



## No Man's Sky: The Story of a B-17 Waist Gunner Who Flew 29 Times over the Reich

**R. C. Cline**

AuthorHouse (Jul 22, 2015)

Softcover \$26.95 (464pp)

978-1-4969-2896-2

*Real-life adventures of a Flying Fortress gunner take us into the lives of WWII air crew.*

Only a year and a half after his high school graduation, a small town Ohio boy finds himself part of a ten-man crew dropping bombs on the enemy in R. C. Cline's nonfiction work, *No Man's Sky: The Story of a B-17 Waist Gunner Who Flew 29 Times over the Reich*. Not only do the men inside the "flying fortress" get their story told, but it's also a richly detailed and compact look at the last few harrowing months of World War II.

The author, a trained historian, has parlayed his military interests into a very cohesive story that follows J. Emerson Krieger, known as Emy, from basic training through gunnery school to deployment and his eventual safe return home. Emy's third flight occurred on his nineteenth birthday and targeted bridges over the Rhine River in Cologne, Germany. It was an intense and casualty-ridden mission, leaving him "wondering if I would see my 20th birthday."

Culled from his journal and letters home to his sweetheart, Emy's words paint a picture of a young man dedicated to doing his patriotic duty in spite of the fact that he was participating in death-defying missions five miles above the earth. The diaries of several of his colleagues contribute additional information about their home base in England and their flights during a five-month period in the winter and spring of 1945. The author covers the particulars—such as kind, number, and location of targets—of each bombing mission.

More than one hundred black-and-white photos and nearly fifty illustrations and charts accompany the text. The photographs of the men humanize the text, and the few aerial shots are truly amazing. Other images include copies of official documents, diagrams of squadrons during flight, and examples of recruitment posters.

The author does an exemplary job of defining words, phrases, and slang he believes his audience might not be familiar with. For example, fliers often referred to "washday," which was "a scrubbed mission ... that washed-out or cancelled before take off." At the end of the war, one of the men flew a "chow hound" drop, which was a "mission of mercy to feed starving people dislocated by war."

There's an abundance of very detailed information about the B-17 bomber airplane, most of the men in Crew 136, and what military life for them entailed. The author cites the numerous sources he's used, in addition to his own personal research into World War II and this particular group of men.

Readers who like military history or a good human interest story will enjoy learning what the author has discovered in his quest to tell what these sky warriors went through. While very passionate in its prose and composition, the book could benefit from more stringent editing.

Particularly touching are the final pages in which the author reports on the continuing lives of four members of Crew 136 back on home soil.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (September 21, 2015)

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