

# **Blown to Bits** **20,000 Feet Over Ploesti**

This book documents the experiences of two dozen airmen who were shot out of the fiery skies over Nazi-occupied Europe in the late spring of 1944. The author traveled the country interviewing survivors or next of kin to acquire their stories, photos, and related materials along with information from the National Archives.

Two of these airmen—one on a B-17 Flying Fortress and the other on a B-24 Liberator—had family in eastern New Mexico. Although several crewmen perished when their aircraft exploded, both bailed out over unfriendly territory and met up in a POW camp where they survived difficult months, one day at a time, until escaping. The escape itself is an incredible chapter that is hard to believe. A P-51 fighter pilot from Albuquerque who played a pivotal role in their escape is also featured. Dozens of photos, numerous pages from a POW's diary and other graphics are displayed throughout the book. The last of these twenty-four American Heroes passed away in 2011.

**Leon Cooper** was born in Melrose, New Mexico, in 1930, and grew up there during the Great Depression. He vividly remembers the sixty young men, many of whom were just a few grades ahead, who marched off to war. Some spilt their blood in a faraway land, but most returned home. These memories and Leon's experience as a pilot were motivating factors for developing this book

