



## Fast Track to Manhood

*Thomas P. Griffin*

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FAST TRACK TO MANHOOD is recommended reading by Larry Kerkow & Associates.

Fifty-five years after World War II, a B-24 Aircraft Commander who flew thirty missions against heavily defended targets throughout Hitler's Europe, relates the story of his "FAST TRACK To Manhood" as bomber pilot and prisoner of war.

Lieutenant Thomas P. Griffin and his ten-man crew were on their thirty-second bombing mission over Germany on 24 May 1944, when their B-24 Liberator received battle damage from German Messerschmitt 109 fighters. They were forced to parachute from the burning aircraft at an altitude over 20,000 feet. As part of the 450th Bombardment Group, the "Cottontails" as they were known because of their distinctive white-painted rudders, were participating in the United States Fifteenth Air Forces assault against Hitler's European Fortress.

Griffin and his crew came under intense fighter and ground-fire time and time again. He flew against the heavily defended Ploesti oil fields of Rumania on 5 April 1944 when scores of B-24s were shot down in flames. Lieutenant Griffin witnessed many parachutes as survivors of crew after crew bailed out of stricken bombers.

He relates the sometimes tragic, sometimes comedic incidents associated with flying heavy bombers as well as his experiences being a prisoner of war in Stalag Luft #3, which was an allied flying officers camp located at Sagan, Germany. He shares the jubilation of his liberation by forces of the United States Third Army commanded by General George S. Patton.

"FAST TRACK To Manhood" documents the bravery of the young men called upon to fly the heavy bombers against staggering odds including the airmen of the 450th Bomb Group, and specifically the crew flying the Liberator named Little Lady Joyce.

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