

# WINGS OF VALOR

## Honoring America's Fighter Aces

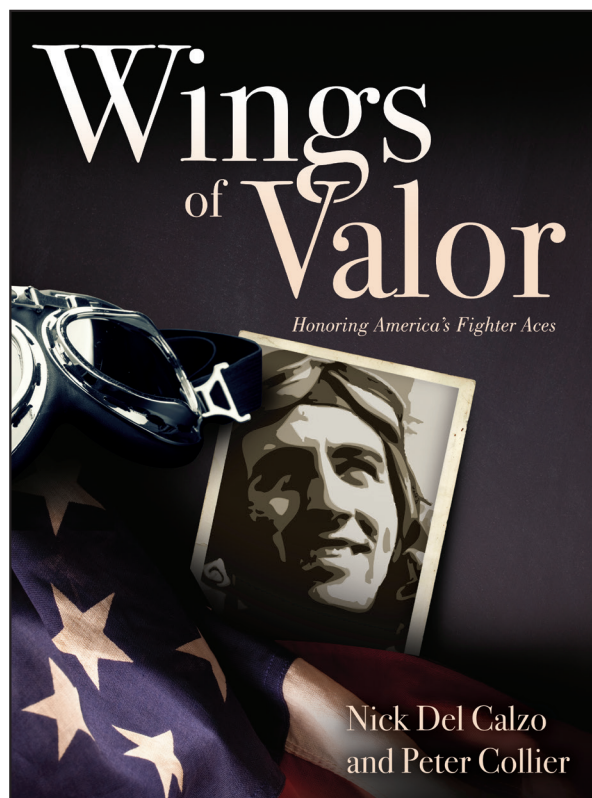
By Nick Del Calzo and Peter Collier

The aces of World War I were knights of the sky, obeying an unwritten code of noblesse oblige. The romance of flight still clung to the aces of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, but they had a different and more decisive mission. Less figures of chivalry now than their predecessors, they were hunters trying to survive in the jungle warfare of the skies, stoic heroes asking no quarter of the enemy and giving none as they scored the five aerial victories that made them a special breed.

Unlike the equally heroic ground forces they protected, the aces of these wars were on their own, relying on their individual skills, determination and daring to prevail in engagements that were the aerial equivalent of a bare knuckle brawl. The stakes—control of the airspace over which the battles that would determine the course of history—couldn't have been higher. It is no wonder the ace is an iconic figure with such a strong and durable hold on the American imagination.

At one time there were over 1,400 fighter aces. Because of the changing technology of war and the shifting nature of combat, these men of *Wings of Valor* are considered the last of the traditional aces. *Wings of Valor* enters the timeless drama of their dogfights one final time and makes the aces' achievements a living legacy. It describes their battles and the planes they flew. Most of all it tells their stories—who they were and where they came from before they were heroes; it reveals the lessons each learned from his rendezvous with destiny, and it honors the content of their character via formal photographs. As *Wings of Valor* shows, theirs are stories that never grow old and never die.

**NICK DEL CALZO** is an award-winning photojournalist who produces photographic projects that advance human values. He photographed our nation's heroes for the book, *Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty*. He also photographed and produced *The Triumphant Spirit: Portraits & Stories of Holocaust Survivors*, which features portraits of then-living survivors of the Holocaust. He lives in Denver, Colorado.



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