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Robert Morgan and Ron Powers. *The Man Who Flew the Memphis Belle, Memoir of a WW II Bomber Pilot*. New York: Dutton, 2001.

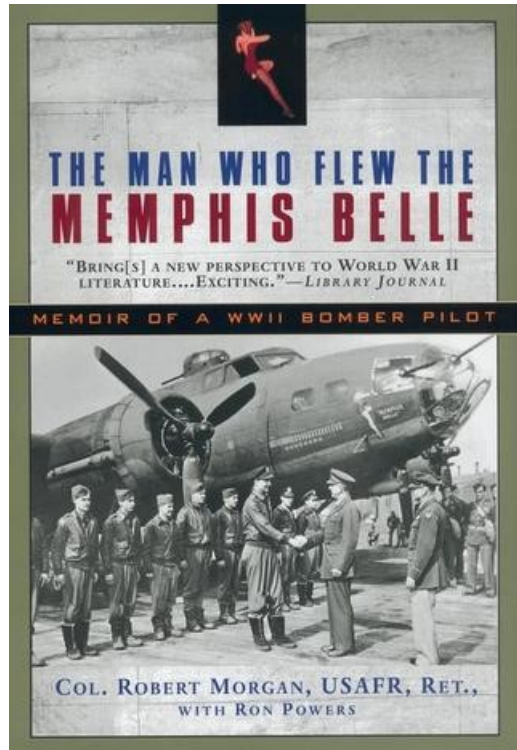
Book Review

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In the early part of the air campaign against Germany, 1942, the 91st Bomb Group, part of the 324th Bomb Squadron and Eighth Air Force suffered eighty percent losses. Daytime bombing raids provided visible targets for German ground defenses and the absence of long-range fighter escort meant the B-17s and B-24s had to defend against German Messerschmitt 109s and Focke-Wulf 190s on their own. To boost morale, the Army Air Force offered an incentive. If a crew could complete twenty-five missions, for them, the war was over (p. 8). The Army Air Force recognized the crew of the B-17 *Memphis Belle*, piloted by Capt. Robert Morgan, as the first to complete twenty-five missions



over Europe, and return to the United States. In addition to his service in Europe, Morgan flew twenty-six missions in a B-29 over Japan. Because Morgan described both tours of duty, the reader can compare the attributes of both the B-17 and B-29 and contrast the difficulties pilots had to face in both the Pacific and European theaters.

Ron Powers co-authored *The Man Who Flew the Memphis Belle*. Powers, together with James Bradley also co-authored *Flags of our Fathers*. The first two

chapters described Morgan's childhood and experiences in Biltmore Forest, North Carolina. Some social elites lived there and among them were the Vanderbilts who befriended his family. Fast cars, bathtub gin, and beautiful women kept the young playboy busy, and were it not for his family's high society connections he might have found himself spending weekends in jail rather than speeding down to Asheville, NC in his father's Buick Century (p. 41). Nevertheless, the events of 1940 such as the British evacuation at Dunkirk in May, the fall of France in June, and the Battle of Britain that began in July, led Morgan to believe that America would soon enter the war. In November 1940, Morgan applied to the Army Air Corps (p. 42). Military life did not destroy his irreverent mannerism, and that may be why he was able to assemble such a strong B-17 crew. A biography of each of the eleven crewmembers of the *Memphis Belle* allows the reader to analyze their personalities and responsibilities in and out of combat. They all receive praise, but three members of his crew earned additional press. First, co-pilot Capt. Jim Verinis, for his piloting skills, and for returning from London with what became the crew's mascot; a black Scottish terrier he named Stuka after the terrifying German dive-bomber. Second, bombardier Captain Vince B. Evans, received great praise for effectively employing the Norden bombsight. He also served as a bombardier in the *Dauntless Dotty*, Morgan's B-29. Lastly, tail gunner S/Sgt. John P. Quinlan received recognition for consistent accuracy with his twin .50 caliber machine guns he named Pete and Re-peat (p. 107).

Morgan described each of the *Memphis Belle's* twenty-five missions, some in greater detail than others. For example, the first mission, bombing the U-Boat pens at Brest on 7 November 1942, was uneventful compared to the third mission, bombing the U-Boat pens at St. Nazaire on 17 November 1942. At St. Nazaire, the Luftwaffe was ready for them and sent up over one-hundred fighters (p. 122). Indeed, the Messerschmitt 109s play a large role in the fighter attacks, but it was the Focke-Wulf 190s that the crew of the *Memphis Belle* respected the most. Morgan described how his crew countered the Fw 190s and how a tight formation was critical to success. By the end of the third mission, the action becomes intense because by this time the Army Air Force eliminated evasive action as a means of escape. As such, the bombing raids became more effective and deadly for both sides.

As the Luftwaffe started to suffer losses, their pilots became noticeably less skilled and desperate. For example, the Germans used Ju-88s to bomb B-17 formations from above (p. 168). The fanaticism increased as the bombing runs crept deeper into German-occupied territory and Germany itself. Nevertheless, the *Memphis Belle* completed its twenty-fifth mission on 17 May 1942, and returned

home for a thirty-one city, three-month public relations tour that included a reunion with Morgan's sweetheart Margaret Polk for whom the *Memphis Belle* takes its name.

With the public relations tour over, Morgan turned to service in the Pacific flying a B-29. He first became aware of the B-29 on the tour's stop in Wichita, Kansas. Brigadier General Kenneth B. Wolfe introduced him to the still-secret bomber, and provided him with the contacts necessary to secure an assignment flying it. Chapters 18 through 21 cover his service in the Pacific, and because of Morgan's earlier description of his service in Europe, readers can contrast the attributes of B-17 and B-29 as well as the European and Pacific bombing campaigns. For example, the weather is quite different and that brought new challenges. Rather than fog and clouds, Morgan and the crew of the *Dauntless Doty* had to combat the relentless crosswinds that the Japanese called the "Divine Winds." These winds consistently pushed their bombs off target. Furthermore, the flights were longer. Tokyo is fifteen-hundred miles from Saipan (p. 287). That is nearly four times the length of the *Memphis Belle's* twenty-first mission; bombing the Focke-Wulf factory in Bremen, Germany. And, while Morgan no longer had to contend with the hated Fw 190s, he now had to counter swarms of A6M Zeros. And indeed, the famous durability of the B-17 becomes clear when a B-29 tried to ditch and comes apart killing the crew that included his friend Waddy Young (p. 295). Furthermore, the reliability of the B-17s Wright R-1820s engines compared favorably to the B-29's Wright R-3350s that were prone to overheat.

Oddly, though the B-29 was a high altitude, long-range bomber, it was at a low altitude where it began to inflict heavy damage to Japanese cities. To counter the crosswinds, on 9 March 1945, three-hundred B-29s set out to firebomb Tokyo at an altitude of 5,000 to 7,500 feet, close enough to smell the burning bodies below (p. 311). The napalm and magnesium had done their job and Morgan's retelling of that night is perhaps the most chilling in the entire book.

The last section of the book discusses his life and career after the war, and also the story of how the *Memphis Belle* survived. The Mayor of Memphis was the first to keep it from the scrapyards, then the Memphis American Legion Post No. 1 found a home for her at the Memphis National Guard Armory in 1950. Later, the *Memphis Belle* found a champion in Frank Donofrio who was instrumental in organizing the Memphis Belle Association, which, through donations, constructed a pavilion for the *Memphis Belle* at Mud Island in 1987. Even so, this was not the last trip for the *Memphis Belle*. The famous B-17 is now on display in the WWII hanger of the National Museum of the United States Air

Force in Dayton, Ohio.

If one is expecting a formal tone, they will not find it in this book. Morgan's tone becomes serious when he describes his bombing missions and the loss of his friends and family, but outside of this, his tone is informal. Furthermore, an error designated the Stuka dive-bomber as the Junkers 88 rather than the Junkers 87, and this creates confusion for the reader (p. 170). Though the book does include an appendix and bibliography, it does not include an index. Nevertheless, the reader will find information relevant to research in the bombing campaigns of both the European and Pacific theatres and the attributes of both the B-17 and B-29.