

Books

War Memorials: From Antiquity to the Present, by Alan Borg. London: Leo Cooper, 1991. Pp. ix-153 + 218 plates. \$35.00. (distributed in the U.S. by The Shoe String Press)

Alan Borg, the Director-General of the Imperial War Museum in Great Britain, has published a thorough study of war memorials. Borg has visited many places, especially in Great Britain, camera in hand, in order "to construct a framework, for both past and present, which allows us to place the memorials round us in their context" (xiii). He has done us all a great service simply in compiling the 218 black-and-white photographs of war memorials included here, and he has met the broader aims of his study to pave the way for future work in this little explored area of art study.

The principal strength of Borg's book is his analysis of the war memorials of antiquity, which have, as he so ably demonstrates, directly influenced those of the twentieth century. In his first four chapters, Borg develops a grammar of war memorials, enumerating the forms that have come down to the modern era from the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Although the explicit purposes of public memorialization have changed over the ages, there are strong and evident formal links between twentieth-century war memorials and the most ancient remains available for comparison.

In the second half of his study, Borg focuses on the monuments of WWI as exemplary of modern memorials, and he is at his best in this portion of the book when he elaborates upon the links between past and present. This formal conservatism may seem odd in view of, first, the function of modern memorials, and, second, the fact that WWI monuments were constructed well into the high modernist period of artistic innovation. As to the first point—the particular message of tribute—Borg notes that

A characteristic of ancient war memorials is that they commemorate war itself, and specifically victory, rather than recording the loss and suffering of individuals. Modern memorials on the other hand are much more concerned with the sacrifices of war, with the loss of young life in defence of freedom. (x)

In what is easily the most interesting chapter in the second half of the book, Borg describes the democratization of memorials and the depiction of "everyman as hero," which began with the nineteenth century. Despite the shift from the glorification of the ruler and the public assertion of power, "most of the forms of heroic portrayal have remained fairly traditional" in the twentieth century (104). Part of the reason for this is to be found in the public nature of the works and part in the solemn occasions which they commemorate. Although even the most staunch patriot may have found a portrayal of the conquering hero too ironic or hypocritical to stand as a fitting tribute to those who fought in the Great War, still the broad public wanted conventional art. In their parks and town squares, citizens wanted works with a visible link to familiar traditions. We should not be surprised that publicly funded art tends to shy from the avant-garde when that art commemorates an issue as solemn and as potentially explosive as the death of young men. One need only look at the widespread and deeply felt criticism directed towards the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. to gauge the negative reaction towards non-traditional, non-heroic commemoration. And this particular reaction occurred long after the art world had subsumed the tradition-breaking distortions of modernism, not in the midst of modernist experiment, as was the case with the WWI memorials which Borg treats.

Though Borg usually remains dispassionate in tone, an overt agenda is to encourage respect for the public memorials of our own century, especially those of the First World War. Borg wishes these memorials to be accepted on their own terms and not dismissed out of hand as retrograde. Borg reminds us that "the view that tradition is the enemy of artistic expression is a legacy of the Romantic movement . . . but as a received opinion it has become as much of a

cliché as the view which it criticises" (70). He next asserts (correctly, no doubt) that

there is still a curious prejudice amongst critics against memorial architecture and sculpture, and an entirely erroneous view that it is all bad. Of course, quite a lot is of poor quality and in an artistic enterprise on the scale of the memorial construction in the 1920s this was bound to be the case. Equally, a surprisingly large amount of the work produced is of very good quality, and a small proportion can be considered inspired. The proportion of good to bad is, I suspect, no smaller than for other forms of artistic expression across the ages. (70)

In defense of his thesis, Borg disappoints. His own aesthetic criteria are never made plain, and it is difficult even to infer what these criteria are in any concrete terms. Vaguely, one sees that Borg prefers works to be "moving" and "inspired." Clearly there is nothing inherently wrong with a preference for populist art, especially in reference to public art aimed to speak to a wide variety of people, but Borg should specify those qualities which he feels make for praiseworthy memorials, populist or otherwise. The reader (especially the reader inclined to look favorably upon the use of modern art in modern times) would then have some insight into why the view that traditional memorial works are bad is "erroneous." Rhetorically, Borg puts himself in the position of the lone voice, yet does not trouble himself overmuch to mount detailed support of his opinion.

Probably it is testimony to Borg's knowledge of his topic that one becomes restless in the second half of the book, hoping he will set aside one or two examples of "inspired" work for extended commentary. What Borg has done is gather a collection of photographs very admirable in scope, and often in quality. He has clearly spelled out the main traditions of memorial creation from ancient times until the present. He has provided an understandable

anatomy of war memorials, and has fulfilled his objective of creating a sensible and readable history of this underappreciated art form.

—*Matthew C. Stewart*
Quito, Ecuador

A Wing and a Prayer: The "Bloody 100th" Bomb Group of the U.S. Eighth Air Force in Action over Europe in World War II by Harry H. Crosby. New York: Harper, 1993. Pp. 336. \$27.50.

Certain U.S. military units have achieved "legendary" status in combat. Custer's 7th Cavalry in Montana, the 20th Maine at Gettysburg, the 101st Airborne at Bastogne, and the 100th Bomb Group over Europe are units which have been immortalized in the history of American armed conflict. *A Wing and a Prayer*, the publication of the 100th Bomb Group Navigator's memoirs, gives the reader of military history a view into actions which create such legends. Because of the course of his military progression, Crosby provides a broad perspective of the "Bloody 100th"; from the author's arrival as a new second lieutenant navigating for the "Tail End Charlie" aircraft to his promotion to group staff, the full spectrum of the nature of this air war—from flight line to headquarters—is presented.

Despite the title, Crosby has not written a purely military history. These are the memories of an individual within a much larger organization. As such, there are some omissions of data or analysis which would have given the work a broader historical context. For instance, Crosby's discussion of the Schweinfurt/Regensburg Raid outlines the horrifying casualties to the Americans, but does not go on to mention that the raid failed to meet its objectives or, indeed, that the mission was considered such a disaster that American daylight bombing raids over Germany were temporarily halted until long-range fighters could be provided for protection. Crosby does not delve into such ex post facto analysis. Rather, he presents his material, within the limitations of memory 50 years removed, attempting neither to explain nor excuse. *A Wing and a Prayer* is not an "apologia" of one soldier's war time experiences.

Such limited perspective leads inevitably to contradiction in some of the events described. Recounting one of his early missions to St. Nazaire, Crosby analyzes the results as follows: "The strike photos show that we have just had our first successful mission. Fitten hit the front doors of the sub pens. Our bombing pattern

popped in like a solid cow pie, small, smooth, and even”(51). From the perspective of an individual B-17 crew member, the results of the St. Nazaire raid were good. Yet, a few pages later, Crosby presents the reader with a different judgment, reporting that at the mission de-brief, Curtis LeMay, the overall commander of the Third Air Division, says, “Now I want you here to tell me what went wrong on the St. Nazaire and La Pallice missions”(64).

Contradictions make this memoir. To be sure, variance and inconsistency are largely unavoidable, given the limited perspective of any front-line combatant. The reader, in his or her turn, experiences such contradiction as an inherent part of this or any war, and begins to understand why military veterans are often the most avid students of military histories—they are trying to find out what they actually did.

As a rule, professional historians approach memoirs with a “jaundiced eye,” and are doubly skeptical of such personal historical recreations as Crosby’s. If you read his work anticipating a history of the 100th Bomb Group, you will be disappointed; though, to be fair, it seems clear Crosby is not attempting to write a history. What he offers is this: the fears, self-justifications, confusions, thoughts, and actions of an individual engaged in one of the bloodiest campaigns in U.S. military history.

—*Douglas Foster*
United States Air Force Academy

Captain Hook: A Pilot's Tragedy and Triumph in the Vietnam War, by Captain Wynn F. Foster, U.S. Navy (Ret.). Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1992. Pp. 1-242, 47 photos, \$26.95.

The title of this moving memoir is doubly unfortunate because the film *Hook* surfaced in the wake of the infamous 1991 Tailhook convention in Las Vegas and both obscure the intended reference to J. M. Barrie's story of Peter Pan. Captain Wynn F. Foster earned the sobriquet Captain Hook from neither piracy nor debauchery but from courage in combat as a Navy pilot in the Vietnam War and from perseverance in fighting the bureaucracy that wished to discharge him as disabled for loss of his right arm. His tragedy becomes triumph, as the subtitle of his book suggests, but his story is far from simple or merely personal.

Inadvertently, I am sure, Captain Foster's story restores honor to Tailhook pilots, even those whose behavior precipitated a massive behavior-modification program for the entire U. S. Navy. The corrective is timely and necessary, given the beating, however justified, the Navy has taken from the media. The Tailhook Association, open to active duty and retired people with the distinction of having made at least one arrested landing on board an aircraft carrier, earns only one mention in *Captain Hook*, in the epilogue. At the 1988 Tailhook Association convention, Foster happens to meet an earnest young newboy pilot, who listens intently to Foster's story about his artificial arm and who proudly declares, "This man is a war hero" (230). This judgment of a nameless listener becomes that of the reader, who "stunned" by the telling wakes the next day as "sadder" and "wiser" as the famous wedding-guest in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Foster begins his story with his injury and ends with its implications. Between, he describes his 26½ years service in the Navy, from 1944 in the Navy's "V-12" college training program in Dickinson, North Dakota, to service on the staff of Commander First Fleet, where he coordinated the readiness training of West Coast-based carriers and other ships preparing for Vietnam duty. On his 238th combat mission, 23 July 1966, Foster's A-4E

“Skyhawk” caught a fragment of a North Vietnamese antiaircraft shell in the right side of the cockpit. His single-engine, single-pilot aircraft had been on its way with three other Skyhawks each carrying six 500-pound bombs to drop on a petroleum-storage area seven miles north of Vinh, North Vietnam. Foster had just sighted the target prior to his roll in at 8,000 feet when:

BA-LAM! Suddenly, the foggy mist of an explosive decompression swirled around me. The 400+-knot slipstream blasted through the cockpit. My helmeted head bounced against the headrest. I looked up. The plexiglas canopy over my head and part of the windscreen in front of me was gone! I was flying an open-cockpit Skyhawk. My oxygen mask, tightly cinched, was still in place. My helmet visor was down. I felt no immediate discomfort, but the deafening roar of high-speed air enveloped me. My jet had been hit, no doubt about that, but how badly? There was a mild stinging sensation in my right elbow, but my attention was still outside the cockpit. The plane appeared to be flying OK, except the left wing was dropping slowly. I moved my hand to the right to level the wings. Nothing happened. *What the hell. . . . ?* (9)

Above the bloody instrument panel his gloved right hand “lay like a macabre display” (9). From the flashback he must have experienced innumerable times in nightmares and waking horrors, Foster painstakingly slows the frames of memory to provide his first awareness of the phantom pain of a new amputee and the incomparable benefits of shock to a body and mind wrenched from healthful wholeness to bitter trauma.

Foster’s final flight began with the exhilaration of the ordinary for a tailhook pilot: the “G” force of the catapult shot, the acceleration from 0 to 130 knots over the short distance of 220 feet in less than two seconds, the clearing of the pattern for returning aircraft, then the climbing turn, and three minutes later the settling into a left rendezvous circle at 20,000 feet above the carrier *Oriskany* to wait for the wingman to take parade position off his

right wing. Clockwork, classic, textbook precision boded well for the combat ahead. The remarkable detail of this unique takeoff, “the world’s most expensive thrill ride” (6), makes reasonable the camaraderie of all tailhook pilots, those paid to experience what few can ever know. But the “tailhook” experience is properly associated with the still more dangerous landing, with which Foster had intimate knowledge in the progression of his career through 75 combat missions over North Korea in the F9F Panther from the carrier USS *Kearsage* to A-4s on the USS *Intrepid* and the nuclear-powered *Enterprise* during the Cuban missile crisis to training missions and on to the VA-163, the “Saints” on the *Oriskany*, an essential part of Command Wing 16 under CDR James Bond Stockdale, now famous as Ross Perot’s Vice Presidential running mate.

On 9 September 1965, Foster flew a bombing mission with Stockdale south of Thanh Hoa, then watched helplessly as Stockdale was shot down and taken prisoner by coastal villagers. Foster’s own grief at Stockdale’s capture exercises itself in his failure to lower his arresting hook on his return to the *Oriskany*, a “minor error” or harmless oversight—corrected just before landing—he openly admits even as he accords the hook the symbolic value of setting him and “every other carrier pilot apart from other pilots the world over” (108). By the explicit bond as a tailhook pilot, Foster implicitly identifies himself as one with Stockdale even as he acknowledges the inestimable personal benefits derived from his Commander’s “minilectures,” “engaging sense of humor,” and listening so patiently as to be “like an older brother” (106-107). Stockdale’s leadership before his capture, as after, set a high standard against which Foster compares his own command in the “close-knit squadron/family environment” (182).

Despite Stockdale’s capture and the not incidental loss of other pilots to enemy flak, mechanical failure, or pilot error, the military objectives of the Saints on the *Oriskany* remained the same: to interdict the flow of supplies, troops, and material from North to South Vietnam without attacking villages or targets within two miles of any known hospital. Rules of engagement (ROE) restricted strikes against “strategically important chunks of the

enemy's geography" (99), like Hanoi and Haiphong, capital and major seaport, respectively. From the beginning of his tour, Foster recognized that "if President Johnson had allowed U.S. air power to pull out all the stops [in 1965], we could have decimated Vietnam's ability to conduct war in short order. But the leadership in Washington decreed otherwise" (3). Between the lively record of attacks on targets, real or imagined, Foster launches a subtler attack in creative aspersions on the strategists responsible not only for "ultimate stupidity in the formulation of the ROE" (99), particular faults, but also for the more general failings caused by the "mental fog bank along the Potomac River" (176).

Never blindly loyal to his Commander-in-Chief, Secretary of Defense, or any of their advisers, Foster vividly describes the grim realities of the Vietnam conflict, placing blame on political and military policy-makers for palliating protestors while mandating operations based on sketchy intelligence reports or crippled by interservice rivalries. Between descriptions of life aboard the *Oriskany* and in the skies above North Vietnam, Foster meticulously and often ironically articulates his perspective on issues far larger than his own experience in the war. When an interservice Rolling Thunder Coordination Committee (RTCC) came into being, "Coordination," he writes, became "the operative buzzword" but not the fact. Required consultation among services added but another "level of frustration" to the Navy and, presumably, Air Force pilots who suffered from absurd schedules, unexpected cancellations, and contradictory orders (59).

Following his accident, Foster's patience is often tried in the long days of recuperation from several surgeries and the still longer ones of rehabilitation as he learns to use the prosthesis replacing his right arm, but he valiantly restrains himself in his written and oral testimonies before various Naval boards responsible for determining his active duty status. He graciously credits friends in high places for their support and suggestions as he wends his way through the bureaucracy of the Navy he hopes to continue serving despite his traumatic amputation. A Distinguished Flying Cross means little to a Physical Evaluation Board (PEB), Physical Review Council (PRC), or even the

Physical Disability Review Board (PDRB) in Washington, D.C., though it may mean somewhat more to the Navy's Judge Advocate General (JAG) and the Secretary of the Navy who would make the final decision.

Foster prepared himself for regulations combat with the same thoroughness that marked his career as a pilot. The Navy's *Disability Separation Manual*, supplemented by JAG rulings he found in support of his cause, laid out in jargon the rules of engagement. Testimonials from commanding officers became his munitions, and a chance meeting with Admiral Roy Johnson, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, gave him necessary artillery. Nonetheless, the Physical Review Council denied his request to remain on active duty, and he accepted the option of a full hearing before the Physical Disability Review Board in Washington. Psychologically, Foster wasn't ready to quit even though he would not fly again. "Having served in three wars, fought in two, and been wounded in the last one," Foster could not accept retirement as "a military has-been at age forty" (216). He continued to fight, accepting a permanent change of station to Washington boondoggled through a friend. At the headquarters of the Chief of Naval Operations in the Pentagon, Foster could see and be seen by those in positions to influence the review of his case. He had more friends and more testimonials than he could effectively use, and he won approval for continued active duty in a simple finding of "fit for duty."

While waiting for JAG review and then approval for continued service by the Secretary of the Navy, Foster fractured the fibular bone that had been transplanted from his leg and grafted to the humerus in his stump arm. The accident occurred when flipping a single-bed mattress at home. He rightly wonders if he had "won the battles only to lose the war to a freak accident" (225). Six months of maneuvering and politicking through the complex, multitiered disability-retirement system to a favorable conclusion seemed suddenly wasted. When Under Secretary of the Navy Charles Baird notifies Foster of his approval for continued active duty status, he comments tellingly, "You have a lot of friends in the Navy" (227).

In the 21 months following his traumatic amputation, Foster recognizes the power of Navy friendships, and that without Navy friends his cause would not have succeeded. *Captain Hook* testifies to the unique bond of military men despite or perhaps because of the horrors of war, even undeclared war, the dread of the enemy, even when it is we and the systems we tolerate. Captain Wynn F. Foster tells his own story well enough to make it emblematic of others, many others, and he does so with the delicate balance of passion and compassion, dramatic immediacy and distancing irony notable in the best military memoirs.

—*Patricia L. Skarda*
Smith College

Countdown! 35 Daylight Missions Against Nazi Germany,
by Fred Koger. Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 1990. Pp. vii-183.
\$18.95.

The many facets of war can be related through formal histories that discuss strategy, tactics, logistics, and other such aspects of war which must be conducted successfully for armed forces to emerge victorious. Much detail can be reflected in figures and statistics. The most effective way, however, to reveal the reality of war is through the personal history or recollection of those involved. Here is the story of Fred Koger who, as a bombardier on a B-17 in the 8th Air Force, survived 35 daylight missions to attack the war machine of Nazi Germany during the latter days of WWII. *Memphis Belle*, the film about the 8th Air Force during the middle stages of the war, depicts an objective view of the same general material, but lacks the inside view Fred Koger reveals.

Koger's narrative poignantly recounts the daily grind on men, machines, and nerves as crews were awakened early with the news of take-off times and the amounts of fuel to be loaded for that day. The fuel amount was an accurate indicator of distance to the target. On days when the fuel load was heavy, the airmen knew they were headed for the flak-filled skies over Germany, not "milk runs" over less hostile targets.

Reality for Koger was the canopy of flak concentrated over targets by the German gun crews. His initial reaction in his early missions left him a little puzzled, but as he adjusted to the strain of it, he came to accept risk as part of the period of life through which he was passing. He respected the machines that governed his life—the sturdy B-17's that took hits from flak and fighters and held together to get back to England to be repaired to fly again. He recalls a look at the YB-40, an experimental B-17 known as the Heavy Formation Defense Airplane. With its heavy armament and armor, the YB-40 provided effective support for the bombing formation against German fighters, but was so heavy that it could not keep up with the empty bombers on the return trip home.

Koger also recalls attacks by conventional German fighters and especially the attack on his group by German ME 163 Komets, rocket-powered aircraft developed by the Germans.

Further livening Koger's narrative are his accounts of leave in England and especially his rather naive encounters with young British women, mostly females like the traditional girl next door who were doing their duty for the defense of England. One exception was an Irish girl who left the relative safety of Ireland to be able to see London bombed.

Koger recounts how his frustration grew as he neared the end of his tour and found his name often omitted from the Alert List for days at a time, thereby keeping him from completing his tour. He was by now an experienced bombardier being held in reserve in case he had to replace or help train inexperienced men who were being shipped to the unit to replace those whose tours ended or those who were lost in battle.

It is instructive to see from above the allied advance through the Lowlands to capture Einhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem; a raid on Ludwigshafen; and the bombing effort which ended the standoff between Patton's forces and the Germans at Metz. Frequent targets of Koger's raids included Munich, Peenemünde, and Merseberg.

Koger's story is a reasonably objective treatment of the war, but underlying the surface are the frustrations and emotional highs and lows that came with success or the lack of success. One of the truly touching scenes in Koger's recollection was his return from leave in London to find that the crew with which he flew had fallen over Germany.

The photographs, which would have been more dramatic if reproduced in larger size, are excellent adjuncts to the text. The in-flight photos of the B-17's, some with vapor trails lingering behind them, look peaceful in stasis, but readers of the text will see instead the danger and tension Koger describes.

When Koger writes about his trip back to his old station at Podington in the 1980s, we see that he was able to come more fully to grips with his experiences as a young airman who survived 35

daylight bombing missions. Like the Ancient Mariner, he experiences release by telling his story.

—*Lawrence Clayton*
Hardin-Simmons University