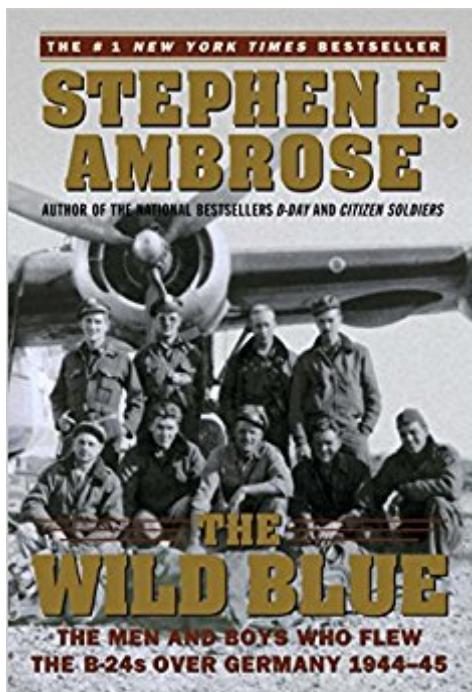


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# The Wild Blue: The Men And Boys Who Flew The B-24s Over Germany 1944-45



## Synopsis

Stephen E. Ambrose, acclaimed author of *Band of Brothers* and *Undaunted Courage*, carries us along in the crowded and dangerous B-24s as their crews fought to destroy the German war machine during World War II. The young men who flew the B-24s over Germany in World War II fought against horrific odds, and, in *The Wild Blue*, Ambrose recounts their extraordinary heroism, skill, daring, and comradeship with vivid detail and affection. Ambrose describes how the Army Air Forces recruited, trained, and selected the elite few who would undertake the most demanding and dangerous jobs in the war. These are the boys—turned pilots, bombardiers, navigators, and gunners of the B-24s—who suffered over fifty percent casualties. With his remarkable gift for bringing alive the action and tension of combat, Ambrose carries us along in the crowded, uncomfortable, and dangerous B-24s as their crews fought to the death through thick black smoke and deadly flak to reach their targets and destroy the German war machine. Twenty-two-year-old George McGovern, who was to become a United States senator and a presidential candidate, flew thirty-five combat missions (all the Army would allow) and won the Distinguished Flying Cross. We meet him and his mates, his co-pilot killed in action, and crews of other planes. Many went down in flames. As *Band of Brothers* and *Citizen Soldiers* portrayed the bravery and ultimate victory of the American soldiers from Normandy on to Germany, *The Wild Blue* illustrates the enormous contribution that these young men of the Army Air Forces made to the Allied victory.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Long before he entered politics, when he was just in his early 20s, South Dakotan George

McGovern flew 35 bomber missions over Nazi-occupied Europe, earning a Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery under fire. Stephen Ambrose, the industrious historian, focuses on McGovern and the young crew of his B-24 bomber, volunteers all, in this vivid study of the air war in Europe. Manufactured by a consortium of companies that included Ford Motor and Douglas Aircraft, the B-24 bomber, dubbed the Liberator, was designed to drop high explosives on enemy positions well behind the front lines--and especially on the German capital, Berlin. Unheated, drafty, and only lightly armored, the planes were dangerous places to be, and indeed, only 50 percent of their crews survived to the war's end. Dangerous or not, they did their job, delivering thousand- pound bombs to targets deep within Germany and Austria. In his fast-paced narrative, Ambrose follows many other flyers (including the Tuskegee Airmen, the African American pilots who gave the B-24s essential fighter support on some of their most dangerous missions) as they brave the long odds against them, facing moments of glory and terror alike. "It would be an exaggeration to say that the B-24 won the war for the Allies," Ambrose writes. "But don't ask how they could have won the war without it." --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Brought to life by best-selling historian Ambrose (author of more than 20 books), here is one of America's forgotten workhorse weapons of WWII the B-24 bomber. Carrying a heavier payload than the glamorous B-17 Flying Fortress, the B-24, nicknamed the Liberator, also filled the skies over Germany, bombing troops, oil refineries, factories and other strategic targets. South Dakota-born George S. McGovern was 22 when he became a B-24 pilot in the 741st Bomb Squadron, based in Cerignola, Italy. Though basing the book largely on McGovern's 35 missions, for which he won the Distinguished Flying Cross, Ambrose includes many other stories about the men who flew over Germany and eastern Europe. As Ambrose makes abundantly clear, the planes were not fun to fly. The crew faced inside temperatures of 50 below zero, sat in cramped seats and suffered high casualty rates. Ambrose follows pilots and crews from start to finish where they were from, their backgrounds, training, bravery and heroism as they did their part to help win the war. Today there are only four B-24s left of the 18,300 that once made up the force. While this book leans largely toward hagiography of the everymen it depicts, it also clearly refutes lies spread about McGovern's service during the 1972 presidential campaign. Photos not seen by PW. (Aug.)Forecast: Any book with the Ambrose name should do a short stint on bestseller lists; this one should pick up some (largely unrelated) momentum from the Pearl Harbor anniversary and film. The book's release coincides with the airing of a 10-part Dreamworks/ HBO series based on Ambrose's *Band of Brothers*. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audible Audio

Edition edition.

purchased for my father in law Lt Ed Snyder (96 years old) who flew 35 combat missions with the 8th air force during this time. He really likes the book and said it is very accurate although true to the warriors of this generation he said he didn't have it nearly as bad as some and had a roof over his head after returning from missions and a lot of times one hot meal which many did not get.

Very much like stories an older brother had related. He was with the 451st Group 15th Air Force as an aerial gunner..Letter from brother dated March 23'45. ..."After we got away from the place we went over our 13th alternate. Now we had ten out of thirteen alternate targets that didn't have guns. We went over the one that did. ...they started shooting, we dropped our bombs, and then by gosh, instead of dodging the lead pilot just kept on going straight ahead. Our pilot waited a while but when no one else dodged why we did it ourselves. Our pilot just took off in a screaming turning dive. They told us later that the only reason they didn't follow us was they thought we were hit. What a foolish thing to say. We just don't like flak. But I wish Calkins (the pilot) would say something when he starts playing those games."The pilot was Earl Calkins of Yakima Washington and the plane was "The Yakima Kid"Brother Frank stayed in the Air Force, served in B29's in Korea, commissioned and flew F86Ds until retirement as captain.

I am a big fan of Ambrose and have read several of his books. No disappointment here, and, I'll tell you it makes me so proud of our history and the men & women who fought to serve this country and come to the aid of other nations. Great read.

This sketchy bio of the early life and war experiences of George McGovern, the very prominent American politician, does not give much insight into anything. The author, who has had much success elsewhere, seems unable to make up his mind exactly what he wants this book to be - a bio, a wartime tale of a bomber pilot, or a close look at the B-24. Consequently it is just a bit of each. It is well edited, without the abysmal grammar found in many other Kindle editions. and so can be read quite quickly. We are left knowing that McGovern was a very brave and skilful pilot, the B-24 was a lumbering but effective pig of a plane, and the Germans were at that time still quite formidable. However I was not left thinking this was one of the great WWII novels, and maybe it was never meant to be.

...for that matter, Who is George McGovern? In 1972 he was the Democrat presidential candidate, but he lost to Richard Nixon. McGovern was anti-Vietnam War and anti-bombing North Vietnam. Before he was a politician he was a decorated officer and pilot of a B-24 Liberator who completed dozens of bombing missions during WWII. The Wild Blue by Stephen Ambrose is primarily about McGovern, his crew and Eleanor, the B-24 they flew. I picked this book to expose myself to the writing of Stephen Ambrose. Also, I wanted to learn more details about our nation's WWII bombing campaign in Europe. By reading this book, I accomplished both. I will be back for more from the author and I gained an amazed appreciation about (so called) precision daylight bombing in Europe amidst enemy fighter aircraft and intense anti-aircraft fire. If I knew then in 1972 what I know now; I would have voted for Lieutenant McGovern.

This is a fabulous story. I've always loved Stephen Ambrose's writing and while I'd heard about George McGovern's flying in World War II, I had not read the story. Frankly, I was almost completely unaware of the B-24's role in the war, so this book was a completely new insight for me into the conflict. Ambrose has a way with not only educating us but also keeping our attention through great storytelling. He does this by focusing less on the historical aspects and more on the people, all of who have something to add. The result is a book I can't recommend more highly.

This book shows the day to day life of our WW 2 airmen as we haven't been shown in the movies. The living conditions were unbearable with the tents, lack of facilities, and the elements. The bomb runs were of course terrifying. Ambrose did a great job, in spite of some seeming repetition. Great job.

I do not in any way want to diminish the actual bravery or skill of the personnel depicted in this book. But, as a book, this was disappointing. Ambrose's other WWII books are generally better, as books about WWII. If you want a serious look at the bomber war, go elsewhere. Finally, if you want a "popular" work on the "feel" of the bomber war, the video/DVD "Memphis Belle" (despite some Hollywoodization) is more moving. And, if you just want to read something good by Ambrose, try "Undaunted Courage" or his book on D-Day. Summary: This is OK, but reads like a series of longish magazine articles stitched together. So -- the 3-star rating is "average" for an average book. For young teens interested in WWII, I would rate this higher; it is a good, quick read; my 11-year-old loved it.

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