



The Mighty Eighth: The Air War in Europe as Told by the Men Who Fought It

By Gerald Astor

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In the skies of World War II Europe, the Eighth Air Force was a defining factor in turning the tide against the Nazis. In these gripping oral histories, the sacrifice, savagery, and supremacy of the “Mighty Eighth” is described by those who experienced it...and survived it.

At the outbreak of World War II, America was woefully unprepared for a fight, though Europe was already years into the battle. Soon, though, America's war machine was rolling out pilots, engineers, planes, and materials in astounding numbers. It was called the Eighth Air Force—and it would hit the Nazi juggernaut like a lightning bolt.

Launching a then-groundbreaking campaign of daylight bombing runs, the men of the Eighth would suffer more casualties than the entire Marine Corps in the Pacific theater. But they would also prove to be the most effective weapon against the enemy, taking out strategic targets such as munitions plants and factories that were vital to the German war effort and grinding them to a halt. In *The Mighty Eighth*, the men who fought in the greatest air war in human history tell their stories of courage and camaraderie as only those who were there can tell them.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Astor, a journalist and narrator of popular World War II historical subjects, has combed the latest published memoirs and collected numerous oral interviews to assemble what will probably be the best eyewitness account of the daytime air raids over German-occupied Europe. Besides the usual recollections of bomber and fighter pilots, he also presents the viewpoints of the air gunners and mechanics, bombardiers, and navigators who fought alongside them. Best of all, Astor has the Ernie Pyle-like knack of presenting his subjects as distinct personalities who stay in the reader's mind. The book is intelligently organized, systematically following the Eighth from its hesitant beginnings to its climax as a combat juggernaut, all the while keeping its story in perspective with the larger picture of the European war. The result is a compelling document of the air war. Recommended for all public and academic collections. Raymond L. Puffer, Edwards AFB, Cal.

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From Booklist

Though *Booklist* has reviewed Astor's last few semiannual offerings, individual libraries know whether his World War II narratives circulate. As in Astor's preceding "voices of" accounts of D-Day, Okinawa, and the Bulge, his style and method remain the same. Astor stitches together about a hundred eyewitness experiences of the combat, linking them with a workmanlike narrative of the battle's course. Here he presents the saga, frequently disastrous, of American daylight bombing against Germany. However ineffective the strategic campaign was, and historians agree it had little effect until late 1944, it was rationalized as the only contribution the U.S. could immediately make to the war while mobilization revved up. Thus, the first part of Astor's story is a pathetic one of small numbers of B-17s facing long odds of survival against flak and swarms of ME-109s, phasing into a more successful period as fighters arrived to protect the bombers. Riveting vignettes of dogfights and destruction for active World War II collections. *Gilbert Taylor*

From Kirkus Reviews

The history of the celebrated Eighth Air Force in WW II, by one of the leading chroniclers of that war Astor (Crisis in the Pacific, 1996, etc.) writes of the US/British agreement on the need for strategic bombing to destroy the war-making power of Nazi Germany as a prelude to a massive frontal assault by Allied troops on Fortress Europe. The US was to use precision bombing in daytime (to spare civilians) while the RAF would do "area bombing" at night. The Eighth, set up in England by generals Arnold, Spaatz, and Eaker had few planes and crews in place in January 1942, when Germany's enormous air power and anti-aircraft defenses were strongest. An early raid on Brest cost the loss of 10 planes and 100 men. It would get worse. As the US buildup grew, appalling losses of planes and crews from "maximum effort" raids alarmed the generals. During the bombing of Hamburg the Eighth's losses were 88 planes and 880 men. Few airmen could expect to survive their prescribed 35 missions. Generals Le May and Doolittle (who replaced Eaker) brought innovative tactics to reduce the human and materiel costs. Astor recounts the many raids with clarity and vigor, traces the evolution of tactics, and captures the hard experiences of these young men in combat, on the ground, and in enemy camps. His many interviews of American airmen turn up some fascinating anecdotes, catching the grim realities of air combat in a way that more conventional strategic histories cannot. After V-E Day, the Eighth, having played a crucial role in the Allied victory, flew humanitarian missions, bringing food and medical supplies to starving civilians and POWs. Revealing and vivid personal sketches of the quiet heroes in a unit that suffered more lives lost than the entire Marine Corps in WW II. (16 pages b&w photos, not seen) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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