

Book Review of works written by Martin W. Bowman

Summer 2020 Readings -WWII Bombing Campaign

The summer of 2020 had become one of research and writing for me. This resulted from a simple book order placed with the Naval & Military Press Ltd of Uckfield, East Sussex, United Kingdom.

Naval & Military Press consistently offer reasonably priced sales and specials from its vast inventory of historical offerings.

My first focus from this purchase concerned naval warfare and the U-Boat threat. Reading that compendium alone took several weeks. In the end though, a separate review of these readings concerning the U-Boat war and Maritime Air Warfare, especially that of Coastal Command was posted separately.

This review concerns part 2 of the readings from the larger order. Naval & Military Press also has an extensive inventory of work concerning the air war of World War II. I had desired to learn more about the Allied bombing campaign. This round of readings lent special emphasis on the night campaign air battle between the RAF and Luftwaffe.

Three books on that subject were obtained, and unknowingly, I did not realize that all three were composed by the same author, Martin W. Bowman, until the time I opened their covers. What a treat to find three interesting and compelling elucidations of the air war from one author's perspective, whose subject was treated diligently, passionately, and in a professionally written manner.

Bowman's works include:

- Martin W. Bowman, **The Second World War by Night -German Night Fighters Versus Bomber Command 1943-1945**, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2016, 256 pp.
- Martin W. Bowman, **Voices in Flight: The Heavy Bomber Offensive of WWII**, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2015, 224 pp.
- Martin W. Bowman, **NACHTJAGD - Defenders of the Reich 1940-1943**, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2016, 252 pp.

Each book will be reviewed in the order read.

1. Martin W. Bowman, **The Second World War by Night -German Night Fighters Versus Bomber Command 1943-1945**, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2016, 256 pp.

Martin W. Bowman, "The Second World War by Night-German Night Fighters Versus Bomber Command 1943-1945" published by, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2016, is both an interesting and an informative book. It gives great context to the grave losses experienced by Bomber Command during the latter part of the Second World War. More importantly Bowman offers a unique view of the war from the other side of the fence. The German experience or point of view is often not readily available nor expressed.

A student of the bomber war would be well advised to add this book to their collections despite what I am about to relate. Be warned, it is a most difficult read on several levels. Bowman interweaves this aerial history chronologically by battle and campaign interspersing the stories and narratives of all protagonists concurrently.

After a time, the reader becomes starkly aware of the maw of death experienced by both sides, that to me, was utterly debilitating. That made it difficult for me as a student of this history, who while attempting to find the accounts of individuals familiar to me, made it a more personal rather than an objective endeavour. It became depressing to find time after time, the names of young Canadian men who died at the hands of this formidable force. On the other side of the coin was Bowman's consideration of the Allied actions in the attempt to liquidate an enemy in what became a jousting battle to expunge them from their skies.

Anyone who has widely read on the Bomber War will be familiar with tremendous loss of life and high casualty rates experienced on operations. These high rates often suggested this type of warfare was not sustainable over the long run, and yet the campaign was pressed on despite the obvious carnage experienced.

A quick synopsis from two sources provide some insight into the cost. From Wikipedia from the RAF perspective, "the total of **125,000 aircrew were involved on bombing operations. Some 57,205** were killed (a 46 percent death rate).¹ And from the Bomber Command Museum of Canada "The successes of Bomber Command were purchased at terrible cost. Of every 100 airmen who joined Bomber Command, 45 were killed, 6 were seriously wounded, 8 became Prisoners of War, and only 41 escaped unscathed (at least physically). Of the 120,000 who served, 55,573 were killed including over 10,000

¹ [RAF Bomber Command aircrew of World War II - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Bomber_Command_aircrew_of_World_War_II),
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Bomber_Command_aircrew_of_World_War_II

Canadians. Of those who were flying at the beginning of the war, only ten percent survived.”²

There is often no real explanation of why these losses occurred other than the determination of the enemy. But Bowman’s work provides a great context in which those losses occurred. They were largely at the hands and tactics of the enemy’s Night Fighter force that reaped a significant share of that bounty in explanation of the high and mounting loss rates on individual night actions.

The deadly toll from a German perspective for January 1944 for example was “308 Bomber Command aircraft (were) shot down. Jagdkorps claimed at least 223 victories (including 114 during the three Berlin raids 29 January -February) but lost 55 aircraft and crews during January 1944. Losses had reduced the(ir) front-line strength to 179 operational aircraft...”³

Bowman’s work is replete with such tales which can and does place an emotional burden on the reader. Regardless it is a professionally researched and cited work. It is an invaluable aid to the understanding of the bombing campaign of 1943-1945, and as such, is a worthy addition to one’s library.

2. Martin W. Bowman, **Voices in Flight: The Heavy Bomber Offensive of WWII**, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2015, 224 pp.

Mr. Gary Campbell wrote in the prologue to Martin W. Bowman’s “Voices in Flight: The Heavy Bomber Offensive of WWII”. It was an excerpt of an article written he originally penned for the Times-Colonist, Victoria, British Columbia, 9 November 1981.

Mr. Campbell was 70 years old at the time. He wrote about the institution of an association to a rather unique Lancaster Squadron based at Fiskerton, Lincolnshire. He had received an invitation to join that association which brought back evocative memories and experiences. And so Bowman’s book too is premised on the many shared experiences of the air crew based there, from all parts of the globe, that included the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere. It was in deed a Commonwealth who were the composite crew of nationalities who fought the air battle together, living or dying as the case may be.

² Bomber Command Museum of Canada, <https://www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/bomber-command/bomber-commands-losses/>

³ Bowman, pg. 19

Once again, this book extends far beyond the stories from Allied perspectives. Bowman's work explores the shared and surprisingly common experience of total war of a bombing campaign that was felt by all protagonists, Allied and Axis alike. The bombing campaign had more commonalities than differences. It was the experience of life, humanity, survival, and its depravity that found voice through the stories of those who were there.

Bowman's "**Voices in Flight: The Heavy Bomber Offensive of WWII**" is unique amongst all historiographies as it is lensed through the eyes of those who had lived, died, and endured its suffering. It is an especially well-crafted book, a gripping read, and again, a highly recommended addition to one's personal library.

3. Martin W. Bowman, **NACHTJAGD -Defenders of the Reich 1940-1943**, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2016, 252 pp.

Finally Martin W. Bowman's, NACHTJAGD -Defenders of the Reich 1940-1943, published by Pen & Sword Aviation, 2016 is yet another interesting and compelling read. Bowman has a unique style that is of special interest to all students of the air battle over Germany and western Europe.

Bowman constructs and tells the German NACHTJAGD tale based on a chronological historiography of the defence of Germany through its night fighter operations. Invariably he leads with a story of the key axis personalities or units that he skillfully blends and dovetails with the corresponding story of actions, personalities, and units of the Allied units. It is a compelling history posited from the suffering and losses under a very skilful and determined enemy. But Bowman was also compelled to write of the reciprocal stories when Allied actions too resulted in German losses and casualties.

His methodology and balance add piquancy to the story and history of aerial warfare that stimulates interest in what was a very challenging battle. He spares no quarter in describing Allied units shot down or aircrew killed. It was a butcher's bill paid by the gross, that was waged in the ultimate aerial struggle, the bombing campaign over Europe. And significantly Bowman both allows and blends the stories of civilians and service personnel from both sides such, where the reader becomes immersed in the action as it is played and experienced on the ground by those there.

Martin W. Bowman's, NACHTJAGD -Defenders of the Reich 1940-1943 is professionally researched and a well written book. What Bowman has achieved in the several books written on the subject, is an elevation of our understanding of the impacts of that battle. There was more to it than statistics and number. His frequent accounts of the death

struggles and survival; on both sides provided an insight into the depravity of war, chance, the underlying inhumanity of it all, and then, through it, the humanity and spirit of those who coped with the air war that is so seldom seen or conveyed in writing.

Martin W. Bowman's, NACHTJAGD -Defenders of the Reich 1940-1943 is a highly recommend addition to one's personal library.

by Gerry Madigan

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