

Annals of the Undaunted

MISSION BEYOND DARKNESS. By Lieut. Comdr. Joseph Bryan III, U.S.N.R., and Philip Reed. New York: Duell, Sloane & Pearce. 1945. 133 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by ROBERT SCHWARTZ Y2c



Robert Schwartz, Y2c

Saipan. THE Messrs. Bryan III and Reed have used a familiar wartime technique to construct a familiar wartime story. By piecing together the individual accounts of the sixty-four men of an Air Group (the *Lexington's* sixteenth) during one day of the First Battle of the Philippines, the authors have produced a book. Much of the material they had at hand was marvelous stuff, but all they have produced is a book.

One can assume that the authors found themselves in a situation where dozens of men were coming back from a fantastic adventure, each with an exciting story to tell. Being writers, they saw the editorial possibilities and got right down to work. As fast as they turned out the stuff, two yeoman (who get an acknowledgement in the preface) typed it up for them, and off it went to the publisher.

But where the problem was to sift, the authors accumulated. The first part of the book is so full of names, planes, altitudes, and formations (on the way to the attack) that I felt like a pilot coming out of the overcast when I broke through to the second half of the story. Here are described some of the most hair-raising episodes of the war. Hundreds of American planes returning from the Philippine Sea fought to get aboard our carriers in the dark of night before their gas ran out.

The *Lexington*, being a large, well-lighted carrier, drew planes from all the little escort carriers, whose pilots were told to "land anywhere." The Landing Officer (who waves planes aboard) "felt as if he were under a strafing attack. Instead of the orderly file that should have been approaching him, pairs of planes, even groups, roared up the groove together, elbowing and jockeying for his favor.

It was impossible to single out one of them. The pilot beside it or above it might mistake the signs as meant for himself, and if two of them attempted a simultaneous landing both planes would be wrecked, and the deck would be fouled up for an hour. [He] waved them all away. He realized bitterly that among them might be planes with wounded men aboard and planes with insuf-

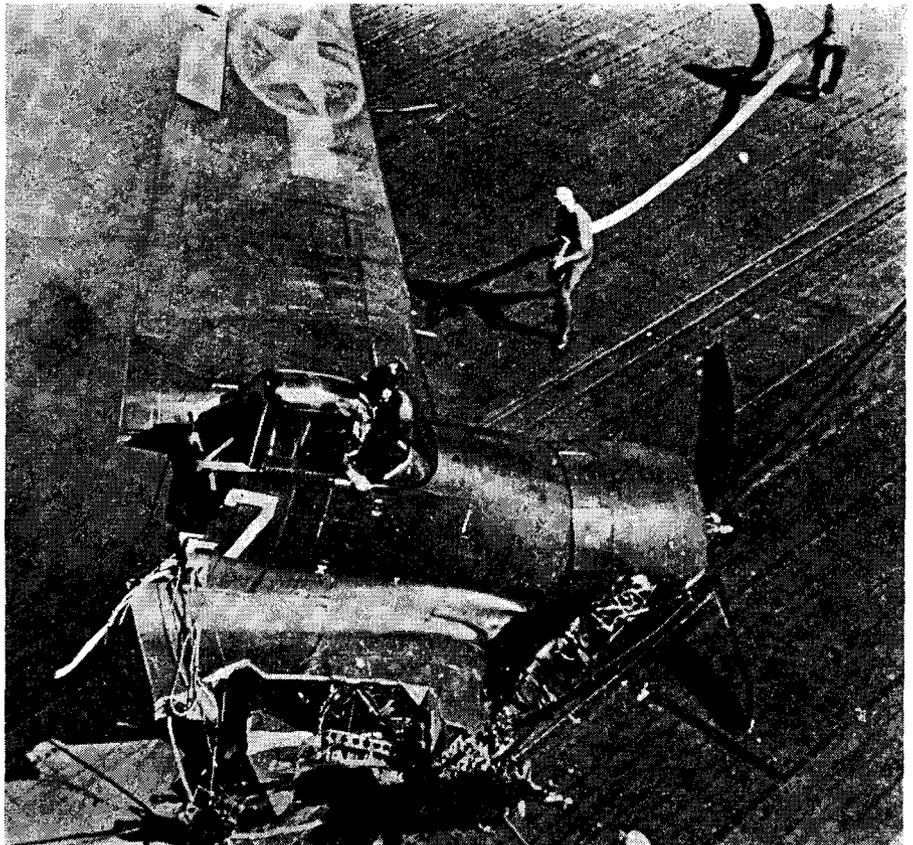
ficient gas to make the circuit again, but there was no help for it.

The ensuing forty-five minutes were an agonizing strain as pilots flew their planes into the dark sea, crashed on carrier decks, missed each other in the air by inches, and zoomed through the rigging of unseen destroyers. Two extremes illustrate the variety of confusion. On one carrier, a radioman jumped out of his plane clutching a life raft, because the last word from the pilot told him to expect a water landing. Another pilot was making his approach to the carrier when water began pouring into his cockpit and he realized he was plowing into the sea. The apex was reached when two planes, unaware of each other, obeyed the same landing signal instructions, cut their motors, and headed for the deck. Seeing the inevitable crash approaching, the deck crews dived for the gun galleries. But one plane landed about thirty feet ahead of the other (zooming over it without lights), and caught a separate landing cable. They both bounced to a stop, unharmed. The most poignant statement of the book is made by a Bo'sun's mate on deck: "Nobody ordered me to watch this. I'm going below."

But, somehow, even the tensest parts of the book manage to get clut-

tered with unnecessary detail. In a heartrending episode, two men who have just returned safely from the most dangerous mission of their lives are killed in their plane by the next plane to land. After you learn of the crash, and before you learn the fate of the men in the parked plane, the authors take time to tell you that there were six planes on deck: "four F6Fs, a TBF, and an SB2c. Two of the F6Fs were on the starboard side out of the way." A short phrase in a buried sentence tells a much more vital fact: the pilot who crashed into the other plane (and survived) was a wingman of the man he killed. And it's almost a dozen pages later before you find that he forced his way into the landing circle because he was wounded in the back, nearly out of gas, without running lights, with one wing partly burned off, and with a mental and physical fatigue so great that he couldn't force himself to obey the wave-off and landed anyway.

The authors likely found themselves in the position of all war writers who are telling the story of one operation: they must get it on the market before other military advances destroy its timeliness or before someone else beats them to the story. With less urgency they would certainly have trimmed out the non-essential, frequently confusing, material that clutters the book, virtually burying the real story.



A badly-wounded bird returns to its Flat Top.

Sub Rosa Adventure

THE DOUBLE AGENT. By Hildegarde Tolman Teilhet. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1945. 220 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CPL. MARGARET DAVIS



Cpl. Margaret Davis

A BOOK like this used to be called escapist literature. This was in the days when avoiding death at the hands of enemy assassins while pursuing and being pursued through picturesque and historical countrysides seemed a romantic and interesting adventure.

Now that to several million Americans the most romantic possible adventure would be to sit in slacks and a polo shirt on their own Manhattan terrace with a rye and soda in hand, or in their own Paducah backyard with a julep, escapist is hardly the word. But, well done, such books are still pleasant reading even to people whose recent routine business in life has been avoiding death at the hands of enemies in picturesque countrysides.

Hildegard Tolman Teilhet's thriller in the Ambler-Hitchcock tradition is very well done, and nice enough reading in or out of uniform. It is a crisply-written tale of French and Nazi undergrounds surviving as of this June in liberated France, and of an American painter who has played the role of double agent for the five years of the war. The FFI and the Germans are both deeply interested in his extermination. The FFI is mistaken in this ambition, since all along John

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 107

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer to No. 107 will be found in the next issue.

AHYDL SZ GDPZSZCFPC RSCA

TKCADZ, RASXZC RSC SZ PDC.

—Z. C. GDXFLSONF.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 106

STYLE WENT OUT WITH THE MEN WHO WORE KNEEBREECHES AND BUCKLES IN THEIR SHOES. WE WRITE MORE EASILY NOW.

—ALEXANDER SMITH

—DREAMTHORP.

JULY 7, 1945



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