

Mighty by Sacrifice

author: James L. Noles Sr., James L. Noles Jr.

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Synopsis

author	James L. Noles Sr., James L. Noles Jr.
readBy	Jim Seitz
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On August 29, 1944, the 15th US Army Air Force unleashed 500 bombers against oil and rail targets throughout central Europe. It dispatched the 20th Squadron of the Second Bombardment Group on what they regarded as an easy assignment: attack the Privoser Oil Refinery and associated railroad yards at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia. This "milk run" deteriorated into the bloodiest day in the Second Bombardment Group's history: not a single one of the 20th Squadron's B-17 Flying Fortress bombers returned from the mission. Forty airmen were killed, another 46 spent the rest of the war as POWs, and only four, with the aid of the OSS and anti-German partisans, and sympathetic Czech civilians managed to evade capture.

The 90 airmen on the mission to Moravska Ostrava provide a remarkable personal window into the Allies' Combined Bomber Offensive at its height during WWII. In a microcosm, their stories encapsulate how the US Army Air Forces built, trained, and employed one of the mightiest war machines ever seen. Their stories also illustrate, however, the terrible cost in lives demanded by that same machine.

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