

Red Skies at Night: The True Diaries of Irving J. Schaffer

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Meet Irving J. Schaffer “a nice Jewish boy” from Amsterdam New York. Schaffer a technical sergeant in the United States Army Air Force flew 65 combat missions during World War II both as a radio operator and photographer. He recounts these missions his return to civilian life and his romance with wife-to-be Shyrle in his diary .

Beginning in August 1944 Schaffer shares the daily events of his life including the most mundane of details such as the time he wakes up goes to bed and what he eats at each meal. Sprinkled in between are the particulars about the dangerous missions life overseas during the war and his long distance romance with Shyrle. Schaffer also shares his thoughts about his fellow servicemen movies and shows he saw people he met and books he read.

The diary entries themselves are a bit on the dry side revealing more facts than emotions causing the reader to wonder how Schaffer can appear so unaffected by the tragic situation around him. As the diary unfolds however certain entries indicate that Schaffer is in fact a very sensitive man who internalizes his deepest thoughts and fears.

“My Shyrle is entitled to anything I have. I only hope she does not want to read this diary. However if she sincerely wants to I’ll permit her. Many of my inner thoughts are not recorded as when I am low I feel differently than when I feel OK so I do not record” he writes.

Ranging from a fear of dying to the loneliness he feels without his family and Shyrle and his concern for an unknown future Schaffer tries to put his best foot forward as he consistently pushes down his emotions. Instead of displaying these painful feelings outwardly they crop up in the form of fatigue and illness. The diary continues through Schaffer’s honorable discharge from the service and his search to find his place in the world as he reintegrates back into civilian life.

Perhaps even more interesting than the diary itself is the foreword written by Schaffer. In this section he explains his reasons for starting the diary in the first place and why he has left it unread for so many years. He allowed the diary to resurface following the events of Sept. 11 2001 so that others might learn from his experiences. For those who follow the Iraqi war or who have loved ones fighting reading this diary is critical to their understanding of the myriad of emotions facing each of our servicemen. It is also critical to those of us who feel removed from the situation— may we gain a greater understanding of the insanity of life during and after war.

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