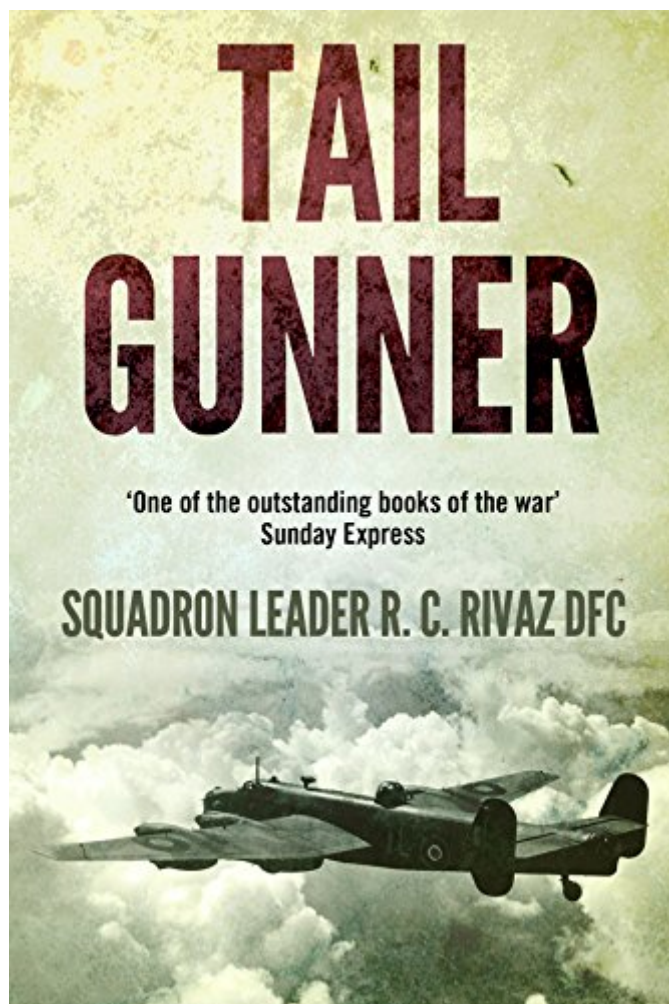


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# Tail Gunner



## Synopsis

“One of the outstanding books of the war.” *Sunday Express* This gripping story of one man’s involvement in RAF Bomber Command’s fledgling offensive was first published in 1943. Written only months after the events described, R. C. Rivaz provides a uniquely fresh and immediate perspective on some of the most harrowing episodes of the war. He was tail gunner to Leonard Cheshire, one of the most famous RAF pilots of the Second World War and flew in Whitleys with 102 Squadron and Halifaxes with 35 Squadron. Rivaz describes his experiences of night bombing attacks against heavily defended enemy targets like Duisburg, Dusseldorf and Essen, recording in captivating detail the sights and sounds of these dangerous night time raids. But he describes equally well the colour pallet of the setting sun from fifteen thousand feet, and his turbulent mind set as he prepares for each death defying mission. He relates a dramatic shoot-out with German fighters over La Rochelle in broad daylight and describes his near-death encounters with cool but honest detail. Rivaz also describes two agonizing crashes over the sea, one occasion of which he waits near frozen for seven hours, buffeted by stormy weather in a rubber dinghy. Tailgunner is not only unrivalled in its immediacy and insight, but gripping and eminently readable. Richard Rivaz was born in Assam on 15th March 1908, son of a colonial official in the Indian Civil Service. He later returned to England and studied painting at the Royal College of Art. He became an accomplished artist in the 1930s, before training as a teacher and taking up an appointment at Collyer’s School in Sussex, where he taught art. Rivaz volunteered for pilot training in 1940 but was bitterly disappointed to learn that, at the age of thirty-two, he was too old to become a pilot. He commenced training as an air-gunner and saw first service with No. 102 Squadron. He survived many dangerous raids and crashes but was unfortunately killed at the end of the war, when his transport aircraft caught fire on take off from Brussels airport on 13 October 1945. For details of other books published by Albion Press go to the website at [www.albionpress.co.uk](http://www.albionpress.co.uk). Albion Press is an imprint of Endeavour Press, the UK’s leading independent digital publisher. For more information on our titles please sign up to our newsletter at [www.endeavourpress.com](http://www.endeavourpress.com). Each week you will receive updates on free and discounted ebooks. Follow us on Twitter: @EndeavourPress and on Facebook via <http://on.fb.me/1HweQV7>. We are always interested in hearing from our readers. Endeavour Press believes that the future is now.

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## Customer Reviews

Reading first hand accounts puts a personal face on history rather than just learning the dates and locations especially when well written like this book. The author describes in some detail the aircraft set up, roles of those aboard, and the process of preparing for missions in a way that is not dry but keeps readers fascinated. Rivaz participated in a number of bombing missions described through the course of the book. While not graphically gory the dangers faced are not glossed over either. While reading the book readers can almost picture themselves in the situations described; the trepidation at leaving home behind and flying over enemy lines, the anxiety of flak exploding all around and enemy fighters approaching, the sadness of seeing airplanes hit and falling with friends aboard and the relief of being rescued from the sea after being forced to evacuate a disabled airplane. I would have preferred the book be longer but other than that it was excellent. I received a complimentary copy of this book from Net Galley in exchange for an honest review.

I was asked by the publisher to read this book and provide an honest review. I am truly thankful for that as it was a pleasure to read. Written during World War Two within months of when the events described took place, it has a real immediacy to it and gave me an excellent understanding of what it was like to be a "tail gunner" right down to the clothes he wore to keep warm under freezing conditions to the fear he felt before certain bombing sorties. It amazes me how these young men

could go out so many times knowing that there was a very good chance that they would never return. Squadron Leader Richard Ravaz DFC had several very close calls during the time he was writing - twice being forced to bail out into the sea - once without anyone knowing where they were and just hoping they would be found. While the early part of the book had some grammatical or writing issues, the writing either improved or I just didn't notice as I was so engrossed in what was happening. The book was originally published in 1943 which seems amazing under the circumstances and with the need for wartime secrecy. It basically covers one year in time and doesn't take the reader to the end of the war. It left me wanting to know more about Rivaz - especially whether he survived (as this was his only book.) Apparently he did survive, but only until October 1945 which is incredibly sad. In the book I learned that these men were very particular about who they flew with and had strong loyalties. Rivaz apparently flew with Leonard Cheshire, one of the most famous pilots of the Second World War. He was also trained as a painter at the Royal College of Art and perhaps this is why his descriptions of scenes and skies are so vivid to the reader. I think this book would be of interest to anyone eager to learn more about the war in the air but it is also clear enough that it would probably be of interest to Young Adult readers too.

Tail Gunner is the memoir of a member of the Royal Air Force during World War II. I was fortunate to receive a copy free in advance from Net Galley and Endeavor Press in exchange for an honest review. It's both compelling and informative. Those accustomed to modern air travel may find it hard to imagine flight during this time period. There was no source of heat, and of course it's far colder in the sky than on the ground. Our author was a turret gunner, and it turns out that the turret and the nose are the two coldest parts of the plane. He stoically assures us there is no reason to be too cold up there if one dresses properly, and then lays out the multitudinous layers that must have made flyers look like old-fashioned versions of the Michelin man, but with head gear and a parachute. He describes the layers of ice that formed on the metal inside the turret, and how his oxygen mask freezes while it is on his face. None of this is all that important once one is shot down, however. My interest in military history is recent; I studied and taught history for a long time, but for most of those years, I preferred to study the causes of war, and so my primary interest was more political and theory-based. Maybe this is why it never occurred to me that the pilot is always the boss inside a military plane regardless of the ranks of various officers. Rivas points out that there really can't be a discussion when the pilot says to jump; the point is well taken! This novella-length memoir is recommended to those with an interest in World War II, particularly its aeronautic aspects, and also to academics and researchers, given that this is a primary document.

It was released to the public April 8, so you can buy a copy for yourself.

The book is disappointingly incomplete. No real start, middle or end. It is a fragment of a combat diary. It begins, disappointingly, with the tail gunner reporting to his bomber squadron for combat flying duty. No mention of the gunner's military training, nor who he was before that in civilian life. Then follows some exciting accounts of several terrifying missions, but no personal information about the tail gunner or his family. Was he an officer? Or an NCO? A military book, but nothing personal about him. At the end - if one can call it that - of the book, the tail gunner and his crew are shot down after a terrifying mission, but rescued from the sea, to their relief. Then what? Nothing. We don't know - that's all you get. It is as though the last hundred pages were simply deleted. What happened? Did the tail gunner then die in a later air battle? Or did he survive the war to have a family and a career? The book ends abruptly with none of that. The effect is of a combat diary covering a few months of his combat tour. Or was it more like a year? If so, what year? I guess we will never know. The book looked promising, but was a disappointment.

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