



The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany 1944-45

By Stephen E. Ambrose

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The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany 1944-45 By Stephen E. Ambrose

Stephen E. Ambrose, acclaimed author of *Band of Brothers* and *Undaunted Courage*, carries us along in the crowded and dangerous B-24s as their crews fought to destroy the German war machine during World War II.

The young men who flew the B-24s over Germany in World War II fought against horrific odds, and, in *The Wild Blue*, Ambrose recounts their extraordinary heroism, skill, daring, and comradeship with vivid detail and affection.

Ambrose describes how the Army Air Forces recruited, trained, and selected the elite few who would undertake the most demanding and dangerous jobs in the war. These are the boys—turned pilots, bombardiers, navigators, and gunners of the B-24s—who suffered over fifty percent casualties.

With his remarkable gift for bringing alive the action and tension of combat, Ambrose carries us along in the crowded, uncomfortable, and dangerous B-24s as their crews fought to the death through thick black smoke and deadly flak to reach their targets and destroy the German war machine. Twenty-two-year-old George McGovern, who was to become a United States senator and a presidential candidate, flew thirty-five combat missions (all the Army would allow) and won the Distinguished Flying Cross. We meet him and his mates, his co-pilot killed in action, and crews of other planes. Many went down in flames.

As *Band of Brothers* and *Citizen Soldiers* portrayed the bravery and ultimate victory of the American soldiers from Normandy on to Germany, *The Wild Blue* illustrates the enormous contribution that these young men of the Army Air Forces made to the Allied victory.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Long before he entered politics, when he was just in his early 20s, South Dakotan George McGovern flew 35 bomber missions over Nazi-occupied Europe, earning a Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery under fire. Stephen Ambrose, the industrious historian, focuses on McGovern and the young crew of his B-24 bomber, volunteers all, in this vivid study of the air war in Europe.

Manufactured by a consortium of companies that included Ford Motor and Douglas Aircraft, the B-24 bomber, dubbed the Liberator, was designed to drop high explosives on enemy positions well behind the front lines--and especially on the German capital, Berlin. Unheated, drafty, and only lightly armored, the planes were dangerous places to be, and indeed, only 50 percent of their crews survived to the war's end. Dangerous or not, they did their job, delivering thousand- pound bombs to targets deep within Germany and Austria.

In his fast-paced narrative, Ambrose follows many other flyers (including the Tuskegee Airmen, the African American pilots who gave the B-24s essential fighter support on some of their most dangerous missions) as they brave the long odds against them, facing moments of glory and terror alike. "It would be an exaggeration to say that the B-24 won the war for the Allies," Ambrose writes. "But don't ask how they could have won the war without it." --*Gregory McNamee*

From Publishers Weekly

Brought to life by best-selling historian Ambrose (author of more than 20 books), here is one of America's forgotten workhorse weapons of WWII the B-24 bomber. Carrying a heavier payload than the glamorous B-17 Flying Fortress, the B-24, nicknamed the Liberator, also filled the skies over Germany, bombing troops, oil refineries, factories and other strategic targets. South Dakota-born George S. McGovern was 22 when he became a B-24 pilot in the 741st Bomb Squadron, based in Cerignola, Italy. Though basing the book largely on McGovern's 35 missions, for which he won the Distinguished Flying Cross, Ambrose includes many other stories about the men who flew over Germany and eastern Europe. As Ambrose makes abundantly clear, the planes were not fun to fly. The crew faced inside temperatures of 50 below zero, sat in cramped seats and suffered high casualty rates. Ambrose follows pilots and crews from start to finish where they were from, their backgrounds, training, bravery and heroism as they did their part to help win the war. Today there are only four B-24s left of the 18,300 that once made up the force. While this book leans largely toward hagiography of the everymen it depicts, it also clearly refutes lies spread about McGovern's service during the 1972 presidential campaign. Photos not seen by PW. (Aug.)Forecast: Any book with the Ambrose name should do a short stint on bestseller lists; this one should pick up some (largely unrelated) momentum from the Pearl Harbor anniversary and film. The book's release coincides with the airing of a 10-part Dreamworks/HBO series based on Ambrose's *Band of Brothers*.

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From Library Journal

A distinguished author whose recent works include *Band of Brothers* and *Citizen Soldiers*, which also focus on World War II, Ambrose prefers to tell history from the average soldier's point of view. This book follows that formula. Ironically, the main character in this war book is George McGovern, who flew 35 combat

missions and won the Distinguished Flying Cross but would later become a dovish Democratic candidate for president in 1972. The book follows the training of the 22-year-old McGovern and his friends through their deployment into Italy in 1944-45. Those who made it through the demanding and often dangerous training courses would have to face the even more perilous routine of flying a B24 bomber into the heavily defended skies over Germany. Many B24 flight crews never returned. The mental fatigue of flying so many stressful missions was almost as bad as the physical danger. With books like this, Ambrose has certainly struck a popular chord. The World War II generation is thinning daily, and everyone's story should be told including McGovern's. Ambrose's narrative flows smoothly, even as he manages to cover each man's story.

Recommended for public and academic libraries and subject specialists.

- *Mark Ellis, Albany State Univ., GA*

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Users Review

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