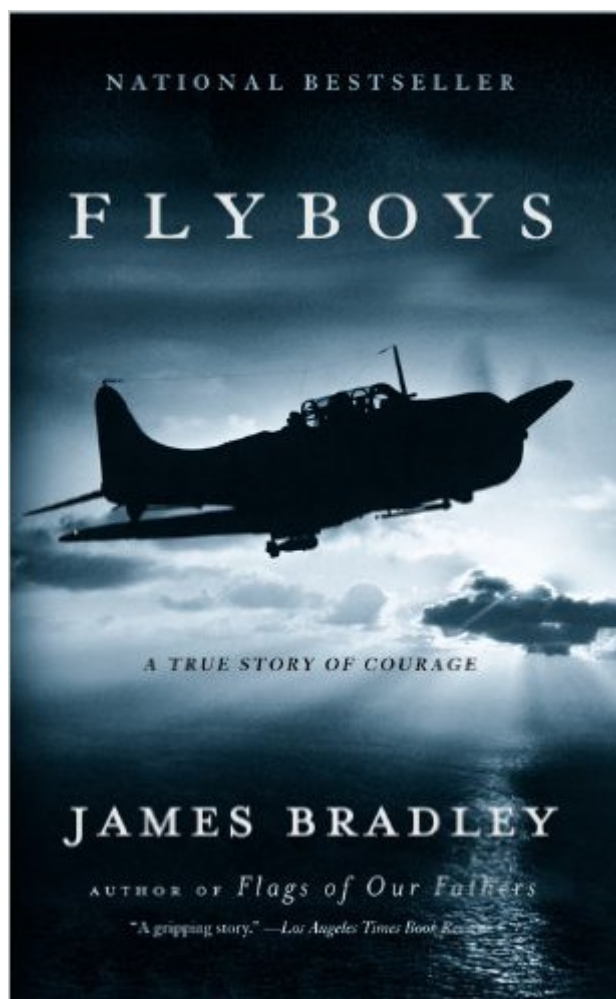


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Flyboys: A True Story Of Courage



Synopsis

The classic New York Times bestselling story of heroism and sacrifice--by the author of *Flags of Our Fathers*, *The Imperial Cruise*, and *The China Mirage*. This acclaimed bestseller brilliantly illuminates a hidden piece of World War II history as it tells the harrowing true story of nine American airmen shot down in the Pacific. One of them, George H. W. Bush, was miraculously rescued. What happened to the other eight remained a secret for almost 60 years. After the war, the American and Japanese governments conspired to cover up the shocking truth, and not even the families of the airmen were informed of what happened to their sons. Their fate remained a mystery--until now. *FLYBOYS* is a tale of courage and daring, of war and death, of men and hope. It will make you proud and it will break your heart.

Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: Little, Brown and Company (September 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316743798

ISBN-13: 978-0316743792

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (746 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,014,027 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #83 in Â Books > History > Military > Prisoners of War #2064 in Â Books > History > Military > Aviation #2238 in Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War II

Customer Reviews

I am old enough to have lived through the war and remember it well. I never knew why Japan declared war on the U.S., even though I have taken every history class offered throughout my school career. "Flyboys" is probably the most brutal book I have ever read, almost too difficult in places. I am grateful to James Bradley for having written this book, I now understand why America dropped the Atomic Bombs and put an end to that war. "Flyboys" is a must read.

What an odd book. Flyboys is the story of several air raids flown against the island of Chichi Jima, north of Iwo Jima, during 1944-45, by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, and more specifically it's the story of what happened to those airmen who were shot down over the island. The author, to write

this story, uses extensive interviews he conducted with participants from both sides, survivors in their late 70s and 80s. This is all well and good, and if the book stopped at that, I suspect I'd be giving it a higher rating than I am. What cripples the book is the author's belief that he has to give you a history lesson. As a result, he starts his account of the raids on the island by describing Japan prior to Admiral Perry's arrival in 1852. He takes a sort of anecdotal approach to things, recounting various events in American and Japanese history. His reason for doing this, apparently, is to give the events of the subject of the book context. And that brings us to the main difficulty with the book. The author has a rather skewed view of American history, one that's decidedly more critical of it than is warranted, at least in my view. Further, his recounting of fact is at times inaccurate and incomplete. There is one good thing he doesn't do: he doesn't attempt to minimize Japanese atrocities in WW2. What he does instead is insist that the Americans committed crimes just as terrible, the implication being that the Japanese were punished because they lost the war. Let me go over these accusations in some detail, so I'm not misunderstood and we're all clear. In the chapter dealing with America's 19th century history, he recounts the Mexican-American War and the Indian Wars and then tells you that they are instances of American war crimes that the Japanese took as proper behavior for a western country, and that this meant that if the Japanese became regarded as civilized they could do these things too. The difficulty comes in the recounting of the wars themselves. The Mexican war is dismissed in a few paragraphs, mostly recounting U.S. Grant's opinion that the war was sinful and wrong. He also said (in the same passage in his autobiography) that he thought the U.S. Civil War was punishment for the Mexican-American War, but that's left out of Bradley's summary of what Grant said. Bradley then recounts the Indian Wars by telling you of the Sand Creek massacre. Sand Creek was probably the most egregious and senseless murder of Indians during the Indian Wars. Using it as an emblem for the whole is similar to using O.J. as an example of how all football players treat their wives. While the U.S. was harsh and unfair with American Indians in the 19th century, it wasn't universally so, and the depth of the unfairness varied depending on where they were or lived or other factors. Bradley ignores all of this. Then Bradley really goes off the reservation, so to speak. Many people know the history (at least in outline) of the Mexican-American War and the Indian War, but the insurrection in the Philippines is by contrast very obscure. Bradley's recounting of the U.S. experience there is almost entirely from one source, one book called *Benevolent Assimilation*. I have a book called *The Philippine War*, which includes a critical bibliography. In it the author dismisses two other books on the war, then labels *Benevolent Assimilation* "even more factually inaccurate" than those two books. Bradley relied on this book almost completely for his account of the war. He should know that if you're going to write the history

of something, you consult more than one source. The author also has a goofy habit of referring to people in an eccentric fashion in the book. This starts with the term Flyboys, which he insists on using (capitalized) as if it were a title or rank, when he refers to American and British aviators from the War. He refers to President Roosevelt as "the Dutchman" repeatedly, calls Curtis LeMay "Curtis", and sarcastically labels Japan's military leadership "Spirit Warriors" and their emperor the "Boy Soldier" (because he was educated in part by generals). It's all very weird, and a bit juvenile. What does all of this lead to? The author seems to have a feeling that all war leads to war crimes which all sides commit, and that the one way to prevent this is to prevent wars. There's a sense of moral equivalency running through the book that's annoying when faint and insulting when he gets more insistent about it. There's also, as a side annoyance, the pro-Marine bias that's so common in books that deal with them in contrast with the army (check out my review of Martin Russ' book Breakout if you want to learn my opinion of this in more detail). It's not stated much here, the one outrageous comment implying that the Normandy invasion was a cakewalk. The oral history part of the book is very valuable, however, and the author, to his credit, doesn't flinch in recounting the Japanese war crimes or their aftermath. For this I commend him, and give him the two stars he gets above the one minimum one. I would recommend this book, but only very guardedly, given the inaccuracy of the backstory in the early chapters.

I have viewed all the previous posted reviews of this book, and what I find surprising (and a little disturbing) is that no one has taken Mr. Bradley and his publisher to task for an untruth trumpeted both on the dustjacket and in Mr. Bradley's introductory text (also see the blurb above). There it is asserted that the events on Chichi Jima were a closely guarded government secret until the intrepid Mr. Bradley uncovered them. This is not just a distortion, it is a flat-out falsehood. For example, Bradley's own bibliography cites Robert Sherrod's history of Marine Corps aviation during World War II. Sherrod's book - published 45 years ago - features several pages on the appalling events on Chichi Jima, including footnotes indicating exactly where the information came from (in particular, the war crimes trial transcripts). As an archivist who works with World War II era military records every day, and a published scholar, I find the mendacious assertion that the book uncovered previously "hidden" material to be a breach of faith with the public it supposed to inform. Bradley may have done more work on the topic than those who came before him (and here he deserves credit), but he certainly did not dig up any "secrets." For shame.

In more than 50 years of reading voraciously about World War 2 I don't think I have read a more

disappointing book. After reading Mr. Bradley's excellent "Flag Of Our Fathers" I was expecting something a lot better from him. As many others have mentioned here, I was expecting the book to be a thoughtful examination of Naval aviation in general and the suffering of some captured fliers in particular. Unfortunately Mr. Bradley couldn't resist inserting his own view of history i.e. that Western Imperialism drove the poor Japanese to behave so badly. He devotes the first 75 pages to drawing a moral equivalency between the U. S. and Japan. The book seems to have been written either for or by someone with only a superficial knowledge of the war and, in my opinion, denigrates the suffering and bravery of the Americans who fought it. Bradley's irritating insistence on referring to air crewmen of all types as "flyboys" is puzzling because that term was often used derisively by non-flying personnel jealous of those they perceived to be a "privileged class". And, in my many years of reading, I have never before seen the B-25 medium bomber called a "Billy". Silly! As the World War 2 generation fades away from us, we can expect to see more such revisionist history come forth with politically-correct versions of the war. I don't recommend this one.

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