. It is very well written and very entertaining. Get the maps out because you are going to want to follow them across Puerto Rico all the way to Culebra. This is a true story, it's serious and it is accurate. I have read this book several times and I know these places. Today, Culebra has several of the best beaches in the Caribbean and some of the best coral reefs for snorkeling and diving. It's fantastic! We should be very grateful to have this thanks to these guys and gals because we almost lost it to the Navy.

When I read the cover blurb -- "The Improbable Quest To Save The Corals Of Puerto Rico" -- I was half-expecting a serious, sanctimonious dissertation appealing primarily to environmentalists. The seriousness is there alright, but the author makes it all the more compelling because he keeps it, like a coral reef, just below the surface. It's what's on the surface that makes *Islands Under Fire* such a riveting story: characters who are simply (and complexly) human -- heroes one minute, hopeless the next. The narrator (who happens to be the author) is at the center of this motley crew and totally subject to their whims and peccadilloes. He's captain of a boat but not captain of his own fate. Despite all the frustrations he experiences, you get the distinct sense he's enjoying himself. And you start enjoying yourself as well because the author has the knack of making you feel like you're walking in his shoes. His humorous observations on topics like the surplus of Puerto Rican swear words, paint a picture of the island far more palpable than any travel brochure. Before reading this book, I had no desire to visit Puerto Rico. I do now -- for the coral reefs, but even more for the people.

There are many things to love about "*Islands Under Fire: The Improbable Quest to Save the Corals of Puerto Rico*". First and foremost for me, is Kevin McCarey's lovingly accurate portrayal of Puerto Ricans. Like the author, I lived in Puerto Rico for a number of years and experienced the kindness, the histrionics, the optimism, the fatalism and the quiet determination of its people. It is heartwarming to find an author who can bring the Puerto Rican character to life in all its colors and textures. For other readers personally unfamiliar with Puerto Rico, this is a classic tale of an underdog winning against a mightier adversary---only the underdog is a group of American citizens, living on an ecologically sensitive islet, being bombed by our own U.S. Navy. Incredibly, it's a true story and more incredibly, McCarey is able to tell it with great humor and a lack of hand-wringing or sermonizing. The best reason I recommend this book is it is a really FUN read!

McCarey's book captures the spirit of Puerto Rico even today, 40 years later. His whimsical story describes his adventures and misadventures as he tries to fit into a new job, oversee building and equipping a small research vessel, and learn something about the research involved in the fledgling environmental movement of the 1970s. I smiled and chuckled while we traipsed about the island while wondering if this man and his motley crew could really take on the 500 pound gorilla, the U.S. Navy, to stop the bombing and shelling of the populated island of Culebra. It is an entertaining, easy read with a poignant message to us all. I find myself wanting to

return to Puerto Rico to visit the sites he described.

Amazing book. The author did such an amazing job of slipping in very valuable facts and knowledge, while simultaneously captivating the reader through an engaging story. Such an easy read.

It is rare to find a book that is simultaneously entertaining and highly informative, and that's what Kevin McCarey's book is. At once a great yarn and cautionary tale, I have now put Culebra on my list of places to visit before I die. With Mr. McCarey's other talents, one wonders if he could create a TV documentary series with the highly memorable characters accompanying him on his mission to help save the coral reefs of Puerto Rico- sort of an ecology adventure a la Gilligan's Island. In all seriousness, though, this book educated me about Puerto Rico and gave me an appreciation for the combination of sheer determination and happenstance that it takes to succeed in the most admirable of causes.

A beach read based on the setting of the story. The book sat on my table for several weeks, with its enticing cover and glowing recommendation from none less than T.C. Boyle. But I saved it for a vacation at a Caribbean island. Told with a conservationist's passion, historic knowledge and a humorist/novelist's eye and ear for human foibles and communications. The author rapidly relates the adventure which helped lead to the preservation of the coral reefs. In the tale he quickly bonds with and insightfully observes people of all sorts. Most importantly, in this case, he bonds with the reader. And the good guys win.

McCarey captures not only the Puerto Rican spirit, but does a fabulous job of painting a picture of the wonderful island of Culebra. It was a piece of writing that celebrates the spirit and uniqueness of the small island that a relatively few people know about regarding its past with the U.S. Military. It took the dedicated work and strong character of the people of Puerto Rico, McCarey and his crew and the tenacity of the people of Culebra to allow Culebra to become what it is today. Great read!

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