

Fire from the Sky: A Diary over Japan

Ron Greer

Mike Wicks

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Combining journals and research, prewar voice and postwar voice, gives this ode to a father's legacy a unique perspective.

Fire from the Sky: A Diary over Japan, by Ron Greer and Mike Wicks, is a multidimensional look at one man's experiences as an aviator in the Pacific theater during World War II and its aftermath.

Greer tells the story of his father, Herb Greer, who was a staff sergeant in the US Army Air Corps. Herb was a B-29 radio operator stationed in Guam who flew on bombing missions over Japan. Greer uses letters from his father's life, his father's journals from 1945 (when he was twenty-three-years old), his own research, and professional writer Mike Wicks's impartial eye to unify those elements. The result is a multifaceted look at the terrifying realities of war that Herb witnessed toward the end of World War II, bits of his life leading to up the war, and how his life was changed as a result.

The contrast between Herb's two voices—his gung-ho voice as a young man and his clear, detailed, reflective voice as an older man—is engaging and gives the book a balanced perspective. The young voice is energetic, ready for action, and focused on the what and where of mission details. The older voice is calm and takes a broader look at the context and consequences of each event.

The chapters discussing Herb's early life and life after the war are appropriately short in order to keep the focus on the heart of the wartime action. The writing is clear and weaves in historical details well and sparingly—tying them to the events at hand without inserting an encyclopedic deluge of facts.

The approach to typography in the book is organized but feels a bit overcomplicated: there are individual type treatments for exposition from Ron Greer as well as Herb Greer's journal, his letters, and his present-day thoughts. While the different fonts give the book a disjointed look, the transitions are smooth—evidence of Wicks's keen supervision over the project.

The cover images are compelling and the layout appealing, but they transfer to the page poorly—even the type is grainy and pixelated. The interior photos give the book a warm, personal feel, but they too are often hard to read—even for old photos. The back cover includes three small photos but lacks a description of the book.

The brief references section is very helpful, especially for readers researching their own personal or family histories of the time. *Fire from the Sky* will appeal to anyone trying to make sense of, and give honor to, their families' memories and legacies.

MELISSA WUSKE (January 22, 2014)

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