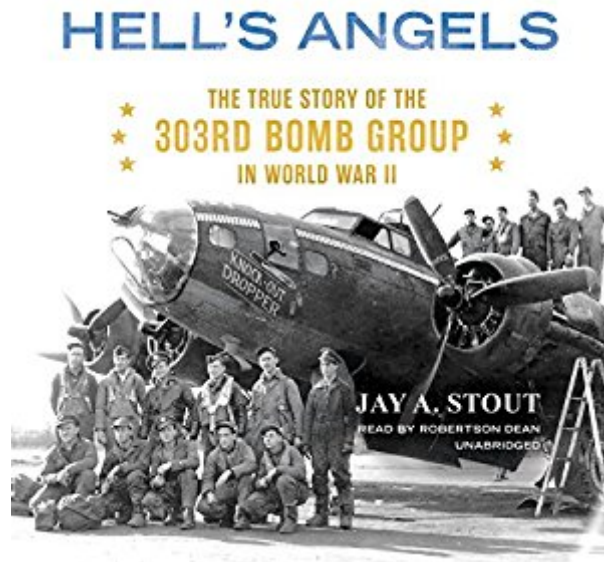


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# Hell's Angels: The True Story Of The 303rd Bomb Group In World War II



## Synopsis

During the air battles that destroyed Nazi Germany's ability to wage war, one bomb group was especially distinguished. The Hell's Angels. At the outbreak of World War II, the United States was in no way prepared to wage war. Although the US declared war against Germany in December 1941, the country lacked the manpower, the equipment, and the experience it needed to fight. Even had an invasion force been ready, a successful assault on Nazi-occupied Europe could not happen until Germany's industrial and military might were crippled. Because no invasion could happen without air superiority, the first target was the Luftwaffe - the most powerful and battle-hardened airforce in the world. To this end, the United States Army Air Forces joined with Great Britain's already-engaged Royal Air Force to launch a strategic air campaign that ultimately brought the Luftwaffe to its knees. One of the standout units of this campaign was the legendary 303rd Bomb Group - a.k.a. Hell's Angels. This is the 303rd's story, as told by the men who made it what it was. Taking their name from their B-17 of the same name, they became one of the most distinguished and important air combat units in history. The dramatic and terrible air battles they fought against Germany changed the course of the war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have just become a Jay A. Stout fan! What a story! I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in any aspect of WW II history. For those of us who didn't serve in WW II and didn't participate in aerial combat, I don't suppose we will ever truly know or understand the experiences of those who did. But as I read this book, I could almost feel the bone-chilling and mind-numbing

cold of the drafty bombers while flying in the thin air above 10,000 feet; I could almost hear and feel the monotonous thrum of the engines; and I could almost smell the exhaust fumes coming off of those engines. Jay does an exceptional job of putting the reader in the story and making him/her feel as though they are not just reading the story but rather, experiencing the story. This is not just a story about bombers or even about a bomb group so much as it is a story of the men who served. As others have mentioned, he wrote not just about the flyers but the support personnel as well. All contributed to the victory. But the flyers represented the point of spear. They delivered the bombs that degraded the ability of the Nazis to make war. As the author points out, these flyers were all double volunteers, having volunteered first for the service and then volunteered for aerial combat. I remember years ago hearing my step-father (Paul Sersland) saying that they didn't always report to sick call when they didn't feel well because they always felt sick... probably nerves. And he said they were always scared... and in spite of it all, they flew. It was great to get to know these men although it was also painful to feel their loss as some of the various airmen Jay introduced died... sometimes horrible deaths. My hat's off to the author for documenting these experiences before the last of these men have departed.

I grew up listening to my father recount stories of life as a crew member in the 303rd, so when this book was announced I preordered it right away. I have not been disappointed. The author writes in a style that is part history book and part story book, drawing you into the action, and painting a picture of combat in the air over Europe unlike anything I have read before. I particularly enjoyed how Stout wrote of the prewar years in America, and what life was like for potential young recruits who later would engage in the bloodiest air campaign ever waged. The book reinforced my father's stories of training at Jefferson Barracks, of life at the base in Molesworth, and the terror of battle in the sky over places such as Schweinfurt and Oberschleben. It is hard to imagine what it must have been like embarking on 8 hour missions over enemy territory, fully knowing that only by the grace of God will you return to fight another day. Lieutenant Colonel Stout depicts this with the stark imagery and authority that only one who has experienced it can portray. Finally, I would like to thank the author for the gift he has given to my family by sparking memories and provoking new stories from my dad, who not only graces the front cover, but has listened to the audio book. My father is 98 years old, a veteran of the 303rd, and a crew member of the Knockout Dropper, Eight Ball, Rambling Wreck and other aircraft. While listening to the audio book, sometimes through tears and sometimes not, he has told me new stories that if not for Stout's excellent storytelling prowess, I would never have heard. So I urge you to buy this book, test fire your .50 caliber and strap on your oxygen mask,

because you are heading deep into enemy territory.

This is the story of the 303rd Bombardment Group in World War II. The story begins with the 303rd being activated in Oregon in 1942, and shows how a bunch of green youngsters were transformed into the expert professionals who destroyed Germany from British bases from 1942 to 1945. Stout tells the story primarily from the standpoint of veterans; this may be one of the last works about air warfare in WW2 that incorporates interviews with veterans themselves. He does not just focus on the aircrew and discuss their combat experiences, but also relates the experiences of the maintenance and support personnel who, after all, made it possible for the air war to be fought but don't get much attention in books about air combat. "Hell's Angels" is not merely a "men in combat" narrative. The author provides a good account of the strategic context -- i.e., what was the USAAF trying to do in its strategic bombing campaign against Germany, and what role did B-17 groups such as the 303rd play. He also provides excellent descriptions and analysis of the clothing, guns, aircraft, anti-aircraft, tactics, gunnery, and formations that made the Eighth Air Force such a formidable fighting machine. He supports his analysis with compelling examples from actual combat. Jay Stout's background as a combat-experienced Marine Corps fighter pilot provides extra credibility to this work, as it does to all his many fine works about air warfare. The book is extremely readable and engaging. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in World War II, air warfare, or the B-17.

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