

*Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War*, by Mark K. Wells. London: Frank Cass, 1995.

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In 1997 the Society for Military History gave one of its Distinguished Book Awards to Colonel (Dr.) Mark K. Wells for his *Courage and Air Warfare*. The honor was well deserved: this finely crafted volume represents analytical military history at its best. Thoroughly examining the human dimension of air warfare, Wells' book covers every significant aspect of the experiences of the Allied aircrews in the European theater.

Soundly based on primary sources, *Courage and Air Warfare* identifies the similarities and differences between the efforts of the Army Air Forces and the Royal Air Force. One commonality between the American and British air forces was the importance of the human element. Tactics and technology were significant in both the AAF and RAF, but the quality of the aircrews was the essential factor. On paper "all airmen were the same," Wells concludes, "but in actual combat some men did better than others" (page 51). Selecting, training, and sending these better-performing aviators into combat contributed fundamentally to the success of the Combined Bomber Offensive.

Wells also finds that both AAF and RAF had strong esprit de corps. He concludes that "the morale of the Eighth Air Force was undeniably high" (page 109). As for their allies, if "there was any significant difference between the morale of the American airmen and the British and Commonwealth men of Bomber Command, it was that Americans might generally, and with some justification, express more confidence in their aircraft" (page 132).

The leadership of the air forces represented yet another similarity. Although there were cultural and philosophical differences in the command styles of the allies, each produced effective leaders. In the case of the Americans, it is noteworthy that ten of the Eighth Air Force's top twenty-five aces served as squadron or group commanders.

*Courage and Air Warfare* also examines the differences between the AAF and RAF, which began with the aircrew selection procedures of the two nations. The American system drew on experience which had been gained during World War I and took a scientific approach. The British practice was based on tradition rather than science. The two systems were quite different and yet, as Wells concludes, "both worked in their own ways" and "produced thousands of reasonably healthy and enthusiastic volunteers for aircrew duty" (pages 21 and 22).

The most interesting difference between the allies was in their treatment of the issue of "lack of moral fiber." The authorities attributed this derogatory term to airmen who were grounded for what was seen as their personal failure to face the dangers of combat flying. Wells' scholarly examination of this sensitive subject represents the most striking feature of this book. He demonstrates that the basic difference in addressing this matter was that the British procedures were harsher. Wells emphasizes that while "lack of moral fiber" represented an important problem, it applied only to a small percentage of crew members.

Wells' findings about the human dimension of air warfare during World War II have enduring value. The author concludes that the reactions of modern airmen "to the stresses of combat and their abilities to overcome the friction of air war are not likely to be fundamentally different from those of their Second World War predecessors" (page 213). Anyone interested in military history or the human dimension of combat should read carefully *Courage and Air Warfare*.

