



From the Pilot Factory, 1942 (Centennial of Flight Series)

William P. Mitchell

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In 1939, the United States Army Air Force trained just 1,200 new pilots. Yet, by the end of World War II, airfields had become factories, and 193,440 young men had become pilots. Author William P. Mitchell entered the pilot factory at San Antonio's Kelly Field in January 1942. He then went to Garner Field near Uvalde, Texas, for primary training; to Randolph Field for basic; to Brooks Field for advanced flying; and to Del Valle for transition on the C-47.

Mitchell's experiences were similar to those of thousands of young men. Because his mother kept his wartime letters, readers of this book can catch glimpses of a world long vanished and an era that now seems innocent and naive. Mitchell worried about washing out, but he eventually learned to do nighttime "blitz" landings without lights, to loop and roll and recover from a spin, to identify an aircraft from its silhouette, and to navigate cross country. Like many of his peers, he wanted to be a pursuit pilot, but he was assigned to C-47s, a disappointment to which he resigned himself. As a member of the 73d Squadron of the 434th Troop Carrier Group, he delivered glider infantry at Normandy, dropped airborne troops during Operation Market Garden, and supplied the 101st Airborne Division during the Battle of the Bulge.

Mitchell's letters remind us that learning to fly was a romantic and unexpected adventure for the young men of the Greatest Generation who flew for the USAAF.

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