



Operation Thunderclap and the Black March: Two Stories from the Unstoppable 91st Bomb Group

Richard Allison

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From the bomb group that brought forth the bomber Memphis Belle and the movie Twelve O'clock High comes a final epic from the air war in Europe...

In February 1945, the Allies launched Operation Thunderclap, a series of maximum efforts against cities in eastern Germany, partly to pave the way for the Red Army that would soon be overrunning that territory. These deep-penetration raids would tax the bomber crews immensely, as well as bring new devastation to cities yet untouched by U.S. airpower.

Two B-17 crew members, a co-pilot and gunner, trained together in Gulfport, MS, and in fall 1944 were assigned to the longest-serving and most decorated U.S. bomb group in England. However, their paths then diverged. The co-pilot flew 31 missions until war's end; the gunner was shot down and captured on his very first combat mission. These crew members both lived—one through Thunderclap and one through the Black March—and this is their story: an account of both constant air combat and travail on the ground.

This work includes a firsthand view of the bombing of Dresden, perhaps the worst cataclysm inflicted by bombers in the West. The co-pilot participated in these attacks, where he witnessed a city already too far destroyed to expend additional bombs. Meantime the gunner, shot down and parachuting into enemy territory, was taken prisoner by the Germans, and then forced to endure "The Black March," an effort by the Nazis to move all their prisoners beyond the Red Army's advancing spearheads. Of 6,000 Allied POWs put on the roads from northern Poland, in a 500-mile, three-month trek, a quarter died due to the elements, disease and starvation.

The gunner survived the March, and once the sands ran out for Germany experienced a period in Soviet captivity. During the day he thought their men behaved; but after dark there was chaos as the Red Army wreaked its revenge. This unique book on the Allied air campaign offers new insights into what our fliers truly saw and experienced during the war.

REVIEWS

This book tells two stories for two individuals—but, in truth it is a story shared by thousands! Well written and once started—hard to put down!

Airborne Quarterly

Combined in one volume are the sagas of two B-17 Flying Fortress crew members. Addison Bartush, was a copilot, Paul Lynch a waist gunner. Richard Allison, a retired US Navy captain and lawyer, conducted extensive interviews to document Bartush's flying experience and Lynch's ground pounding ordeal. The result is a touching narrative of heroism and resilience

Aviation History, 2015 Summer/ Fall

Mr. Allison has written a gripping, true story of two WWII USAAF veterans that makes you feel you were there. Vicariously experiencing their good times and bad, their hopes and fears, you won't be able to put the book down. As a retired Navy Captain, I enthusiastically recommend this thoroughly researched and superbly written account of these two, unassuming war veterans from the Greatest Generation.
Glenn R. Brown, JAGC, USNR (RET)

Allison presents readers with an oral history of two B-17 crew-members serving in most decorated U.S. bomber group in England, in the waning days of the European Theater of World War II. One of the crew-members, a co-pilot, flew thirty-one successful missions, including in Operation Thunderclap and the allied bombing of Dresden, Germany. The other crew-member, a gunner, was shot down, parachuted into enemy territory, was captured, forced to endure the Nazi's black march away from the advancing Soviets, and was eventually in Soviet captivity as the war drew to an end. Both accounts are first person and provide personal insights into the war.

Protoview

A vivid portrayal of the horrors of war through the eyes of brave soldiers, Operation Thunderclap and the Black March is a welcome addition to World War II history shelves.

Midwest Book Review

... an ambitious and worthwhile book,... poignant and inspiring stories of two young American pilots of the Second World War.

Michigan War Studies Review 2015-073

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