

The Reluctant Warrior: An American Airman's Story

Barry Rickson

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Fascinating and accurate historical detail bolsters this story of the emotional impact of war.

Barry Rickson's *The Reluctant Warrior* tells the story of Frank Eberhardt as he transforms from a young, idealistic pacifist, who is in love with a German girl, to a decorated air force officer, who puts duty to his country above all else. The Second World War leaves Frank permanently altered, but he retains his ideals throughout his journey. Though life takes him away from the girl he loves, he is never quite able to let her go.

Frank is just getting started in life. In 1939, he is in Bremen, Germany, to gain experience working in a chemical plant. He is happy there, making friends and falling in love with an eighteen-year-old law student named Helga. When it becomes unsafe to stay in Germany, he returns to the United States, where, once the country enters the war, he joins the air force. He soon finds himself in the difficult role of navigator, guiding B-17s to their targets over Germany. Through the arduous experiences of war, Frank remains strong and determined. Even when he is sent on a mission to bomb Bremen, he performs without hesitation, though he is painfully aware that he may be hurting people he knows.

Rickson has clearly done a great deal of research on World War II, and, in *The Reluctant Warrior*, he shares information on myriad topics, such as rationing in Germany, the job responsibilities for various positions on a USAAF bomber, the dangers and casualties of air missions, and the painful reality of battle fatigue. While history buffs will find some fascinating details that both entertain and educate in this book, the wealth of information slows the pace of the story. The plot is fairly common—lovers torn apart by war—and seems secondary to the historical detail the author shares.

With very little dialogue, the passive, distanced telling of this story does not allow the characters' thoughts and feelings to come through. For instance, when Frank and Helga have a small spat, the author writes: "He tells her that he is very upset about what he saw two days ago. When he tells her emotionally and tearfully the reason for his being so crestfallen, she is so disappointed with him at the outpouring of jealousy and this lack of trust in her." Allowing Frank and Helga to speak and share their feelings would have provided more insight into their characters and made their relationship more compelling.

The Reluctant Warrior is an interesting story about the challenges faced by one World War II soldier. The characters and plot are somewhat lackluster, but the history is fascinating. Individuals wanting to learn more about the hardships of war will find a thoughtful and thorough presentation of what life may have been like for an air force officer.

CATHERINE THURESON (March 21, 2014)

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