



The True Story of Catch 22: The Real Men and Missions of Joseph Heller's 340th Bomb Group in World War II

Patricia Chapman Meder

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After the publication of his bestselling novel *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller usually chose to deny that any of his richly drawn characters were based on his actual war mates. However, to those who served with Heller in the 340th Bomb Group the novel's characters were indeed recognizable—the hard-drinking, vengeful, and disillusioned Chief White Half Oat, young, sliced-in-half Kid Sampson, shrieking, frenzied Hungry Joe, Colonel Cathcart, General Dreedle, Yossarian and that capitalist supreme, Milo Minderbinder.

In this book, written and colorfully illustrated by the daughter of the 340th Bomb Group's commander, Colonel Willis Chapman, we finally encounter the real men and combat missions on which the novel was based. While Heller's fully developed characters stand solely, solidly and uniquely on their own merits, *The True Story of Catch-22* proves that any resemblance to persons living or dead is, in fact, actual.

This three-part book blends fact, fancy, and history with full-blown original illustrations and rare, previously unpublished photos of these daring USAAF flyers and their Corsican-based B-25 Mitchell. Along with descriptions of the 340th's real wartime events, the work includes twelve men of the Bomb Group relating twelve richly told tales of their own.

Now all of the men upon whom Heller based his characters are gone. However, the last survivor, George L. Wells, was an extraordinary combat pilot who tied the record for the number of bombing missions flown in WWII with 102. George, the model for *Catch-22*'s Capt. Wren, is the common thread who weaves through this book, allowing the reader to truly feel the war and even thumb through George's well-worn mission book describing attacks on Axis ports, ships, bridges, and the notorious Brenner Pass. In this book the reader will discover that truth is indeed as fascinating as fiction!

Author Patricia Chapman Meder has been a professional artist in both fine and commercial art for the past 35 years, 13 of them in Europe. When *Catch-22* was published it was quickly apparent that this book was based on the Bomb Group her father commanded in World War II. This true-life parallel book thus begged to be written. Pat Meder has also written a full-color companion work to "*The True Story of Catch-22*," containing her delightful original artwork and caricatures of the individuals, "*The True Story of Catch-22 Illustrated*".

REVIEWS

Heller's satiric caricatures are here shown to have stemmed from patriotic, courageous, highly decorated airmen who daily performed heroic wartime feats against overwhelming obstacles. The log of George Wells (Captain Wren in *Catch-22*), who flew a record 102 missions in his B-25, is included in an appendix. *Library Journal*

"...uses rare and unpublished photos to bring our actual heroes to life through use of first person narrative...Fans of *Catch-22* will enjoy the book. It makes good use of diaries, logs, and photos to bring the people to life. For those unfamiliar with *Catch-22* the book will make you curious enough to pickup Heller's book..."

Irish Defence Forces Veterans Association

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"The True Story of Catch - 22: The Real Men and Missions of Joseph Heller's 340th Bomb Group in World War II" would make a nice companion volume or commentary for the serious student of the original work. It would make a nice inclusion in university or community libraries as a resource for Joseph Heller's book.
Kepler's Military History

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