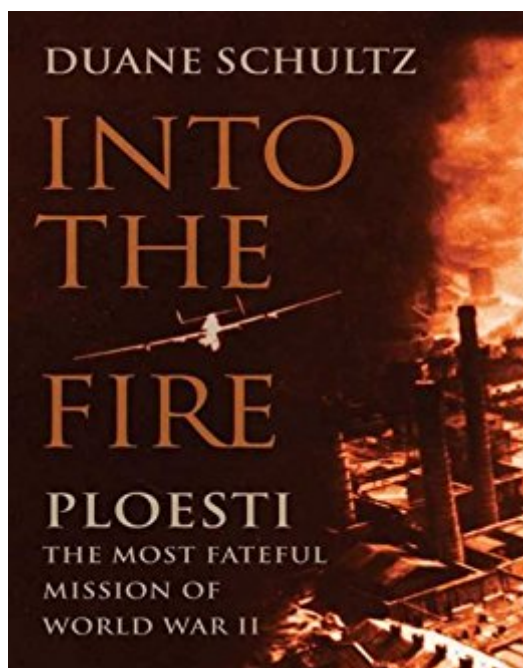


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Into The Fire: Ploesti, The Most Fateful Mission Of World War II



Synopsis

A detailed and vivid account of the World War II disaster."âBooklist"Into the Fire shimmers with historical parallels and modern resonances. . . . Schultz combed an impressive body of material for this account." âWashington Times"This bittersweet tale of arrogance, wishful thinking, sacrifice, and heroism is recounted with grace and empathy." âMilitary.com"Schultz combines a historian's meticulous research and a novelist's hypnotic prose to produce this memorable popular history... Shultz's intimate account of this controversial episode is a timely reminder of the horrors of war and a moving tribute to Ploesti's heroes." âPublishers Weekly"We knew it was a disaster and knew that in the flames shooting up from those refineries we might be burned to death. But we went right in." âLt. Norman Whalen"We were dragged through the mouth of hell."âfrom a Ploesti Mission debriefing reportPlanned by Winston Churchill, authorized by Dwight D. Eisenhower, and executed by five specially trained American bomber units, the attack on the oil refineries of Ploesti, Romania, was among the most daring and dangerous missions of World War II. If the raid succeeded, the Nazi war machine would suffer a devastating blow. On August 1, 1943, nearly two hundred B-24 bombers flew from Benghazi, North Africa, with directions to descend on Ploesti at treetop level, bomb the refineries, and return. The low-level bombers could evade enemy radar and were thought to be more difficult to shoot down. But despite warnings that a German heavy flak train had been moved into the area and that the secrecy of their mission had been compromised, the bombers were sent out. Minutes from the target, one of the commanders made a wrong turn, leading the formations away from Ploesti. Recovering from this mistake, most of the bombers relocated the refineries, but the mission was doomed. The ensuing air-ground battle claimed dozens of the bombers, and many of those that survived the ordeal were forced to ditch in the ocean or in remote areas due to lack of fuel or structural damage.In Into the Fire: Ploesti, The Most Fateful Mission of World War II, Duane Schultz re-creates this great battle, combining original research and interviews with survivors in order to capture the tension, drama, and heroics of the warring sides. More Medals of Honor were awarded for this mission than any other aerial combat enterprise in the history of the United States. But the medals are bittersweet testimony to the courage of the 1,726 young men who risked all on a fateful attempt to cut off the Nazi supply of "black gold.

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Customer Reviews

"Into The Fire" by Duane Schultz
Subtitled: "Ploesti: The Most Fateful Mission Of World War II."
Westholme Publishing, Yardley, Pennsylvania, 2007. This is a well written dissection of the famous B-24 Liberator raid on the oil fields in Ploesti, Rumania, in August 1943. Many details can be found in this fine book. With the exception of the first chapter, this book is in the chronological order of the mission, from conception, to practice drills, to the actual implementation on 1 August 1943. The book's first chapter describes the recovery of the remains, in 1994, of the B-24 bomber know as "Hadley's Harem", including the body of the pilot, 1st Lieutenant Gilbert B. Hadley. It seems that Lieutenant Hadley was a bit flamboyant, tending to wear cowboy boots and carry pearl-handled pistols; they were recovered with his body. And this is how the author handles the story: he names the B-24 involved, tells about the pilot and crew, and describes if and how the bomber survived the attack on Ploesti. He begins with the "matte black" B-24, "Commando", which carried Prime Minister Winston Churchill to his January 1943 meeting with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Out of that meeting and out of the fertile mind of Churchill, the plan to bomb and destroy the oil fields in Ploesti, to deny Hitler his main oil supply, was developed. The writer, Duane Schultz, shows that most of the people involved, from the highest ranking down to the crew sergeants, were convinced that the raid on Ploesti was a suicide mission. Fifty-three Liberators were shot down on this low level raid; the Nazi anti-aircraft defense was waiting for them.

The 1 August 1943 low-level strike on the Ploesti oil refineries by five B-24 groups has been the

subject of a fair number of books. The latest Ploesti volume is this 2007 volume by military writer Duane Schultz for Westholme Publishing. While it recounts the mission in exciting fashion, it can not claim to be the definitive account of that fateful mission. Operation Tidal Wave pitted five 8th and 9th AF B-24 bomb groups against the very well-defended Ploesti, Rumania refineries. The raid did not deliver the knock-out blow the Allied hoped. Then too the cost was horrendous, 54 out of 177 Liberators were lost, a 30% loss rate! Schultz' account of the often heartbreaking experiences of those wonderfully brave men over Ploesti made for compelling reading. I didn't find all that much new material but INTO THE FIRE was a good read. I had mixed feelings about Schultz' research though. I don't think he dug deep enough. His biggest gaffe is repeating that hoary old chestnut that Flavelle's 'Wongo-Wongo' was the lead ship of the strike and that its loss enroute to the target contributed to the mission's mixed success. For the record: the 376th BG led the Tidal Wave strike, its lead ship being 'Teggie Ann' carrying Compton and Ent. 'Wongo-Wongo' was lead ship of the second element which was BEHIND Compton. The only effect its loss had was that it deprived the strike of two B-24s, Flavelle's bird and that flown by his wingman, who dropped down to check for survivors! Tidal Wave's outcome resulted from: (1) a flawed attack plan reflecting a complete lack of U.S. intell on Ploesti's defenses; (2) Ent's inability or unwillingness to order all five group commanders to maintain the same cruise settings enroute to the target; and (3) Compton turning at the wrong IP.

This is a very good retelling of what could have been a turning point in World War II, the destruction of the oilfields in Ploesti, Romania, that was the primary source of oil for Hitler's war machine. The attack on the oil fields sounded good in theory: Crippling Hitler's ability to obtain fuel would cripple Hitler's ability to wage war. The decision to attack the oilfields was approved by a multitude of higher-ups from the ultimate arbiters of power, Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt, to the supreme military commanders, George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower, and on down. These otherwise generally magnificent leaders and sound strategists only saw one little problem: The name of the operation was too wimpy. The name of the plan, originally called "Operation Soapsuds", was consequently changed at Churchill's insistence to the more fearsome sounding "Operation Tidal Wave". There were a few noted military tacticians, notably Maj. Gen. Lewis Brereton, commander of the Ninth Air Force (which would provide the staging ground for the over 175 B-24 Liberator bombers involved in the raid), who saw major flaws in the plan but they were effectively silenced by a chain of authority that viewed protests as weakness and rewarded the objector by relieving him of his command. Consequently, the operation lurched forward to its fateful

conclusion. One major weakness of the operation was that reconnaissance flights over the oilfields were banned so as not to alert the Germans that the Allies had any interest in the target. Unfortunately, this left the planners in the dark as to the actual defenses of the oilfields.

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