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From 1918 to 1972 over one hundred American aviators (pilots and crew) from all military services received the United States' highest military decoration for "distinguishing themselves by conspicuous gallantry and courage at risk of their own lives, above and beyond the call of duty." Through a combination of interviews with the surviving fliers and in-depth research, Barrett Tillman presents the incredibly valiant and inspiring stories behind the medals and in many cases sets the "official record" straight. These accounts, which redefine heroism, feature some of the most famous airmen in history-Frank Luke Jr., Jimmy Doolittle, Joe Foss, David McCampbell, Leo Thorsness, and Patrick Brady, to name a few-and lesser-known fliers who finally get the recognition they deserve. In World War I, Lieutenants Edwin Russell Bleckley and Harold Ernest Goettler flew in the first sustained aerial resupply operation in history. To accurately drop supplies to the 77th Infantry's "lost battalion," they flew so low that German troops perched on French cliffs were firing down on them. Second Lieutenant David Richard Kingsley, returning in a battered B-17F from a bombing run over Ploesti, Romania, in 1944, gave his parachute to a badly wounded man just before the plane went down. Over North Korea in 1951, helicopter pilot Lieutenant John Kelvin Koelsch, while rescuing a downed pilot, was shot down and captured. He refused to talk and provided only name, rank, and serial number, a procedure that would become the American code of conduct for future POWs. Major Patrick Henry Brady took such heavy fire during one day in Vietnam that he went through three Huey helicopters while evacuating fifty-two men from certain death. Half of the medal winners died earning it; most of the survivors consider themselves lucky just to be alive. Their selfless acts of true heroism deserve to be remembered.

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