

THE LOST AIRMAN

By Seth Meyerowitz with Peter F. Stevens

One of the greatest fears of airmen during World War II – especially Jewish airmen – was to be shot down and captured by the Nazis. Allied airmen, regardless of their religion, were labeled *terrorflieger* – terrorist airmen – by the Nazi hierarchy. Many of those downed over German territory were captured and sent to POW camps, the less fortunate were lynched by German civilians, shot on sight by German soldiers, or if captured by the Gestapo, tortured and then killed. Those shot down in France and not captured by the Nazis but rescued by French citizens and given over to the *Maquis* – the French resistance fighters – were extremely lucky and smuggled out of France. Staff Sergeant Arthur Meyerowitz, a young Jewish B-24 flight engineer and top turret gunner who was shot down over France on his second mission on 31 December 1944 was one of the lucky ones. The *Lost Airman* is the amazing true story of his 6-month journey with the help of the French resistance to escape from Nazi-occupied France.

Injuring his back after cutting himself out of the tree in which he landed after bailing out of his burning B-24, Meyerowitz takes a chance and walks to a French farmhouse to seek help from its occupants. His luck holds out – the French family are in close contact with a French resistance group, the Morhange and its leader, Marcel Taillandier. Marcel takes Arthur and his journey through a number of safe houses begins. He is taught to be and act like a deaf mute to avoid possible capture by the Nazis, always on the lookout for downed airmen. The perilous journey takes him through France to Toulouse where he spent four months hiding in the open and finally over the Pyrenees into Spain and eventually to Gibraltar and Allied control.

Aside from the description of Arthur's journey, there are a number of excellent reasons anyone interested in World War II history should read this well-written book. Firstly, it tells the story of a young, Bronx-born Jew who, disqualified from the Aviation Cadet program due to an accident affecting his eyesight, opts to become a flight engineer rather than an administrative officer because he wanted to fight for his country. Secondly, it is the story of an individual with tremendous will power, fortitude and courage that enabled him to do what his French rescuers required of him in order to survive. Thirdly, it provides an in-depth look at the French *Maquis* and how they operated, including infiltrating the German occupation authorities. Lastly, it describes the heroism of those patriotic French men and women who faced torture and death rather than give up the names of their resistance colleagues.

The Lost Airman is based on Arthur Meyerowitz's escape debrief, post-war letters from his French rescuers, and interviews with Arthur's brother Seymour, and the narration reads easily like a novel. Whatever literary license that was taken, smoothly bridges gaps and is factually based and logical, portraying Arthur and the members of the *Maquis* as true heroes.

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