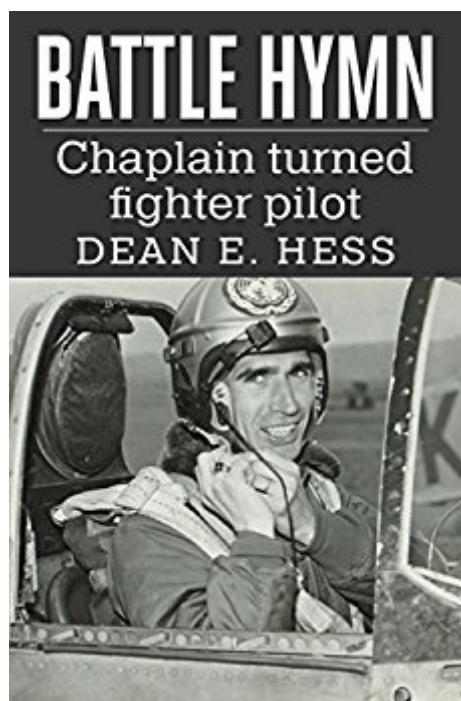


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Battle Hymn: Chaplain Turned Fighter Pilot



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.

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