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Hell's Angels: The True Story Of The 303rd Bomb Group In World War II



Synopsis

Winner of the San Diego Book Awards for Military/Politics, this is the true story of the U.S. Eighth Air Force's legendary 303rd Bomb Group. Although the United States declared war against Germany in December 1941, a successful assault on Nazi-occupied Europe could not happen until Germany's industrial and military might were crippled. The first target was the Luftwaffe--the most powerful and battle-hardened air force in the world. The United States Army Air Forces joined with Great Britain's already-engaged Royal Air Force to launch a strategic air campaign that ultimately brought the Luftwaffe to its knees. One of the standout units of this campaign was the legendary 303rd Bomb Group--Hell's Angels. This is the 303rd's story, as told by the men who made it what it was. Taking their name from their B-17 of the same name, they became one of the most distinguished and important air combat units in history. The dramatic and terrible air battles they fought against Germany ultimately changed the course of the war. INCLUDES PHOTOS

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Winner of the San Diego Book Awards for Military/Politics. "[An] epic tale of the World War II aerial campaign over Europe. Hell's Angels is a gripping and awe-inspiring book." —Nathaniel Fick, author of *One Bullet Away* "It's all there—the boredom, the devotion, the horror and even the humor in an industrial war fought on a global scale that we'll never see again. Unit histories just do not get any better." —Barrett Tillman, author of *Whirlwind* and *Forgotten Fifteenth*. "Jay Stout is a triple-threat aviation

historian— an experienced combat aviator, a meticulous researcher and a compelling story teller. His uncanny eye for authentic detail allows Hell's Angels to be the incredible story of the 303rd Bomb Group and the bombing campaign that crippled Nazi Germany. Stout makes a hard-riden topic seem fresh and new again. Highly recommended.

—Walter J. Boyne, Author/Historian

“Jay Stout's reputation as a hard-hitting, authoritative, yet easy-to-read aviation author is upheld with this book. Readers looking for new insights and material will not be disappointed. Highly recommended.

—Donald Caldwell, author of JG 26: Top Guns of the Luftwaffe

“A well-researched, beautifully written, and deeply evocative paeon to the 303rd Heavy Bombardment Group and all the young American heavy-bomber crewmen who, from 1942 to 1945, went out, facing a high probability of death or imprisonment, to grind the German industrial base to dust.

—Eric Hammel, Author of The Road to Big Week

“Jay Stout has done a masterful job. The life and death struggles are told using the mission records, personal writings and experiences of one of the Eighth Air Force's most successful bombardment groups. All who wish a complete understanding of the role played by the Eighth Air Force and the strategic bombing of Germany should read this book.

—Keith Ferris, Artist and Military Aviation Historian

From the Hardcover edition.

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Jay A. Stout is a retired fighter pilot who works as a senior aviation analyst for one of the world's preeminent defense corporations. During his twenty-year military career he logged a remarkable 4,700 flight hours, including thirty-seven combat missions during Operation Desert Storm. His writing has been read on the floor of the U.S. Senate, and he has been widely hosted as an aviation and military expert on various television and radio news shows including Fox, NPR, and Al Jazeera. He is the author of *Unsung Eagles: True Stories of America's Citizen Airmen in the Skies of World War II*; *Fighter Group: The 352nd* “*Blue-Nosed Bastards*” in World War II; and many other military nonfiction titles.

Having read a variety of unit histories over the years, I approached this book with a little hesitation as there was always the chance this would be another of those histories which is long on detail but short on personal anecdotes and recollections by the people who were actually there. Turns out, I shouldn't have hesitated at all. I've read a few other books by Jay A. Stout and loved them all, and now I'm adding this one to that list. Starting with the humble beginnings of the 303rd Bombardment Group through it's final days in the skies over war-torn Europe, this book is a wonderful mixture of detail and personal stories. The 303rd flew over 300 missions against the Third Reich, but not all of

them are recounted in the book--it would have been about triple in size if that had been the case! Instead, Stout weaves a tale of the group as seen through the eyes of those who were there: pilots, bombardiers, navigators, gunners, radio operators, crew chiefs, maintenance personnel and administrators. Sprinkled into the mix are anecdotes from English and German civilians, as well as German military personnel who fought against the 303rd. All of these personal stories convey the hardships, danger and moments of sheer terror which the members of the 303rd endured as they played their part in bringing Hitler's Nazi empire to ruin, but there are lighter moments as well which help to balance out some of the grisly details. This book isn't short on detail, it just presents it differently than some other unit histories I've read. Being a former combat pilot himself, the author knows just what bits of information to present in order to inform the reader how things were done. While I've read many books on aerial combat and was familiar with pretty much all of the concepts and weapons discussed in the book, those who are unfamiliar with this aspect of warfare will find it very informative. Items such as anti-aircraft fire (aka flak), the Norden bombsight, gunnery basics and training, standard operations of the B-17 Flying Fortress, combat formations, and prepping a bomber for a mission are just some of the details which help the reader better understand what it took to get a bomber in the air, fly to the target, and hopefully survive. Many times, the latter did not occur and there are plenty of stories about those who either fell in combat or ended up as prisoners of war. Definitely one of the best and most entertaining unit histories I've read, and I definitely have a deeper appreciation of what the brave men of the 303rd went through. Pick this one up--you won't be disappointed!

My careers over many decades were as a journalist, public relations executive and foreign service diplomat, so I was rarely at a loss for words. But I don't have the words to fully express my pleasure in reading Jay Stout's epic work about the Hell's Angels of World War II. I flew 30 combat missions as a B-17 radio operator in 1943 and 1944. More than a half-century later, I edited and produced the 303rd Bomb Group Association's quarterly newsletter for nine years. So, with some experience in the field, I recognized his ability to get to the heart of what made a bomb group tick. He tells the true story through the eyes of the men who were there. And I was overwhelmed by the volume of research necessary for him to go beyond the 303rd to cover the Eighth Air Force and World War II. If "Hell's Angels: The True Story of the 303rd Bomb Group in World War II" doesn't make the best seller list, something is wrong with the system.

What a great story this is and an invaluable tale of our history! It gives you a whole new perspective

on World War II and the generation, many of whom are our parents and grandparents, that lived and died through it. The daily trauma of each mission that they flew is something that will open up your hearts and minds to this special generation. As you read, you will feel that you are there with this group as they take off for each mission. You will be scared along with them as they start out and be amazed at the number of aircraft that survive and the number that never return to the base at the end of the day. You will feel anxiety for the ground crew as they wait to see who will return and who will not at the end of the day. There are many, many unsung heroes in this group and a story is told that many of us never realized. It is a must for everyone's book shelf even for those who do not embrace historical accounts, this is more than that it is a story that is easy to read and understand and will tug at your heart, as you turn each page and read this amazing account of love of country and the fight for freedom at its best.

In 1942, the United States began preparations for the creation of the Eighth Air Force. Over the course of the next three years, the Eighth would grow from relative obscurity into one of the largest fighting forces of the war. Employing thousands of men and aircraft, the Eighth developed the premise of daylight precision bombing as opposed to the British doctrine of night time area bombing. One of the groups in the Eighth was the 303rd bomb group, and "Hell's Angels" tells the story of the group's formation until their last mission in April, 1945. The 303rd consisted of a cross-section of members from across the country. Some were farmers, some were laborers, and many were still in their teens. As the war progressed, these young boys honed their skills and became one of the most successful bomb groups in the Eighth. Author Jay A. Stoudt has done a masterful job in describing the 303rd bomb group. Loaded with first-person accounts from the members themselves, the reader gets a true sense of what it was like to fly a B-17 or to fight off attacks from German fighters. He describes what it was like to be crammed inside the ball turret and what it was like to be shot down and captured. Not only does Stoudt discuss the actual missions flown by the 303rd, he also discusses the human element of war, such as the loss of a bomber on their 35th and last mission, or the horrific sight of two B-17s colliding in midair. I've read many books about the air war over Germany, and "Hell's Angels" is one of the best I've read. Loaded with eyewitness accounts of the actual flights to Berlin, Cologne, and other cities, Jay Stoudt gives the reader a true look into the air war over Germany. Highly, highly recommended.

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