



Serenade to the Big Bird: A Young Flier's Moving Memoir of the Second World War (Uncommon Valor)

Bert Stiles

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Serenade to the Big Bird, first published in the United States in 1952, recounts author Bert Stiles' experiences as an Army Air Force pilot in the European theater of World War Two. Stiles enlisted in the Air Force almost immediately after Pearl Harbor, and served as a Second Lieutenant in the 401st Bomb Squadron, 91st Bomb Group, and later in the 505th Fighter Squadron, 339th Fighter Group. Stiles expressed doubts about the conflict, stating that "we aren't solving anything with this war." However, he realized "there is a time when every man must fight."

After completing a tour of duty (thirty-five missions) in B-17 bombers, Stiles transferred to a fighter squadron where he flew the P-51 Mustang. Sadly, four months later, on November 26, 1944, he was killed in action while on an escort mission to Hanover, Germany. Stiles was 23 at the time of his death.

Due to the efforts of his mother, *Serenade to the Big Bird* was first published in England in 1947 and in the United States in 1952. The book, long-considered one of the masterpieces of World War Two writing, has remained popular due to its description of the tragedy of war, and specifically, the sensitive portrayal of life and war by such a young, gifted writer.

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