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WWII Airmen: Amazing Accounts of Airmen Recorded During the War

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“Today air power is the dominant factor in war. It may not win a war by itself alone, but without it no major war can be won,” said aviation expert Arthur Radford in a speech in 1954. This double CD audio book offers forty-two short radio programs, including speeches like Radford’s, that were broadcast to American audiences at home by the AAF (Army Air Force) radio service overseas during World War II.

Authorized by the War Department, these broadcasts were clearly designed for their morale-building and propaganda value. Because they were recorded more than fifty years ago, several are scratchy and difficult to understand, but the overall effect is dramatic and electrifying. Most of the selections are interviews or reenactments with pilots and aircrewmen after successful combat missions, and several are on-scene reports from AAF correspondents flying as observers on bombing runs over enemy territory. One selection even includes interviews with wives and mothers of surviving aircrew.

Pilots, gunners, bombardiers, and navigators tell of the tension and stress of bombing, strafing, attacks by enemy fighter aircraft, and the devastating effects of accurate enemy anti-aircraft ground fire. The crew of “Jack the Ripper,” a B-17 Flying Fortress, tell of a harrowing bombing mission of a Nazi airfield near Paris. Lieutenant Ace White, the pilot of a P-38 Lightning fighter, tells of the ferocity of aerial combat over North Africa. The crew of the “Enola Gay,” the B-29 Super Fortress that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, is interviewed, with Colonel Paul Tibbetts, the pilot, providing an interesting perspective on his historic mission.

This collection provides a wartime glimpse of the aircraft and aircrews who made up the U.S. AAF in Europe and the Pacific, 1943-1945. One CD focuses on the air war in Europe; the other on the air war in the Pacific. World War II proved Radford right: during that conflict, air power played a key role in all theaters of the global war, especially when operating in concert with ground and naval forces.

This is a fascinating oral history-colorful, vivid, and powerful, as only the voices of real participants can be. It is also a reminder that the engine may be the heart of an aircraft, but the aviator is its soul.
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