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N. Jack “Dusty” Kleiss, Timothy J. Orr and Laura Lawfer Orr. *Never Call Me a Hero: A Legendary Dive-Bomber Pilot Remembers the Battle of Midway*. New York: Harper Collings, 2017.

Book Review

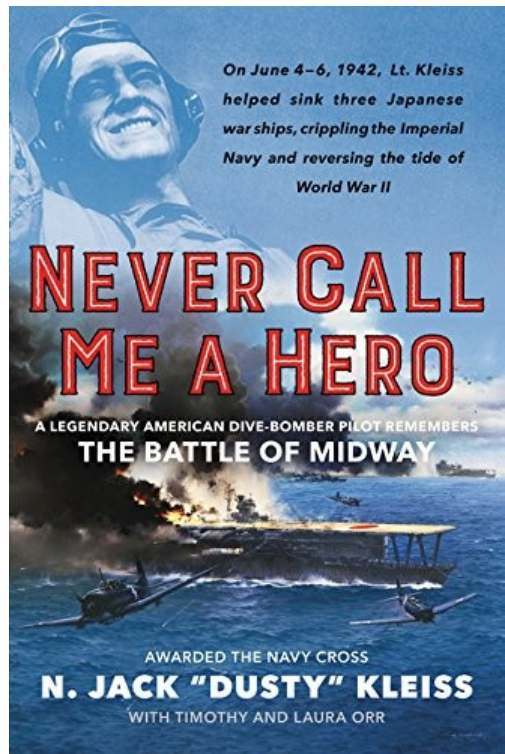
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Captain Norman Jack “Dusty” Kleiss of the United States Navy piloted an SBD Dauntless dive-bomber at the Battle of Midway, June 4, 1942. He was a member of Scouting Six and attached to the USS *Enterprise*. During his time on *Enterprise*, he lost close friends. For example, on May 20, 1942, a mishap on take-off caused ENS William P. West’s SBD to stall and fall into the ocean. As he tried to escape the sinking SBD, his boot tangled in the antenna wire and the sinking plane drowned him. Kleiss witnessed the entire event. In another incident, his friends ENS Frank Woodrow O’Flaherty and AMM I/C Bruno Frank ran out of fuel over the Pacific and ditched their SBD.

The Japanese captured them. After interrogation, they tied weights to their feet and threw them overboard (p. 235). To suppress what he had experienced, he distanced himself from Midway the remainder of his naval career. He retired in 1962 (p. xiv). As the public’s interest in the Battle of Midway grew, so did the interest in his stories. He told them, but focused on the actions of his fallen friends. He waited until the end of his life, a life that spanned one hundred years, to tell his story.



Because it is a story of Kleiss's life rather than a battle narrative, *Never Call Me a Hero* offers something for the researcher, the aviation enthusiast, the student of the war in the South-Pacific, and the romantic.

Kleiss was a meticulous record-keeper; he kept his log book, action reports, his diary and letters (p. xv). His good record keeping provided a valuable collection of primary sources for him and his co-writers Timothy J. Orr and Laura Lawfer Orr. Timothy J. Orr is an Associate Professor of Military History at Old Dominion University and Laura Lawfer Orr is the deputy education director at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum. The book begins with his childhood in Coffeyville, Kansas, the town where the Dalton Gang met their demise in 1892. The stories of his childhood adventures make it clear he was a daredevil from the beginning, and his account of his time at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, is telling of what life was like for an ambitious midshipman in the 1930s. The hazing, the constant studying, and the obligatory two years of service in the surface fleet that included cruises on the cruiser USS *Vincennes*, and the destroyers USS *Goff* and *Yarnall* help shape the soon to be naval aviator (p.60).

Kleiss's flight training as a dive-bomber provides a glimpse at the stubborn resistance to change, and the suspicion those that embraced change received. Torpedo planes and dive-bombers threatened to make the battleship obsolete—something certain admirals did not wish to consider. Because of this, pilots had to demonstrate their determination—more than most. Kleiss described this attitude when he began training in the SBD at Ford Island once the Navy transferred him to the USS *Enterprise* (p. 88).

Aviation enthusiasts can expect a thorough review of the SBD Dauntless's capabilities as well as some of its lesser-known peculiarities. For example, the possibility exists of the forward guns firing at full auto when the pilot switched off the safety. Thus, the rule was to switch the safety off only seconds before firing or risk losing all one's fifty-caliber ammunition (p. 131). The SBD-2 had flotation bags that would unexpectedly inflate during flight and cause the plane to crash. Furthermore, each squadron had their own style of dive bombing. Scouting Six, for instance, preferred to initiate a dive at seventy-five degrees rather than the standard sixty-five degrees (p.135). Perhaps the most famous feature of the SBD was its perforated braking flaps. Kleiss discussed their effectiveness and their dependability. For example, he once put his SBD into a dive to escape Japanese fighters. When his attackers followed, he opened both flaps. His SBD slowed so fast that the three attacking Japanese fighters flew past him (p.143). Because Kleiss flew both the SBD-2 and the SBD-3, the reader is

privity to the differences and how the differences influenced the success of a mission. One difference was the new self-sealing fuel tanks on the SBD-3. They compared favorably against SBD-2 unprotected tanks that often caught fire when hit (p. 154).

Kleiss described his involvement in the Battle of the Marshall Islands, Wake, and Marcus Islands and finally, the Battle of Midway. In the chapter on the Battle of the Marshall Islands, he recalled his four-part dive-bombing technique, and how it earned him a hit on the Japanese cruiser *Katori*. For the air raids over Wake and Marcus Islands, Kleiss flew the SBD-3, and it included the YE-ZB homing radio that allowed pilots to lock in on their home carriers. Each carrier had a different code transmitted in Morse code. By listening for the code, the pilot could then determine the correct direction of his ship. He used all his experience and the advances in technology at Midway.

For students of the Battle of Midway, Kleiss provided a thrilling and detailed account of the morning battle and his hit on *Kaga* (p. 202). And for the afternoon attack and his hit on *Hiryu*, he provided the same powerful narrative (p.220). One attribute that sets this account of Midway from others, such as Stephen L. Moore's *Pacific Payback*, is the criticism LCDR Clarence Wade McClusky received. McClusky's unsuccessful attack on his initial dive on *Kaga* could have been disastrous because trailing pilots, only seconds behind, made adjustments based on their leader's hit or miss. McClusky's miss was so wide that those who followed him in the dive might not have been able to get back on target. Nevertheless, because fuel was a concern before the squadrons left *Enterprise*, McClusky received a stern reproach for his decision to fly at 190 knots rather than the standard cruising speed of 160 knots (p. 195). His decision may well be why some pilots had to ditch their planes. Furthermore, Kleiss described how one's placement in the formation affected fuel consumption. Those in the rear of the formation used more fuel because they had to match their leader's flight path—every alteration used fuel. McClusky, a fighter pilot, may not have considered this. Nevertheless, this criticism is minor compared to that which the Admirals received for arming the TBD Devastators with Mark-13 torpedoes. The Mark-13s had proved completely ineffective at the Marshall Islands as well as Wake and Marcus Islands. Nevertheless, before the morning attack, the Devastators had Mark-13s attached. Stunned, Kleiss looked for his best friend on *Enterprise*, Tom Eversole, of Torpedo Six. In a heart-breaking account, he wished Tom luck and said goodbye; both men knew most of Torpedo Six would not be returning (p. 186). Kleiss was so shocked at the decision to use Mark-13s that he suggested someone aboard the *Enterprise* altered the action reports to hide the Mark-13's

ineffectiveness (p. 149). It is these types of arguments, and a straightforward, honest tone, that makes this telling of Midway fresh and vibrant.

Kleiss weaved in letters to and from his sweetheart Eunice Marie Mochaon, whom he nicknamed Jean. He often wrote letters just before leaving on a mission and the one he wrote the day before Midway is especially touching (p. 181). Through these letters and the description of his courtship, the reader is privy to the family obligations both had to consider before marriage. Mochaon's parents were French-Canadian and practicing Catholics while Kleiss's father John was a stern Methodist and did not want his son marrying a Catholic girl. Even so, it is apparent his father was not always so harsh. A good example of this was when his father got behind the wheel of his son's new 1940 Ford Coupe on the open road, "This Ford has more power to it than my Mercury!" (p. 69).

Though Kleiss does reference other works in the text such as Clearance Dickenson's serialized memoir, "I Fly for Vengeance," the book is missing a bibliography or works cited page. Furthermore, of the three maps included in the book, the second and third maps are difficult to read in greyscale. Nevertheless, the book is accessible to those who know little about the Battle of Midway, but at the same time provides a first-hand account for those who do. The book is more than a battle narrative; it is an account of Kleiss's life. As such, it includes his great deeds as well as his missteps. And with the modesty his generation is known for, Kleiss makes one request, "Dear reader, please be generous to me, but never call me a hero. During the Pacific War, I did my job and that's it" (p. xvii).