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B-17 Memphis Belle (Images Of War)



Synopsis

Without doubt Boeing Flying Fortress B-17F 41-42285 Memphis Belle and her crew generate an image that is an all-American icon. Indeed, it has been claimed that the Memphis Belle is in the top five of the most famous American aircraft of all time. In September, 1942, a new Flying Fortress was delivered at Bangor, Maine, to a crew of ten eager American lads headed by Robert K. Morgan, a lanky 24-year-old USAAF pilot from Asheville, N. C. The boys climbed aboard, flew their ship to Memphis, Tenn. and christened her Memphis Belle in honor of Morgan's fiancée, Miss Margaret Polk of Memphis, and then headed across the Atlantic to join the US Eighth Air Force in England. Between November 7 1942 and May 17 1943 they flew the Memphis Belle over Hitler's Europe twenty-five times. They dropped more than 60 tons of bombs on targets in Germany, France and Belgium. They blasted the Focke-Wulf plant at Bremen, locks at St. Nazaire and Brest, docks and shipbuilding installations at Wilhelmshaven, railway yards at Rouen, submarine pens and power houses at Lorient, and airplane works at Antwerp. They shot down eight enemy fighters, probably got five others and damaged at least a dozen. Memphis Belle flew through all the flak that Hitler could send up to them. She slugged it out with Goering's Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs. She was riddled by machine gun and cannon fire. Once she returned to base with most of her tail shot away. German guns destroyed a wing and five engines. Her fuselage was shot to pieces but Memphis Belle kept going back. The Memphis Belle crew has been decorated 51 times. Each of the 10 has received the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and three Oak Leaf Clusters. The 51st award was Sergeant Quinlan's Purple Heart.

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Customer Reviews

Excellent and concise history of the legendary WWII B-17F "Memphis Belle" with an extensive collection of photos of the plane, her flight and ground crews during her combat service, the attendant PR hype, the War Bonds tour, the Wm. Wyler WWII film,, and what happened to the "Belle" post war. This book is a must for 8th Air Force aficionados. The reason the book did not get 5 stars is the absence of any color photos within the book. The only color images are on the back cover. The lack of an index is also a negative..

Excellent book and background on a brave crew and proud plane.

A lot of interesting facts that I did not know before. Great book!

The MEMPHIS BELLE is the most famous B-17 ever produced. Allegedly the first 8th Air Force Flying Fort to complete 25 missions, it assumed almost mythic status, inspired a classic William Wyler documentary and subsequent wide-screen remake in 1990. Graham Simons examines the bomber's true record in B-17 MEMPHIS BELLE, one of the Pen & Sword IMAGES OF WARS series. As many aviation enthusiasts now know, some of that record was false or misleading. The BELLE was not the first 8th AF B-17 to survive 25 missions, HELL'S ANGELS from the 303rd BG took that honor. THUNDERBIRD, also from the 303rd, was the second runner-up followed by the BELLE. Air Force brass selected the BELLE to take the honors; William Wyler and 8th AF PR staffers creating the BELLE myth. Likewise, the men who flew the BELLE on her 25th mission had not flown all 25 missions in that bird; they were a make-up crew of 91st BG crewmen who had completed 25 missions. For example, Jim Verinis, Bob Morgan's 'co-pilot,' had flown 20 missions as first pilot in another B-17! Smoke and mirrors! Or, as a character in a John Ford movie once said: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Simons does a fair job of relating the BELLE story. I was disappointed in the chapter detailing the Belle's combat career; it was disjointed and

incomplete. He does a better job describing the subsequent war bond tour stateside and Wyler's efforts in creating his BELLE documentary. Although Simons updates the aircraft's later wanderings to 2011, I wish he had included details on, at least, Morgan and Margaret Polk. The best thing Simons' book has going for it is the wonderful collection of b&w photographs showing the BELLE throughout the years. Many rare candid photos can be found in the book. If the text is uneven, it's obvious a lot of research went into its production. So, four stars for this photo tribute to a legendary 8th AF warbird. Recommended.

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