The last great mystery of World War I has been solved. Drawing from more than two thousand pages of unpublished material, archeological digs in France and dozens of interviews with the descendents of those involved, The Stand: The Final Flight of Lt. Frank Luke, Jr. writes the last chapter on the life and death of Americas most spectacular fighter pilot. After fifteen years of research, author and Telly Award-winning television host Stephen Skinner pens a driving, dynamic account that fills in the blanks left behind by history after the legendary Arizona balloon buster died under controversial circumstances deep in enemy lines in September of 1918.

My Personal Review:
My copy arrived about two weeks ago and I've read it through.

All I can say is that if it's not the definitive work on Luke, I don't what will be. I think you'd need to interview the man himself to get any more detail on his life and military career.

The book is a grand tome. The book is well and thoroughly researched, the reconstruction of events given the evidence are logically and rationally presented and the story is very thoughtful in presentation.

When I received it, I was going to simply cut to the chase and read the last chapter to see what really happened on 29 September 1918 when Luke was shot down, but I read the introduction first and was impressed with the way it was written, and Stephen's flair for leading us on to the story. I thought if the main text was as engaging as the intro, it would be a good read - not just a laundry list of facts, but something that kept my attention as the story unfolds. He does this consistently throughout the book from incident to incident and chapter to chapter. You follow the trail of
breadcrums because they appear to be leading us somewhere interesting and ultimately, that's exactly what happens.

The book will not disappoint anyone who thinks they know what happened that September evening and it will completely inform those who are new to the subject.

Luke fan or not, it's a model presentation of research done both on site and in the archives and it leverages the expertise of many people who are intimately acquainted with the many facets of the story. Instead of trying to research the minutiae of the supporting sub-stories (M-Flak guns, balloon unit tactics and organization, the German occupation of Murvaux), Stephen has done a good job of using his resources to help broaden the story and understand it's nuances without having to recreate the wheel.

Above all else though, it's a work that shows Stephen's deep respect for Luke and is a fitting tribute to the man and his accomplishments.

Now, to prove I am not on the payroll.... I have just a couple of small gripes.

I was not impressed with the photo reproduction. It's workmanlike, but not a feature that'll knock your socks off. There are a few great shots Stephen has dug out that I was impressed by though and the photos are supportive of the text. I think most are the same size on the page and a few of the gems would have more impact in a larger format.

Secondly, it would have benefited from an index. I read a great passage and went back to find it....and... well, no index so it's a bit of a grind to re-locate it. I know these are a pain to put together, but in a work of this size and scope, it's almost a requirement.

But that's it - the cover artwork by Russ Smith, the color interior work by Alan Toelle, the writing style, content, chapter division, endnotes, appendices - you name it. It's a great piece of work.

If you do not have it - buy it - you will not be disappointed.

I'm waiting on the DVD "The Search for the Stand" - but suspect given Stephen's background in media, it'll be every bit as good as the book.

Super job, Stephen - you should be proud.

- Mike O'Neal, New Jersey

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