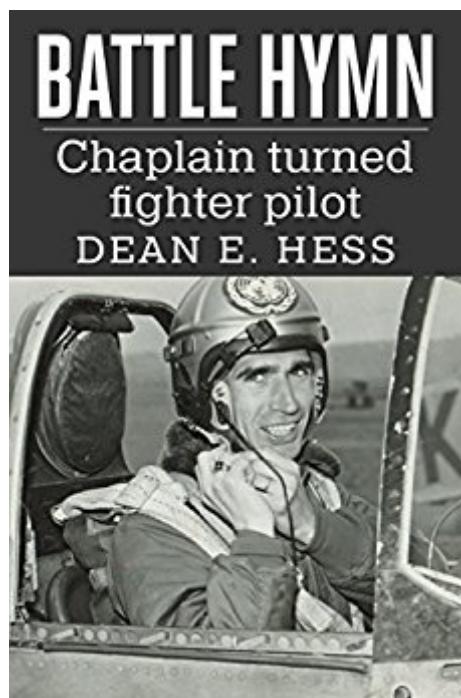


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Battle Hymn: Chaplain Turned Fighter Pilot



Synopsis

Battle Hymn: From Chaplain to Fighter Pilot, first published in 1956, is the inspirational autobiographical account of U.S. Air Force Colonel Dean Hess (born 1917). Hess details his experiences as a combat pilot in both World War Two and the Korean conflict. He flew more than 300 missions over France, Germany, and Korea and received numerous decorations from both the U.S. and Korean governments. His service was the subject of the 1957 film of the same name, starring Rock Hudson. Prior to the Second World War, Hess was a Protestant minister living in Marietta, Ohio. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hess came to believe that it was not right to ask members of his congregation to fight if he was not prepared to go himself — not as a chaplain but as a combatant. In Korea, in addition to flying combat missions, Hess undertook the daunting task of organizing and training a South Korean air force. He is also remembered for his part in the so-called "Kiddy Car Airlift," the rescue of nearly 1000 orphans and 80 orphanage staff from the path of the advancing Chinese in December 1950. Although Hess' actual role in the airlift has been somewhat criticized, Hess donated proceeds from Battle Hymn (both the book and movie) to charities helping Korean children. Included are 10 pages of photographs and maps.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The main inscription on the Korean War Memorial in Washington reads, "Our nation honors her sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met." In "Battle Hymn," one American who got to know the Korean people during the war, Air Force Major Dean Hess, tells his own story. He was sent to Korea only a few days after the fighting began in 1950. His mission: uncrate and assemble some old F-51 Mustang fighters, form the cadre of a Korean Air Force from among the few Koreans who knew how to fly, lead them in their first combats, and start the flying training schools that would create the ROKAF. He got to know more Koreans when he took a special interest in caring for the war's orphans. When the North Koreans and Chinese again pushed south in 1951, he gathered aircraft to evacuate the children to safety. "Operation Kiddy Car" became an Air Force legend. Hess was given the Korean equivalent of the Medal of Honor. The book fascinates for other reasons. It describes the hardships of life during the Depression, how he worked his way through Marietta College, and how became a preacher in Ohio at a very young age. His decision to become a combat pilot (rather than a chaplain) during the Second World War echoes the decision of Pastor John Peter Muhlenberg during the Revolution. How Hess weighed his faith with the violence and tragedy of war is a constant theme in the book. When I meet Air Force cadets and young officers, I always recommend they read "Battle Hymn" for its lessons in leadership. Every officer must find a style of leadership that fits with his or her personality and values. Not every officer will lead in Hess's manner, to be sure, but his candid account will help any leader better understand responsibility and command. The best story in the book is how he dealt with a visiting colonel who refused to bunk with an African-American officer in Hess's unit. One more thought: In Iraq and Afghanistan the armed forces have had to re-learn some old lessons. Winning the cooperation of local people starts with understanding and respect. American units must always seek to minimize civilian casualties. In the end, it is the training of effective local armed forces that will allow Americans to withdraw, so the training mission is as important as combat. In distance and time, Korea is a long way from the Middle East, but Hess's experiences can speak to a new generation.-30-

This was a inspiring story. This man gave of himself and gave to his children some much. This is a man we should all inspire to be. Dean Hess is truly a Good Man

I had already read this once before but lost the book so I bought this to replace. One of the best stories on war from an unlikely hero doing his duty along the lines of Seargent York. Also check out the movie by the same name starring Rock Hudson.

Good book, a little slow in spots. Enjoyed the history of his "Korean" training squadron.

It was great, I enjoyed it and I typically don't read this type of book. I learned about the Korean War.

Well written autobiographical account of a minister, becoming an Air Force pilot and piloting many missions in the Korean War while training ROK airmen to fly F-51's as they established their own South Korean Air Force.

Fine read, telling of an earlier era when faith, self-discipline, commitment, and patriotism were paramount values. Minister turns fighter pilot, then squadron leader. Fine portraits of caring and trial through adversity, prayer, and Christian charity, while at war. Also, good overall fighter pilot and logistics overview of the air war in the Sabre jet.

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