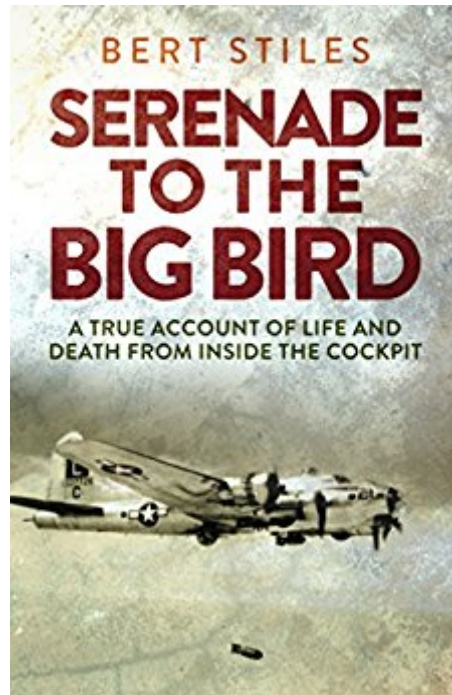




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Serenade To The Big Bird



Synopsis

“... the whole low squadron was gone ... blown up ... burned up ... shot to hell ... one guy got out of that.”

At the age of twenty-two, Bert Stiles joined the American Air Force. Two years later he began his life as a co-pilot of a B-17 Flying Fortress, flying high over Germany and bombing cities far below. In his moving memoir of that time Stiles takes you right to the heart of life as a young bomber pilot in World War Two; the terror of being under fire from flak and German planes, the disillusionment in their mission, the thoughts of girls back home and those they’d met on their travels, the dreams of the future and the overwhelming tiredness that hung over every member of the crew.

“A book of terrific impact. Perhaps the best to come out of World War II.”

The Philadelphia Inquirer

“The serenade is a simple and moving story of the war in the air. The big bird was a Flying Fort. She had a crew of ten men and all but one of them were 20 to 24 years old. They went out on missions together into Germany from England. They ran into flak and had the daylight scared out of them, and burned out their guns shooting down 109’s and Focke-Wulfs. They dropped bombs on Berlin and other cities, and hated war, and did not like to think what their bombs had done.”

The New York Times

Bert Stiles was a student at Colorado College in 1942 when he joined the American Army Air Force. He received his commission in November, 1943, and went overseas to Great Britain in March, 1944. He was awarded the Air Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross and was a veteran of thirty-five bomber missions. Instead of returning to America when leave was due to him, he requested to be transferred to fighters. On November 26, 1944, he was shot down in a P-51 on an escort mission to Hanover. He died at the age of 23.

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Customer Reviews

My husband and I are history buffs-that being said- We have seen and heard the name Stiles on many documentaries about WWII and the young men who flew the skies in Bombers and other aircraft. Bert Stiles was just a youngster when he began his tour on B17 bombers- ironically he wasn't killed aboard a bomber- but he was killed in combat in World War Two- after finishing his tour with the B17's- he became a fighter pilot and that cost him his life. God rest his soul and God bless his family and friends. This book is definitely a serenade to a marvelous big bird and the courageous men who fought for freedom. So what if there are a few errors-here and there- it is a true story that needed to be told and I hope will be read by many. May God bless America and all who fight to keep us free from tyranny. Jeannie Walker (Award-Winning Author) "I Saw the Light" - A True Story of a Near-Death Experience

Had Bert Stiles survived the war, I believe his legacy would have been as one of the great writers of his generation, on a par with Mailer, only more cynical. This is not a rah-rah Greatest Generation account; it reads more like if Jack Kerouac had covered the war. His accounts of battle are descriptive and vivid; his cynicism about war is refreshingly frank; and his running commentary about his would-be girlfriend, "August," reads like a Mickey Spillane novel. One could argue--okay, I could argue--that this book is an early form of Gonzo journalism. A terrific read, leaving me wanting more.

The book goes hot and cold. I ordered it because I had some friends whose fathers flew bombers in WWII. When the narrator (a co-pilot) is not rhapsodizing about how similar the fields, towns and people of France, England & Germany are, the book really drags. But once the pilot tells him to stop day dreaming the descriptions of the challenges of actually flying such a big plane in formation and

avoiding enemy fighters is very good. There were a couple of scenarios where I found myself holding my breath without thinking about it. I flew light attack aircraft in the Navy for 9 years so I am familiar with formation flying but after reading this I am still trying to figure out how they flew formation with the pilot on the yolk and the co-pilot managing the power.

Here is a rare thing, this account. It is the voice of a young man, an airman, an unfinished man, observant, reflective, recounting moments and missions that are only hours old, some mundane, some brutal. It is a rough diamond, this telling. There is a rawness, an immediacy, in it. The author has not summoned these events and the crewmen he shared them with from a time some seventy five years in his past. No, this is no armchair remembrance, urgently teased from memory before that memory fails. Nor has it suffered under the censor's pen. To his credit, the author reveals that he is not the most focused and dedicated co-pilot. While at war in the co-pilot's seat, he allows his mind to wander. He daydreams, a fault that could have fatal consequences for he and his crew, warriors in an unforgiving environment, miles above the Earth in thin, frigid air, the ideal hunting ground of an unheated B-17. Dialogue is rare in this telling. The prose is almost stream of consciousness at times, and despite the Air Corp personnel that surround him, men he flies with, sleeps in barracks with, eats with, drinks with, you sense his existential isolation. And for all the rawness and directness of this account, at times the author surprises the reader with descriptions of the cloud layers, or of the Earth, miles below, that are so poetic they reveal nascent literary genius. I didn't read the author bio before diving into the account, but the voice of the narrator was so young, so immediate, and still so vulnerable, that I could not imagine it springing from the mind of a ninety-something year old veteran. I felt a growing dread as the mission count rose. Nowhere in the prose did I sense the hand or the voice or the presence of the survivor, of the man the author became, safe in the present with his identity established, his conflicts resolved, at peace with the world, with his past, and with his life. And then I read the bio.

Great first-person account from a WW2 bomber pilot! Stiles puts you in the cockpit during many missions, but also shares his mind and heart as you sense how the stresses of war, the loneliness, the exhaustion take their toll. One of the best reads from WW2 since Ernie Pyle.

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