ForeWord Reviews

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Into the Land of Darkness: A Bombardier-Navigator's Story
Arthur L. Haarmeyer
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Startlingly vivid memories of the Korean War put readers directly in the plane on bombing missions.

Arthur L. Haarmeyer was not drafted to serve in Korea. He felt it was his duty to go. He landed in Asia in 1952 and subsequently completed fifty missions over North Korea as a US Air Force bombardier-navigator in the 95th Bomb Squadron, 17th Bomb Group. For more than fifty years, he suppressed most of his memories of his war service, and only over the last ten years has he been able to remember and begin processing the harrowing events of that period. As "long past due mental and emotional therapy," he started recording his recollections as nonfiction stories, and he has now published them in a powerful new book, *Into the Land of Darkness*.

Haarmeyer's memories of the war returned with uncanny clarity. His tales are startlingly vivid, precise in the smallest detail. He writes thoughtfully and clearly, expertly explaining the technical aspects of his wartime occupation, yet also managing to convey an emotional sense of what it must have been like to experience what he faced. His book is a must-read for anyone who served in the Korean War, and is also compelling reading for veterans of any other military conflict, and for those interested in military history and the American war experience.

The individual stories are fascinating and highly informative, providing the type of insight available only from someone who has lived through what Haarmeyer has. His comprehensive descriptions of the flight crews, the types of bombing missions, the variety of bombs themselves, and even the physical circumstances within the aircraft, are all valuable, particularly because they reflect the details of warfare in a specific era. What makes them memorable, however, is how skillfully Haarmeyer incorporates his own experiences into these descriptions.

Instead of merely explaining the appearance of the aircraft's Plexiglas nose compartment, for instance, or the safety pins that kept the bombs from releasing before takeoff,

he recounts how it felt to climb into, then kneel in that compartment, head constantly swiveling, always watching, and how he carefully removed and counted each pin, then ritually re-counted them into the pilot's hand before every mission, proof that the bombs were ready to go. Emotion hovers close to the surface throughout, whether implied, as here, in the author's actions, or revealed outright.

Haarmeyer's delivery is so effective that what *isn't* said is often every bit as chilling as what he actually articulates, but there is also no shortage of disturbing and soul-baring commentary. Admitting to "anxiety, tension, and raw fear that always lurked subliminally and never really ever left," he speaks of the psychological necessity of trying to remain dispassionate in the middle of carrying out his duties as a bombardier. The military concurred with the need for detachment, coining innocuous phrases to describe what amounted to destroying the enemy. He refers to it now as a denial of reality. At the time, identifying and dropping bombs on "APs" (aiming points) was somehow different from killing people; viewing his role strictly as "eliminating targets" was the only means to physical and mental survival, whatever the ultimate psychological cost. Haarmeyer has paid the price ever since. Images remain "seared into my mind and memory," he discloses, adding that he sometimes finds himself actually reliving certain of his experiences.

His stories are not easy to forget. Like many who served before him, and many since, he searches for the morality in war, and fails to find it. Haarmeyer does not have the answers, but *Into the Land of Darkness* admirably adds yet more substance to the question.

Cheryl Hibbard