

Shadow: A Cottontail Bomber Crew in World War II

Neil Hunter Raiford



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This is the poignant and exciting story of a statistical anomaly, a B-24 bomber crew that completed 50 combat missions in World War II. This crew was part of the famous 450th Bomb Group, which was nicknamed the "Cottontails" because of their white rudders. As part of the 15th Army Air Force, they flew strategic bombing missions out of Manduria, Italy (in the heel of the boot) and struck strategic targets which were out of the reach of the 8th Army Air Force bases in England. The group lost 1505 airmen in only a year and a half - the equivalent of losing their effective flying strength three times over. The book's title comes from the crew's bomber, Shadow, which in turn was named for the pilot's black cocker spaniel that flew with them on training missions. Based on interviews with the surviving crewmembers and their families as well as extant archival source material, the book details the childhood, training and post-war life of each of its thirteen principal characters. Chapter One is a discussion of each man's boyhood years and Chapter Two provides details of the training that each received. In Chapter Three, the original crew of ten (Crew #4-N-33) was formed in Clovis, New Mexico. An assignment for training in Clovis and in B-24s meant that the crew had been designated for heavy bombardment. Chapter Four includes a description of the four main objectives for the crew, one of which was to participate in Pointblank, the Combined Bomber Offensive, which called for the destruction of German fighter aircraft plants, ball bearing plants, oil refineries, rubber plants, munitions factories, sub pens and bases. Details of the structural components of most missions are provided in Chapter Five. The crew completes its first missions in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, "Shadow" completes its last after taking enemy fire, and Chapter Eight introduces a new plane, Sleepy Time Gal. The book's Epilogue contains information about the post-war lives of the crew.

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