



Blood and Fears: How America's Bomber Boys of the 8th Air Force Saved World War II by Kevin Wilson.

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Blood and Fears is a fine introduction to portions of the history of the US 8th Air Force. Stationed in England, the 8th carried out most of the long-range bombing missions against Germany. The book's author, prolific journalist Kevin Wilson,¹ examines chronologically the strategic, operational, and tactical employment of the 8th Air Force from winter 1944 until the end of the war, omitting the first eighteen months of that story. In the process, he tells the myriad human interest stories of the bomber crews both in action and awaiting their missions. As in his earlier books, Wilson shows a fair command of relevant primary and archival sources, apparent in his thorough endnotes. In short, *Blood and Fears* is a popular history based on some scholarly research.

This balanced account of the 8th Air Force highlights moments of moral tension over the bombing of cities (384) but steers clear of historiographical debates about the dogmatism of some Army Air Forces leaders. This may disappoint those familiar with other works on the 8th Air Force. And, too, Wilson makes statements that tend to the rhetorical, which can be distracting. For example, at the start of one chapter he claims that "air power would finally determine the outcome" (184) of joint operations in Normandy. Yet he concludes the chapter by highlighting a well known incident at Saint Lô when bombers inflicted heavy friendly-fire casualties (197).

The volume's title is misleading, for the author nowhere argues that the 8th Air Force "saved" World War II. One suspects the publisher chose the title, since Wilson more than once credits the contributions of the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command (151, 202, 322), while pointing out the continuing imprecision of the Army Air Force's bombing raids, despite rhetoric to the contrary (380). He gives special attention to the attacks on Berlin throughout. Useful maps that show, for instance, flak zones over Germany, offer further insights into the air war.

Though it lacks a "thesis" per se, the book does feature a leitmotif focused on fear, reinforced in countless anecdotes told by the airmen—quoted at length—regarding their combat experiences. Their descriptions of the gruesome realities of combat can be a bit excessive.

There are, however, many humorous anecdotes; in one, a bomber pilot took the northern route to England and "buzz[ed] Yankee Stadium" (33) during the World Series; in another, a staff sergeant and Yale graduate "failed his officers' course for insufficient parade ground skills" (138).

Besides bomber crews themselves, Wilson tells the more encompassing story of support personnel from local villages.

In the late afternoon of 26 September the red "mission alert" flag went up at Tibenham once more to prevent personnel leaving the base. The highly detailed process now began of preparing men and machines for combat. The minutiae of war required more clerks than heroes. (236-37)

1. His earlier work includes *Blood and Fears: How America's Bomber Boys and Girls in England Won Their War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2016); *Airborne in 1943: The Daring Allied Air Campaign over the North Sea* (NY: Pegasus Books, 2018); and *Men of Air: The Courage and Sacrifice of Bomber Command in World War II* (id., 2019).

Although there are more thorough and scholarly works on his subject,² Kevin Wilson is to be commended for writing a most engaging and vivid account that will carry non-specialist readers into the world of the US 8th Air Force in the Second World War.

2. E.g., Donald Miller's *Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War against Nazi Germany* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2006) is a more detailed treatment of the role of US bombers in the European theater, and Mark K. Wells's *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (1999; rpt. NY: Routledge, 2013) offers a more rigorous analysis of the aircrews' psychological experiences from both individual and institutional perspectives.