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Rob Morris and Ian Hawkins. The Wild Blue Yonder and Beyond: The 95th Bomb Group in War and Peace

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Received PhD from Marquette University

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Rob Morris and Ian Hawkins. *The Wild Blue Yonder and Beyond: The 95th Bomb Group in War and Peace* (Sterling, Va.: Potomac Press, 2012). 400 pp. Cloth \$39.95.

The 95th Bomb Group Memorial Foundation and its Unit History Committee commissioned Rob Morris to research and write the history of this American fighting company, which was the most highly decorated bomb group to participate in the Second World War. With this book being a product of such a request, it is understandable that a reader might worry that the author would pay homage to the group rather than write an unbiased history. The pleasant surprise is that while this book does praise the group's bravery, compassion, and sense of camaraderie, it does not paint over its less endearing moments. The best example of telling the raw truth occurs with the air raid on Münster on October 10, 1943. The raid posed ethical dilemmas for the American bomber crews. Until Münster, the air corps had been committed to a concept of daylight precision bombing, limiting targets to military and industrial facilities. Münster was different: they would hit the center of that city, the homes of the working population of those marshaling yards. The aim was to disrupt their lives so completely that the morale of those affected would be so diminished their will to work and fight will substantially reduce. Morris notes the pilots felt horrible—but they bombed civilians anyway. The Münster mission was their contribution to the battles of Black Sunday.

The book is a collaborative effort between Rob Morris, a high school history teacher, and historian Ian Hawkins, who read and vetted every line. The end result is a work written with the enthusiasm of a fan and the critical eyes of two historians. To tell the story of the bomb group properly, the authors do not focus solely on the pilots. They also tell the story of the small village of Horham, Suffolk, in East Anglia, that became the bombing group's home in 1943. The relationship between the American airmen and English locals is well captured through multiple anecdotes. They also make sure to tell the story of the ground crews and all members of the 95th. This was important to the men and families who commissioned the book, as the group always held everybody on base played an important role. A great deal of space is also given to the emotional toll on the wives left behind.

In detailing a history of the 95th Bomb Group, Morris ties their

story to the larger narrative of the war, not only through discussion of their role in the great offensives, but how downed and captured pilots survived as prisoners of war. By far the most interesting part of the book is dedicated to these men when they were taken prisoner of war, as 64 men of the group were interned in neutral countries, and 805 became prisoners of war. Because Switzerland was officially neutral during the war; American airmen landing there were not classified as prisoners of war. Instead, they were internees, meaning they could not leave but they were not subject to harsh confinement. Men fortunate enough to crash in Switzerland lived out the war in relative comfort in resort villages high in the Swiss Alps. The authors carefully note that there were no known examples of airmen crashing in Switzerland on purpose to avoid the hardships of war. Prisoners of war in Germany endured much worse conditions, but they could have been even more horrid compared to the concentration camps that also existed in Germany at the time. Independent of interference of the more hard-core elements of the Reich, such as the SS or Gestapo, the Luftwaffe administered the *stalag lufts* (air prisons) camps, which housed only flying personnel. An unwritten code of chivalry among fliers that went all the way to the top of the Luftwaffe protected the airmen. Göring, himself a highly decorated fighter pilot in the First World War, and most of those under his command went to great lengths to protect captured airmen, to the point where even Jewish airmen who made it into the Luftwaffe's hands survived their POW experiences and returned after the war. As there was really nothing much to do "inside the wire" boredom, hunger, and uncertainty soon became the POWs biggest enemy. Rob Morris captures the anxiety associated with such inactivity the same way he brings to life the whole book—dozens of stories taken from hundreds of interviews and detailed research.

~ Candice Quinn

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