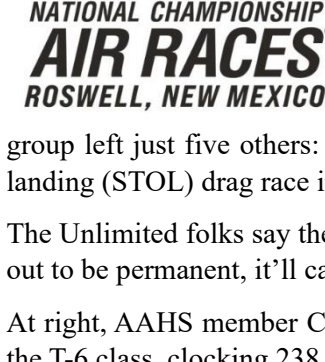




News and Views

From the Editorial Hangar



The Unlimited folks say they hope to be back next year, but if that withdrawal turns out to be permanent, it'll cast a long shadow of doubt on the future of the event.

At right, AAHS member Chris Lefavre, with wife Meghan, took home the Gold in the T-6 class, clocking 238 mph in Joel Stinnett's *Midnight Miss III*. (N3171P) →



★ ★ ★

More on those Me-262 kills

In one of our midnight meanderings through cyberspace recently, we came across an interesting post by Key Aero on the first USAAF kill of a Me-262, claimed by a couple of P-47 jocks from the 78th Fighter Group on 28 Aug 1944 during a sweep near Lens, Belgium. (See *FlightLine* No. 25-11) The post is from an article in *FlyPast* magazine, which requires a Key Aero subscription to fully access. The gist of the tale is this: One of the claimants, "Surtax Blue" flight leader Maj. Joseph Myers, first mistook the bogie for a B-26 Marauder at very low level. As he dived towards the aircraft, he recognized it as a 262. "With full power on and the advantage of altitude I gradually started closing on the E/A [enemy aircraft], and drew up to within 500 yards astern and was *about to open fire* when the E/A cut his throttle and crash landed in a ploughed field."

We added the emphasis, but it's a wonderful example of the inexactitude of air-to-air claims. Myer and others in the flight then strafed the downed machine, and attempted to get the pilot as he ran from the wreckage. Myer claimed "... one Me 262 destroyed, shared with Lt M O Croy Jr." Apparently Myer originally claimed it as destroyed on the ground ("Grd") but that notation was later lined out, thus defaulting to an aerial victory.

The author of the piece, Garry L. Fry, tracked down the combat report quoted above, then discovered that the number three man in the Surtax Blue flight that day, Lt. Fred Bolgert, had later located the German pilot, who not only "played dead" to fool the strafers, but went back to flying the jets and survived the war. Turns out the 262's gear wouldn't retract completely, which is why he hedge-hopped, hoping to avoid exactly what happened. When he saw the P-47s, he bellied 'er in and ran. →

★ ★ ★

Book Reviews

AAHS recently got a very happy surprise when Casemate Publishers offered to send us copies of aviation related titles for review in *FlightLine*. Our thanks to Marketing Director Daniel Yesilonis for that. We of course jumped at this opportunity, and promptly received the first samples. The review of one of those follows. Casemate's catalog lists more than 2,500 books on aircraft and aviation, and thousands of others covering all aspects of military and naval history. Go to their website, <https://www.casematepublishers.com/> and enter "aviation" in the search bar. If you spot a title of particular interest, let us know at FlightLine@aahs-online.org. We'll query Daniel about a review copy. →



Into the Inferno: The Story of a B-17 Gunner over Nazi-occupied Europe

By William Ibelle.
185 pages of text, with numerous black and white illustrations. Not indexed.

Hardback Edition: ISBN 978-1-63624-558-4

Digital Edition: ISBN 978-1-63624-559-1

Casemate Publishers, 2025.
Available at <https://www.casematepublishers.com/> or through Amazon.com.

As the title implies, the subject of this book is the World War II service of a B-17 crewman, the author's father, "Bert" Ibelle, a waist gunner with the 816th Squadron of the Twelfth Air Force's 483rd bomb group. But wrapped tightly around that core is a parallel narrative written by "a Vietnam-era son, who was skeptical of war and the unquestioned moral correctness of our nation" as he attempts to make sense of his father's unwillingness—or perhaps inability—"to explore the subtleties of human emotion." The story is a weaving together, in more or less chronological fashion, of three principal threads: excerpts from Bert's service diary, wartime letters he wrote or received, and his "retirement-age reflections" on his experiences, set down decades later at the behest of his son.

The first pair of those threads examines the main characters as they saw the war, the world, and themselves at that time. In addition to Bert, two other personalities are featured: Francis "Fran" Brighenti, Bert's high school chum, ace playboy, and faithful correspondent before and after they went off to war, and "Red," Bert's erstwhile love interest, whose real name was Mary Jane. The three knew each other from their school days, growing up in Hartford, Connecticut. The military experiences, combat and otherwise, of Bert and Fran are periodically juxtaposed to illustrate the vagaries of war and the differences between a would-be flyboy in the Mediterranean and a dogface infantryman in the Pacific. ("Grunt" is a Vietnam war appellation, but the iconography could apply to foot soldiers in any war.) Bert was drafted in April 1943. Fran had been plucked a month before. Bert wanted to fly, and was accepted as an air cadet. Fran was tapped for the army engineers. Fate—and the U.S. Army—would decree that neither would follow those paths much farther.

The other strand in that thread is the relationship between Bert and "Red," forced into long distance mode by the war and complicated by Mary Jane's uncertainty and confusion over which of two rival suitors will ultimately win her affection. Does boy get girl? In accordance with our no spoiler policy, we'll leave that one alone. But Mary Jane's missives to Bert give a glimpse into the lives of the women on the home front while their menfolk were at war. Bert's "retirement-age reflections" are the final thread, something like the third leg of a stool. These form a far greater part of the narrative than the necessarily terse segments of his diary, and are the source of much information—and frustration—to the author.

Bertram Patterson Ibelle is never identified by his full name, and his AAF unit affiliation goes no deeper than the 483rd bomb group. From 25 December 1944 to 26 April 1945—a period of 122 days—he flew 24 combat missions from Sterparone air base, near Foggia in southeastern Italy, all but two with the same pilot and presumably the same crew, although in several different B-17s. Ten missions were against strategic targets in Austria, five in Germany, with six in Italy in tactical support of advancing allied armies. Two were to Czechoslovakia (one has Prague listed as being in Poland), and a singleton to Hegyeshalom, Hungary.

Several of these missions are described in detail from Bert's perspective as waist gunner. Fighters, including Me-262s, were frequently encountered; flak practically always. On mission number 15, against oil refineries at Vienna on 20 March 1945, Bert took shell fragments in the back—enough to knock him out for an instant and good for an ambulance ride and a Purple Heart, but he was back in the air two days later, headed for Germany.

G.I. chow could play a role. Among the little considered aspects of high-altitude bombing in World War II was coping with "biological emergencies," shall we call them, while garbed in layers of protective clothing and tethered to an oxygen mask at twenty-something thousand feet in 40-below temperatures. Some of these are recounted, humorous after the fact but a serious matter when it happened, particularly if it involved vomiting with food poisoning while somehow managing to inhale enough oxygen to stay conscious.

The narrative is enhanced by many images from the Ibelle family albums, including photos of all the protagonists as they appeared during or shortly after the war. Another fitting addition is a selection of sketches made by Frank Mullally, the radio man on Bert's crew and an artist of considerable ability. Time spent in training and life for the enlisted crews on a first-line operational airfield in the mud and mire of Italy are other facets of combat flying not often discussed in books like this. To his credit, the author has gone to some length to fill gaps in his knowledge of the war his father was a part of, including the fates of several 483rd crews shot down over enemy territory. Short biographies of the other crewmen make a nice supplement. An essentially non-relevant but nonetheless very interesting sidebar is a short essay, with pictures, on two of the enemy propagandists jointly known as "Axis Sally," European sisters of the more notorious Tokyo Rose.

In summary, *Into the Inferno* is an easy read, and engaging enough in its own way. But the author's digressions into the "unseen force field" between his father and him are so extensive that the reader may be excused for questioning which story is actually the focus of the book. The author admits that he isn't always sure himself. In the end he realizes that, in its essence, the book is "a love letter to my parents," adding rather poignantly that "I hope you have come to love them too." I have, to the extent that's possible by reading a book. But as an aviation enthusiast, I'd love even more to read Bert's diary, with his unabridged "retirement-age elaboration" as illumination. →

Review by Joe Martin

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Postscript

My own interest in World War II lies mostly in the Pacific although, like anyone who has delved into aviation history in any depth, I've come across many books that deal with the other theaters. In terms of historical writing, the MTO in general takes a back seat to the ETO, but many if not most Fifteenth Air Force missions were every bit as "hairy" as those of "The Mighty Eighth." After searching for Bert's and Fran's full names (which were gleaned from fold3.com's WWII draft cards) I looked for more background on the 483rd. Author Bill Ibelle doesn't list his sources, but in order to note the "last three" digits of several aircraft serial numbers and other details, he apparently had access to the 483rd's records.

Fold3 was no help there. The National Archives website lists the group's combat operations reports files, but none have been digitized and posted online. Not surprisingly, though, there is a 483rd Bomb Group website, <https://www.483bg.org/>. In it is a personnel roster, by squadron, of more than three thousand names, including Bert's, but there are no operational details. There is a link, however, to a pdf scan of the group's history, published immediately after war's end. It's a mighty hefty file, more than 217 megs, but running the downloaded file through OCR then further reducing that file's size shrank it to a manageable 46 kb. Bert is nowhere to be found, but it's a nice example of this type of unit war memoir. We may add it to AAHS's digital library.

The 483rd was the last B-17 group to arrive in the MTO, and by the time Bert flew his first mission, VE day was barely four months away, but of course that could not have been known at the time. Volume three of *The Army Air Forces in World War II* covers that time period, although accounts of the Fifteenth's strategic bombing campaign are scattered among several chapters. The 483rd appears only once, on page 390. Probably the most useful and readily accessible account of B-17 ops in the Med is Osprey's *B-17 Flying Fortress Units of the MTO* (Osprey Combat Aircraft #38.) The 483rd appears frequently, and there are several color profiles of B-17s from the group. None of those, however, represent "Mr. Bones," the name of two Forts that Bert crewed, which neither the author or this reviewer can further identify. We'll keep looking.

Meanwhile, Casemate has announced the availability of *A History of the Mediterranean Air War, 1940-1945, Volume 6: The Strategic Bombing Campaign over Southeast Europe, 1 November 1943 to 30 June 1944*. This'll be another hefty tome, chronicling the RAF's contributions as well as the Fifteenth's larger effort. Judging from the cover, the air forces of Germany's allies will also be covered, an aspect of WWII in the air not generally recognized. Like the previous numbers in this series, it's guaranteed to be as granular as you can get on the subject. →

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A Bevy of Bizjets

Back in August, our AAHS colleague and regular *FlightLine* correspondent Steve Johnston took note of the annual Monterey (Calif.) Car Week, a 10-day extravaganza featuring some of the most exotic motor vehicles on the planet. Along with regular ol' gearheads, a lot of high rollers are attracted to these happenings. And they travel in style. Steve hopped over to Monterey Regional (MSY), picked a spot on the southwest side of runway 10R/23L and clicked away with his trusty Canon EOS 7D with a 100-400 telephoto lens. The result was a portfolio of visiting aircraft, many of them of the high-dollar bizjet variety, a few samples of which can be viewed below.

One noteworthy specimen was Joby Aviation's eVTOL demonstrator, N545JX. On 15 August, Joby passed significant milestone when the demo aircraft made the first piloted eVTOL Air Taxi flight in controlled airspace between two public airports—an approximately 12-minute/10 nm sortie between Monterey and Marina (OAR) that including five minutes in a holding pattern. The pix here are considerably reduced from the originals, but for those wishing to know more about these birds, the N registration numbers are clearly all but a couple. (At top left is N914JX, below that is N470DC.) →



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