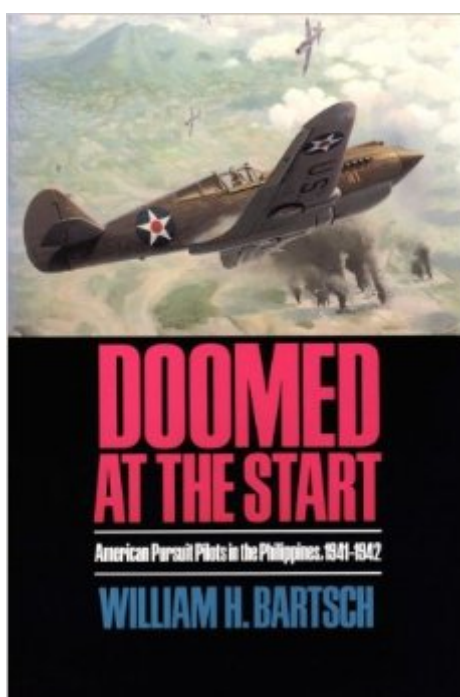


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Doomed At The Start: American Pursuit Pilots In The Philippines, 1941-1942 (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)



Synopsis

During the first three days of the Japanese assault on American Pacific bases in December of 1941, the 24th Pursuit Group, the only unit of interceptor aircraft in the Philippine Islands, was almost destroyed as an effective force. Yet the group's pilots, doomed from the start by their limited training, an inadequate air warning system, and lack of familiarity with the few flyable pursuit aircraft they had left, fought on against immensely superior number of Japanese army and navy fighters.

â€¦ bold drama, with almost novel-like narration. This is good history. . . .â€”Daniel R. Mortensen, Office of Air Force History â€¦ an engrossing and minutely detailed account based on a variety of US and Japanese government and military records and on personal interviews with the surviving pilots.â€”Choice â€¦ an admirably detailed history . . . the work will [be of] interest to both aviation buffs and students of WWII.â€”Publisher's Weekly â€¦ ignoring the point of view of the top brass, Bartsch's book becomes a triumph of human interest rather than another statistical account. . . . A winning account of a losing campaign defended by courage and honor.â€”Journal of Military History â€¦ as much a compelling human drama as an objective and detailed unit history. . . . a prodigious achievement in unit history research that does overdue justice to the memory of a tragic group of airmen who did the best they could with what they had under extraordinary circumstances and against thoroughly daunting adversity.â€”Military History

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Customer Reviews

â€”Doomed at the Start: American Pursuit Pilots in the Philippines, 1941-1942â€” is a fine narrative

history of the destruction of the 24th Pursuit Group at the outset of the Japanese attack on the Philippines and the survivors efforts to carry on after the chaotic retreat to Bataan. The title comes from a letter Lt. Max Louk wrote to his sister after a training mission against B-17s demonstrated the P-40's limitations in its intended interceptor role. "Our planes are not good enough to fight with." Expecting Japan to attack he continued "Well, we all hope it comes soon, because we are doomed at the start." Lt. Louk died December 8 attempting to take off under attack at Clark Field. The December 8 attacks effectively destroyed the 24th Pursuit Group. By the end of the first week of war it had lost 80 percent of its P-40s and P-35s. Barely 20 fighters made it to Bataan in a poorly managed evacuation and most of its personnel fought as infantry. Command failures are a recurrent theme. They were a continuing source of bitterness for the surviving pilots William Bartsch interviewed in the 1970s and 80s. Only General Harold George among senior commanders seems to have generated respect and confidence. His evacuation from Bataan in March 1942 was a major psychological blow. Ironically General George died a month later in an operational accident. The 24th Pursuit survivors steadily developed combat experience. On Bataan most performed well, especially in a ground attack role, but their numbers were so small that they had little impact on the campaign. By the fall of Bataan only 3 fighters were airworthy enough to retreat to Mindanao where they joined a handful of P-40s. Fighter contributions to the brief defense of Mindanao were minimal.

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