

TWO GOLD COINS AND A PRAYER
AN APPRECIATION

By

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James H. Keeffe III, Two Gold Coins And A Prayer: The Epic Journey of a World War II Bomber Pilot and POW, Appell Publishing, Fall City, Washington. Pp. i – 408.

Over the years, many World War II memoirs have found their way into publication. They vary dramatically, ranging from those that are poorly written, presented without proper historical context, or overly self-aggrandizing to the rare, precious few that are well-researched, historically correct, and honestly portray the wartime experiences of men who accomplished great things all the while retaining the foibles which plague all human beings. Two Gold Coins And A Prayer happily belongs to the latter group.

It is the enlightening and intriguing story of a B-24 Liberator pilot, as told to his son. Through the highly descriptive pen of his son, the reader follows young Jim Keeffe, Jr. from the time he decides to volunteer as a pilot, through the various flight schools he attended, and finally to England, where as a 2nd Lieutenant he flew as co-pilot on several bombing missions before his plane was badly damaged during an air raid on Berlin.

Forced to bail out of his plane before it crashed, 2nd Lt. Keeffe landed in German occupied Holland, where he was hidden from the German Secret Police by members of the daring and brave Dutch Resistance. He was eventually captured after crossing into Belgium in a heroic effort to make contact with the advancing allied forces. After being held for a time in various prisons run by the German Secret Police he was eventually turned over to the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe, and sent to Stalag Luft III, the large Prisoner of War camp made famous in the movie, *The Great Escape*.

After several months at Stalag Luft III, 2nd Lt. Keeffe joined thousands of other allied POWs in the long, cold, and often dangerous forced march to the infamous Stalag VIIA in southern Bavaria. The badly overcrowded camp was already a hell-hole when 2nd Lt. Keeffe and his comrades arrived, but grew steadily worse as more and more POWs were herded into the camp in advance of the advancing Allied forces. Eventually 2nd Lt. Keeffe and approximately 130,000 other Allied POWs were liberated by the 14th Armored Division. In the chaos that followed, 2nd Lt. Keeffe and a close friend made their way from southern Bavaria to France, and from there to Camp Lucky Strike where they were cleaned up, provided new uniforms, and given medical treatment. After a brief stay they embarked on a troop ship that took them to home.

The book benefits greatly from the author's attention to detail that brings the reader almost physically along with 2nd Lt. Keeffe. The technical and historical details that help accomplish this are fully explained either in the text itself, or in the extremely helpful chapter notes. These notes also include the citation of sources used in writing the

chapter, a practice that is in keeping with a high standard of historiography, as are the accompanying bibliography and appendices. The text is adorned with many previously unpublished photographs, maps, and illustrations from 2nd Lt. Keefe's private collection, as well as similar materials from the Lt. General Albert P. Clark Collection at the US Air Force Academy Library. They add valuable information and additional context to the narrative.

Inserted at appropriate places in the chronology of the story are comments, updates really, of what happened to people previously mentioned in the narrative. In particular, the reader learns the fates of those members of the Dutch Resistance who assisted 2nd Lt. Keefe in evading the German Secret Police for over five months. All too often, the reader learns that after 2nd Lt. Keefe was captured these brave men and women had been arrested by the Secret Police, imprisoned, and in some cases executed. Rather than interruptive, these intrusions add greatly to the flow of the narrative by placing in stark perspective the trials and tribulations of an American POW imprisoned by the Germans, with those of the Dutch citizens who risked their lives on a daily basis to help downed allied airmen. In this there is a symmetry that often escapes authors of similar memoirs.

Two Gold Coins And A Prayer will appeal to members of the general public who wish to know more about the brave young men who flew American bombers during WWII, the members of the Dutch Resistance who risked their lives to keep those unfortunates who were shot down over Holland out of Nazi hands, and the experiences of those who were imprisoned in German POW camps. Military historians will also benefit from the exquisite attention to detail found in this book, and will undoubtedly discover important bits of information that are new to even the most erudite among them.

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