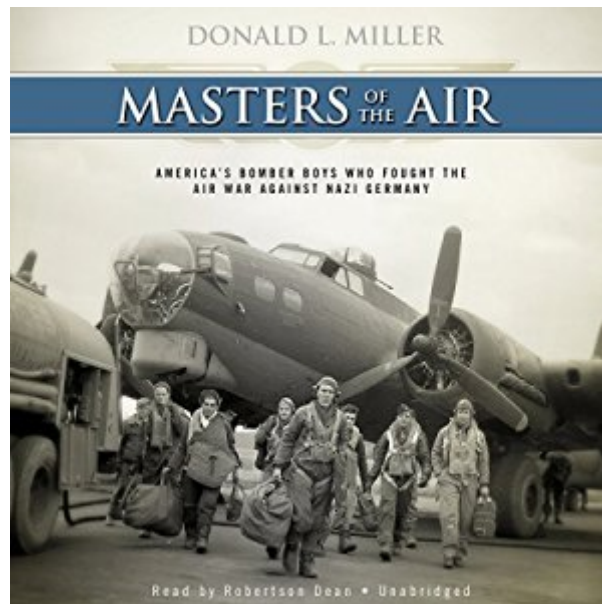


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Masters Of The Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought The Air War Against Nazi Germany



Synopsis

This is the dramatic story of the American bomber boys in World War II who brought the war to Hitler's doorstep. With the narrative power of fiction, this is a harrowing ride through the fire-filled skies over Berlin, Hanover, and Dresden. Fighting at 25,000 feet in thin, freezing air no warriors had encountered before, bomber crews battled new kinds of assaults on body and mind. Air combat was deadly but intermittent: periods of inactivity and anxiety were followed by short bursts of fire and fear. Unlike infantrymen, bomber boys slept on clean sheets, drank beer in local pubs, and danced to the music of Glenn Miller's Air Force Band. But they had a much greater chance of dying than ground soldiers. In 1943 an American bomber crewman stood only a one-in-five chance of surviving his tour of duty. The Eighth Air Force lost more men in the war than the US Marine Corps. The bomber crews were an elite group of warriors. Actor Jimmy Stewart was a bomber boy, as was "King of Hollywood" Clark Gable. The air war was filmed by Oscar-winning director William Wyler and covered by reporters like Andy Rooney and Walter Cronkite, all of whom flew combat missions with the men. The Anglo-American bombing campaign against Nazi Germany was the longest military campaign of World War II, a war within a war. Until Allied soldiers crossed into Germany in the final months of the war, it was the only battle fought inside the German homeland. Strategic bombing did not win the war, but the war could not have been won without it. American airpower destroyed the rail facilities and oil refineries that supplied the German war machine. The bombing campaign was a shared enterprise: The British bombed at night while American bombers attacked by day - a technique that British commanders thought was suicidal. Drawn from interviews, oral histories, and American, British, German, and other archives, this is an authoritative, deeply moving account of the world's first and only bomber war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is awesome. It is awesome because of its balanced and thorough analysis of the air war that pulverized Germany, a war now sentimentally known as "the good war" when Americans pulverized their enemies with the ease of comic book heroes. "Tain't so, Magee." Comic book heroes never had such courage. Instead, think of the 80 percent casualty rate of the US Eighth Air Force in its early years as book theory met killing reality in conditions that stagger modern imaginations. I've flown in a B-17; it is huge on the outside, inside it is a tiny tube filled with equipment, supplies and hundreds of sharp objects that hurt when you are bumped, slip or are thrown about. Think of riding inside your computer on a truck bouncing down a bumpy mountain road and having to write an A-plus story en route. So much for creature comfort. Put it all in air colder than Antarctica. Paint a big star on the side as a target, then send it into the sky for hours at a time. Soldiers on the ground sheltered in foxholes and bunkers; the skin of a B-17 was beer-can-thin aluminum. The plane is like a vast Tinkertoy riveted into an amazingly strong and yet frightfully vulnerable structure. It is a mighty aircraft, yet thin enough that a pigeon could penetrate it and injure crewmen. This is the reality of the bomber offensive. Miller presents it in awesome, chilling detail. Unlike most histories, it isn't a lone portrait of some brave men; instead, it includes chilling accounts from all. One account is of an American pilot flying with his elbows because his hands were blown off, another is of German children who roasted to death in their flaming cities.

As a WWII history buff, the highlight of my one and only trip to Europe was crossing the Dutch coast and asking myself how could the boys - and that's what they really were - of the Eighth Air Force have done this raid after raid, knowing that they were likely flying toward their own death. Until late 1944, the odds were against an 8th Air Force crew member surviving their tour. Donald L. Miller answers that question and many others in his absolutely superlative history of the American air war over Germany. (Not taking anything away from Miller's work is that suggestion that you also read Max Hasting's "Bomber Command" for a view of the very different English air war.) Miller alternates between first person accounts of crew members and their missions, the leaders, the campaign objectives, assessments of the impact of the various phases of the air war and the enemy reaction. It may sound confusing, but because of Miller's extraordinary writing and the seamless organization of his meticulously researched material, it is not. In fact, Miller does an exceptional job of conveying

the fear of the crew, the blind faith of the leaders in the doctrine of aerial bombing, the grim realities that had to be faced all down the line as men realized that the unsupported bomber was not an impregnable "Flying Fortress". Miller weaves each part of the incredibly complex air war and its combatants together. From gunners to pilots to generals to the men who selected the targets and argued over strategy, Miller allows the multiple stories to develop and blossom and then moves on to another. Miller is careful to distinguish the American campaign of "precision" bombing from the more candidly terror oriented British campaign of "area" bombing.

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