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**HARPER & BROTHERS**

**In a Crashing Bomber**

*RED RAIN. By Leslie Kark. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1946. 254 pp. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

**T**HE searchlight man had a runny nose. He took his hands from the wheel to deal with a sneeze and that act accidentally brought into the beam a British bomber, which the next moment was hit and spinning down in flames. What about the crew of the plane? How had their lives prepared them for this ending to life?

Robert Cruickshank had been badly wounded fighting the Arabian rebels and fell in love with a girl in the hospital. David Tetlow encountered the injustice of the world early in life, was very close to his sister, had a basic cowardice which he did not allow to show, a certain amount of talent in the graphic arts. Geoffrey Irons was a college man who had taken up the profession of being a London Bobby, fell in love with an Irish girl he met on a bottle-party raid, so ideally in love that he could no longer take the sights of London under the blitz and had therefore enlisted. Etcetera.

The group was by no means selected for its value in providing antithetical character-patterns; their careers are tied together only by the fact that they died in the crash of the same bomber; in fact the author specifically disclaims any intention of making them represent anything but themselves.

They were not like any other bomber crew, because no two bomber crews were very similar, but neither were they so unlike any others as to make the difference sharply noticeable... On the surface their young lives appeared so neatly closed... but the interiors were often a seemingless purposeless tangle, with here a tale hardly begun or only a

promise of fulfillment and there a whole jumble of doubt, the tantalizing of an encounter that awaited a sequel.

This is a rather remarkable outline for a book. If it really means what it seems to mean the author is saying that the war was fought by a set of disparate individuals who had nothing in common but the fact that they were caught in the gears of a machine and whose lives were deprived of all significance by that fact. In developing this doctrine of despair Wing Commander Kark has shown skill to a degree that makes the book worthy of some attention. One feels that behind each of the selected incidentals run long corridors of experience and emotion, and if their lives were without meaning except to themselves, they at least had that importance to a considerable degree. But the result in a literary sense is not so much a book as a series of disconnected character sketches about people as remote and mutually uninfluencing as so many Pacific atolls.

Wing Commander Kark has apparently felt this difficulty and also the fact that if the war is purposeless for the individual it must also be for the race which is made up of individuals. He is accordingly driven to the device of having one of his characters (the least fully realized, incidentally) escape from the burning plane via parachute and plunge into a set of adventures that would not have disgraced John Buchan, leading up to the point that, after all, people do fight for something and that something of importance. It is a singular volte-face; and it does a good deal to rescue the book from being merely one more of those examples of journalism in the fictive form of which the war has produced such an abundance.

**We Are Not Alone**

By Lt. Kermit Roosevelt, U.S.A.

**B**EYOND the circle of the fire  
Amongst the high grass at the water's edge,  
In those scrub pines above the trail,  
Behind the rocks which guard that ledge,

Within the shattered farmhouse off the road,  
Out of the cellars in this famous city,  
From those clean clouds, out of the tossing water,  
Slit-mouthed, hot-eyed, without pity,

The spearman crouches at your side,  
The cave is ringed with man-made flame.  
Others were at this task before us,  
Before our generation came.

# "If You Think This Is Rough . . ."

**THE GREAT PACIFIC VICTORY.**  
By Gilbert Cant. Maps and battle diagrams. New York: The John Day Co. 1946. 422 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JOSEPH HIRSH

**I**N the latter days of the war in Europe, we would occasionally meet someone who had served earlier in the CBI. To the slightest gripe we might make, his invariable comment would be, "Say, bud, if you think this is rough, you should of seen . . ." Well, next to actually seeing the Pacific war—and Europe was enough for most of us—reading "The Great Pacific Victory" gives a precise enough picture of what it was like out there.

As war editor for the *New York Post* and *Time* magazine, Mr. Cant had many public and some not-so-public documents available to him in the preparation of this book (which is the third he has done on the war). But more important are his tours of duty with our fighting forces. These have engendered a book of vigor and urgency which the academic historians might well note. Cant not only reports but also appraises very humanly the events and the men who shaped them.

Contrasted to the European war where the distances were relatively short and the problems of terrain and opposing armies fairly well understood and appraised, the Pacific war that Cant recounts was alien to us in most of these elements. Distances were great, covering not thousands but tens of thousands of miles, from Guadalcanal to the Aleutians. The terrain ranged from desert beach and impenetrable jungle to mud and mountains and great cities. The enemy—tricky, competent, and hardened—with the preliminaries of China behind him was opposed by armies problemed by lack of experience and supplies.

Against this background, Cant takes us along on the island-hopping campaigns from Guadalcanal to the Russells and New Georgia, a stratagem little understood at the time but dictated by the geography, the short range of our fighting planes, and our limited forces and supplies. From the Solomons, the carrier strikes take us from island-hopping to leap-frogging, a technique of by-passing enemy bases which brought our air forces closer to the Japanese home islands. Rabaul, Tarawa, the Marianas, Iwo, and Okinawa are burning images in these pages. The book ends logically with the surrender of last September.

Interspersed throughout the charge of events, the battles and campaigns, are profiles and portraits of the men,

big and little, who planned and participated in them. Some seem overdrawn, but Cant compensates for it in his thoroughly refreshing manner of taking the "brass" to task. Mighties like Admiral King and other "communiqué commanders" are needed

**LISTEN, PARTNER—SMILE  
WHEN YOU CALL ME A  
"FETID MUSTELINE MAMMAL, GENUS MEPHITIS"**



**skunk** (skūngk), *n.*  
Ind. *segonow*, skunk<sup>1</sup>,  
a small, American  
mammal (genus *Mephitis*)  
usually black with white markings, able at will to eject a liquid of very offensive odor: in the United States, also called *polecat*:  
*Vulgar*, a contemptible person.—*v. i.* to beat (an opponent, as in cards) so badly that he makes no score.

**T**HE life of a skunk is hard enough without dictionaries throwing big words at him. Even *human beings* find THAT habit pretty exasperating!

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