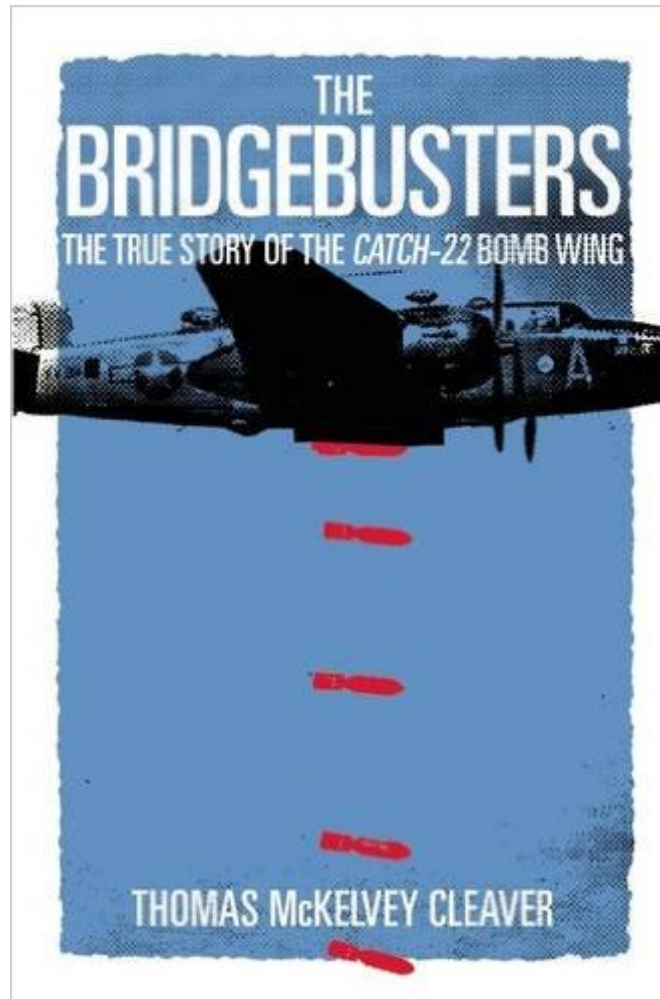


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# The Bridgebusters: The True Story Of The Catch-22 Bomb Wing



## Synopsis

"He had decided to live forever, or die in the attempt." #151; Catch-22The men of the 57th Bomb Wing flew out of Corsica during World War II and bombed vital bridges throughout Italy to sabotage German supply routes. Their missions were dangerous and never-ending. One bombardier in the wing was a young New Yorker named Joseph Heller, who would later turn his experience into the classic 1961 war novel Catch-22. Now aviation historian Thomas McKelvey Cleaver takes a closer look at the real-life men of the 57th, whose camaraderie in the face of death inspired the raucous cast of heroes and antiheroes in Catch-22.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Catch-22: 50th Anniversary Edition is my all time favorite book. So when I learned about The Bridgebusters: The True Story of the Catch-22 Bomb Wing, it immediately shot to the top of my Goodreads "Want to Read" list. It has everything to make it a perfect read for me: airplanes, history and Heller. Then I found out about The True Story Of Catch-22: The Real Men and Missions of Joseph Heller's 340th Bomb Group in World War II, written by the daughter of the real Colonel Cathcart, so I daisy-chained right into what turned out to be the Yin for Cleaver's Yang. The Bridgebusters is a history book of the 57th Bomb Wing in which Joseph Heller served as a bombardier on a B-25 during World War II. Cleaver details the missions primarily in the context of the Allied campaign to liberate Italy which, frankly, I am less familiar with than Operation Overlord and the action of the Eighth Air Force's B-17s bombing Germany from England. Heller is shown as the cog he was in the U.S. fighting machine that defeated the Nazis and Cleaver puts forth an

interesting theory of the author's true relationship to Yossarian. The True Story of Catch-22 is less a history book and more a collection of personal memoirs of the men of Heller's 488th squadron.

The exploits and achievements of the 57th Bomb Wing in the Mediterranean Theater are not well known especially considering the number of unique firsts and superlatives they amassed during the fighting there from February 1943 until the end of the war in May of 1945. After the war Herman Göring stated to Army interrogators: "The disruption of our [transportation] lines has done more harm to us than the destruction of our factories." This was the job at which the Bridgebusters excelled. The lack of general knowledge about the Wing is even more puzzling when you consider that the greatest novel to come out of WWII, Joseph Heller's Catch-22, was woven from the very fabric of his personal experiences as a bombardier in the 57th Bomb Wing. The Wing could not have found a better historian than Tom Cleaver to bring their story to the attention of WWII historians and enthusiasts everywhere. Cleaver uses his encyclopedic knowledge of operations in the MTO to recount the action on the ground as well as in the air in order to establish the context of the sacrifices made by the men of the 57th. Mr. Cleaver is the first author to have total access to the complete archives of the 57th Bomb Wing Association, and was able to do personal interviews with the crewmen who braved the dreaded German 88's over Italy and France. Cleaver's text was fact-checked by Wing historians and veterans of the 57th assuring the reader of the most accurate and comprehensive account of the Wing's history ever published in English. His crisp, fast-moving descriptions of the action inside stricken B-25 bombers will have you on the edge of your seat, as well as the accounts of the fliers evading capture after bailing out over enemy territory.

Cleaver delivers more than what is amply promised in The Bridgebusters: the True Story of the Catch-22 Bomb Wing "so much more in both in material as well as what life was like for the 57th Bomb Wing (Joseph Heller, author of Catch-22, served in it and got his inspiration from that duty station). In The Bridgebusters the book delivers on the promised in the announcements: The telling of the tragedy of a Mitchell combat crew flying one mission beyond their final 70th, never to return home. How a pilot managed to not bomb unsuspecting civilians though ordered to do so. The loathed "road block" missions. The likely reason why Joseph Heller was sent home after far less than the required missions. Life for air and ground crews while based out of Corsica. The above is the attractive wrapper on a fine chocolate since Cleaver tells the history of an air war waged on a neglected front close up as well as strategically "weaving a story cleverly imparting an understanding of the momentum while giving the experience of the individuals. His screenwriting

abilities have the reader feeling the elation, the cold, the fear of all persons caught up in the chaotic events of warâaircrew, ground crew, Germans and civilians. In *The Bridgebusters* the author has readers understand how the 57th waged an effective assault against German forces in Italy for over a year. Cleaver illustrates how General Clark extended the war in Italy by almost a year for egotistical reasons and how he was rewarded for that decision though many of the foreign forces (New Zealand, Poland and Morocco for example) lost confidence in his leadership. The sense of *Catch-22* prevails throughout the story of the campaign.

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