



The Last Mission of the Wham Bam Boys: Courage, Tragedy, and Justice in World War II

Gregory A. Freeman

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Before the famed Nuremberg Tribunal, there was Rüsselsheim, a small German town, where ordinary civilians were tried in the first War Crimes Trial of World War II.

As the tide of World War II turned, a hitherto unknown incident set a precedent for how we would bring wartime crimes to justice: In August 1944, the 9-man crew of an American bomber was forced to bail out over Germany. As their captors marched them into Rüsselsheim, a small town recently bombed to smithereens by Allies, they were attacked by an angry mob of civilians -- farmers, shopkeepers, railroad workers, women, and children. With a local Nazi chief at the helm, they assaulted the young Americans with stones, bricks, and wooden clubs. They beat them viciously and left them for dead at the nearby cemetery.

It could have been another forgotten tragedy of the war. But when the lynching was briefly mentioned in a London paper a few months later, it caught the eye of two Army majors, Luke Rogers and Leon Jaworski. Their investigation uncovered the real human cost of the war: the parents and a newlywed wife who agonized over the fate of the men, and the devastating effect of modern warfare on civilian populations. Rogers and Jaworski put the city of Rüsselsheim on trial, insisting on the rule of law even amidst the horrors of war.

Drawing from trial records, government archives, interviews with family members, and personal letters, highly-acclaimed military historian Gregory A. Freeman brings to life for the first time the dramatic story. Taking the reader to the scene of the crime and into the homes of the crew, he exposes the stark realities of war to show how ordinary citizens could be drawn to commit horrific acts of wartime atrocities, and the far-reaching effects on generations.

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