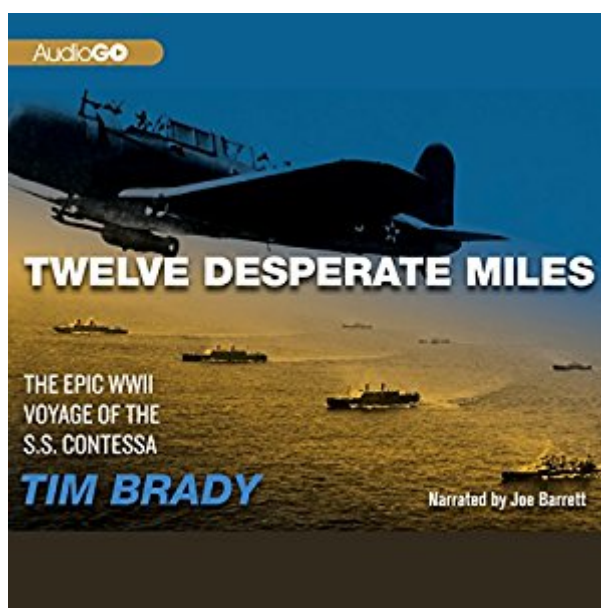


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Twelve Desperate Miles: The Epic World War II Voyage Of The SS Contessa



Synopsis

Audie Award Nominee, History, 2013 The Dirty Dozen meets Band of Brothers in this true story of how a rusty old New Orleans banana boat staffed with an unlikely crew of international merchant seamen, a gang of inmates from a local jail, and a French harbor pilot spirited out of Morocco by O.S.S. agents in the trunk of a Chevy, were drafted into service in WW II - and heroically succeeded in setting the stage for Patton's epic invasion of North Africa. While portraying the ship's journey day-by-day and describing its colorful crew, Twelve Desperate Miles chronicles the overall November 1942 invasion of Axis forces and its aftermath, as well as the critical but unsung role played by the Contessa.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's been a while since I read a book with a military theme, but my curiosity was piqued by the following blurb on the book's jacket cover: "The Dirty Dozen meets Band of Brothers in this true story of how a rusty old New Orleans banana boat and an unlikely crew of international merchant seamen, a gang of inmates from a local jail, and a French harbor pilot spirited out of Morocco in the trunk of a Chevy by OSS agents were drafted into service in WWII -- and heroically succeeded in setting the stage for Patton's epic invasion of North Africa." After spending a relaxing weekend enjoying this story, I came away feeling that my review should be a "tale of two books": the one that Tim Brady wrote, and the one the Crown Publishing marketing department sold. Both are good books, but they aren't the same. First of all, the book that is written is excellent. Brady is a great story-teller, and weaves a fascinating tale of America's first World War II battle in the European

theater centered on some of the more obscure characters and events involved. At times he may go into more detail than some readers will prefer, but I appreciated the immersion into the world of 1940's Morocco, as I shared in the anxiety of ordinary soldiers and civilians on the brink of imminent war. While the SS Contessa does figure prominently in the story, the scope of Brady's book is much larger. He takes readers through the politics and preparations behind Operation Torch (the Allied assault on Northern Africa) as well as the logistical nightmares and insufficient training that made the attack such a risky proposition. We learn why it was necessary for the U.S. Armed Forces to draft a "banana boat" from the Standard Fruit Company into military service, and fill it with crewmen from the Norfolk County Jail -- there simply weren't enough resources and personnel available (with the United States already heavily engaged in the Pacific Theater) for the largest naval mission ever launched to that point in history. To me, though, the ending seemed anti-climactic. The Contessa's journey of "twelve desperate miles" up the Sebou River ended up lasting only a few pages at the end of the book, and I guess I'd expected more. That said, I don't think Brady needed to change anything he wrote. The space designated for the Contessa's role in the invasion is probably roughly proportional to her importance in the scope of Operation Torch, which is to say, not much. But, like I've said, I thoroughly enjoyed the story. The "problem" with the ending has nothing to do with the way it was written, and everything to do with my expectations leading into this book... which brings up the "second book" -- the one advertised by the marketing department. When I read of comparisons to *The Dirty Dozen* and *Band of Brothers*, I expected the book's focus to be relatively narrow, something of a human interest story. Inmates from a local jail chosen to serve in a special mission? Great! What were they like? How did they go about their work? What happened to them afterward? We never really learn the answers to these questions because the "gang of ex-cons" mentioned on the front cover simply don't figure prominently into the story. The crew members taken from the jail weren't hardened criminals, but sailors serving time for partying a little too hard on shore leave, and by all accounts, they performed their duties admirably and without incident. So while the fact that they were needed at all is an interesting historical tidbit, they aren't the story here. With all due respect to Hollywood, real life often provides better drama than fiction. This book didn't need to tell the story of these men to be a page-turner. And while credit goes to the marketing department for getting the book in my hands (after all, I might not have bought it in the first place without the intriguing subtitle and jacket blurbs), the story works better as the book Brady wrote than the one I thought I was buying. If you're into military history, I think you'll appreciate this one. If you're looking for something that really is a real-life version of *The Dirty Dozen*, you'll probably be disappointed.

Enjoyed reading this book especially the parts about Tidewater/Hampton Roads/Norfolk/Newport News Virginia which is where my roots are. A little bit too much detail in some places throughout the book but the author did do his homework. One complaint: The two capes that flank the Chesapeake Bay are Cape Henry and Cape Charles. There is no Cape James....at least not in Virginia. The James is a river that is one of the tributaries of the Bay; it is not a "cape" in any sense of the word.

OK, let's be honest here. This book covers three days of WW2. But, what's left? If you're a history and WW2 buff this book will be fascinating. I loved it and count it as one of the war's little stories told well. Read it and enjoy! Now my usual question to WW2 buffs - have you ever heard of the green cross flights? Another ten minutes of a world stage story.

This book had special meaning to me as my mother sailed on this ship from New Orleans to Panama with a stop in Cuba prior to the war. So many ships we were on were sunk during the war and it was wonderful to find out what happened to the Contessa. A great read.

I really had high expectations for this book. In my opinion, not enough stories like this have been told about the US experiences in North Africa in 1942-43. The author did a wonderful job of describing the life in NYC and Washington DC during the early stages of the US involvement in WW2. There are parts of this book that are well-written and that captured me. My disappointment in this book is in how the story meanders while the author is striving to set the context for the main topic of the book; the mission of the Contessa. He spends an inordinate amount of time covering the big picture of the early part of the war, which has been very well covered by a multitude of authors, and leaves us short on details about the crew and the mission of the Contessa. The author did a poor job of helping the reader to understand who the crew of the Contessa was. Their names, backgrounds, personalities, quirks, how they interacted. All of this was given very little space in this book. Even the actual mission of 12 desperate miles is described very poorly and takes up very little space in the book. I felt like I had read 80% of introduction and 20% story. The author shows moments of excellent writing skills in this book but he disappoints me greatly in how he put the story together.

For students of WWII and international relations this is a well written primer of the difficulties faced by the allies at the American onset of this conflict. The author introduces many readers to the

interplay and conflicts between political and military leaders of the UK and USA in deciding how, where and when American forces would enter the fray. While the history of the boat (not big enough to be a ship) is worthwhile as a story on its own, it is really a sidelight to the invasion of the north African coast at the beginning of Operation Torch. At its Kindle price, it is a bargain and delivers good reading.

If you like interesting and true stories, then this book is for you. Against the backdrop of a major military action is threaded a compelling story of the people who were drawn together in such random circumstances. The book takes you back and forth between personal stories, historical facts, and military action. A fun book.

This book is excellent in describing the U. S. attempts to build up a war machine in early 1942 and some of the individuals involved in that effort. Tim Brady does a fine job in telling the role of the old Banana boat CONTESSA in the first invasion of the war. I had a special interest in the CONTESSA since I sailed on her in 1952 after she had returned to peacetime service as a banana boat in the Standard Fruit fleet, travelling from New Orleans to Havana, Honduras and back to New Orleans under the command of the same Captain John.

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