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Review of *Bomber Boys on Screen: RAF Bomber Command in Film and Television Drama* by S P MacKenzie

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## REVIEWS

hand, Irincheev reminds us that some of the later conditions marked a significant deterioration in the terms despite lower reparations. Whether Mannerheim was right in not settling earlier does become something of a moot point however when one considers the impact of this last offensive on those whose lives were shattered by it. As well as providing great insight into a fascinating theatre of war – accompanied by a selection of striking contemporary photographs, Irincheev has done an excellent job in describing what it was like to live, fight and die during this violent final stage in Finland's evolution as an emerging nation.

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**S P MacKenzie, *Bomber Boys on Screen: RAF Bomber Command in Film and Television Drama*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 256pp. 8 bw illus. ISBN: 978-1350024847 (hardback). Price £85.**

The history and memory of RAF Bomber Command has been overshadowed by concerns about the high number of casualties it inflicted on civilians during night raids over selected German cities in the later stages of the conflict. It has been more palatable to Britain's modern memory of the 'People's War' to concentrate on 'The Few' who fought in the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, rather than 'The Many' of RAF Bomber Command and their controversial commander Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris. While the Battle of Britain memorial in Capel-le-Ferne, Kent was unveiled in 1993 and another Battle of Britain monument in London in 2005, the memorial to RAF Bomber Command was not unveiled by the Queen until June 2012. The memorial to the 55,573 of its aircrew, from Britain and allied nations including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, that lost their lives was vandalised a year later. During a service for the 70th anniversary of the bombings in Dresden, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, was heavily criticised for appearing to apologise for the actions of Bomber Command, and the BBC were also accused of presenting media coverage which was biased in favour of German victims rather than the British and Allied air crews who lost their lives during the conflict.

Over the last three decades there have been a number of histories examining how aerial warfare during the Second World War has been represented in film and on television. However, the on-screen treatments of the heroes of Britain's 'finest hour' have been favoured, with a relatively small number choosing to examine representations of Bomber Command. S. P. MacKenzie's book, *Bomber Boys on Screen*:

*RAF Bomber Command in Film and Television Drama*, seeks to redress this imbalance by making film and television dramas of Bomber Command at the centre of this fascinating study. *Bomber Boys on Screen* is MacKenzie's third book published in this area, having produced *British War Films: 1939-1945* (2006) and *The Battle of Britain on Screen: 'The Few' in British Film and Television Drama* (2016), so he is well placed to fill the lacuna in academic discourse on the place of Bomber Command in films and television dramas.

*Bomber Boys on Screen* adopts a chronological approach, examining the development, presentation, and reception of significant dramas decade-by-decade. The scope of material is impressive, going from the films of the RAF Film Production Unit in the 1940s to the televisual treatments of Bomber Command veterans in the 2000s. However, this book does more than satisfy the requirements of a work which seeks to highlight the existence of an overlooked screen subgenre. MacKenzie explains how developments in everything from characterisation, storylines, film technology, and the availability of vintage aircraft have changed over time, alongside other representations in historical context such as novels, histories, war comics, television documentaries, campaign memorial and commemorative statues. This study also considers how representations of Bomber Command have been received in allied countries, including America, but judges it best to leave discussions of the German perspective to other scholars such as Alex Bangert and David F. Crew.

While the introduction feels rather succinct, the detailed notes will help signpost readers to material which outlines the basis of the book. Indeed, the weight of research underpinning this work makes it an ideal resource for students of media representations of war. The chronological treatment of the material by chapter also makes this work more accessible, and I would recommend anyone teaching or studying courses on war, media and memory to add *Bomber Boys on Screen* to their reading lists.

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