

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

HISTORICAL

## Grounded Eagles: Three Tales of the RAF in WWII

**Helena P. Schrader**

Cross Seas Press (Nov 15, 2021)

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*The informative, life-affirming historical novellas Grounded Eagles follow three RAF pilots who are forced out of the air during World War II.*

The historical novellas in Helena P. Schrader's *Grounded Eagles* concern non-flying members of the Royal Air Force.

"A Stranger in the Mirror" tells the painful story of David, a RAF pilot shot down in the early part of the war. David endures horrific burns, leaving his hands weak and his face unrecognizable. His condition affects how other people view him, which impacts his psyche even more. A series of tortuous surgeries result in David recovering the use of his hands along with a semblance of his old face. David finds solace in unlikely places, including a rundown cottage and an eager abandoned puppy, but his future with the RAF is unclear.

"A Rose in November" shifts in tone; it's a love story featuring older characters grappling with personal vagaries. Rhys is a widower with teenage children who's devoted to his RAF career. He achieves his dream of leading a squadron, but he struggles to balance his military duties with caring for his children. Then Hattie, a mature woman working with the Salvation Army, comes into his life. But the two come from different backgrounds, and their class disparities threaten to drive them apart and crash their careers.

"Lack of Moral Fibre" focuses on a little-understood psychological issue during the war that was akin to shell shock. When Christopher refuses to fly on a mission without a medical reason not to, he's said to lack moral fiber. He is sent to a center to determine if he's had a mental breakdown and needs treatment, or is a coward due for punishment.

Connected by their concern for the mental toll that the war took on people, these character-focused stories build up their leads with relatable details; each works toward a heartfelt resolution. The characters' experiences of pain and joy are palpable, and are juxtaposed ably to their experiences of the war. Rich secondary characters provide additional perspective and context.

Sensory details lead the book's individual scenes, as of burns that are described in visceral ways, and of the sights and sounds of hectic mid-air dogfights; they are a grounding force. Further, each story is preceded by an introduction detailing the historical research and attention that went into it, rounding out the book.

The informative historical novellas of *Grounded Eagles* follow RAF pilots who are forced out of the air during World War II.

JOHN M. MURRAY (November 23, 2021)

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