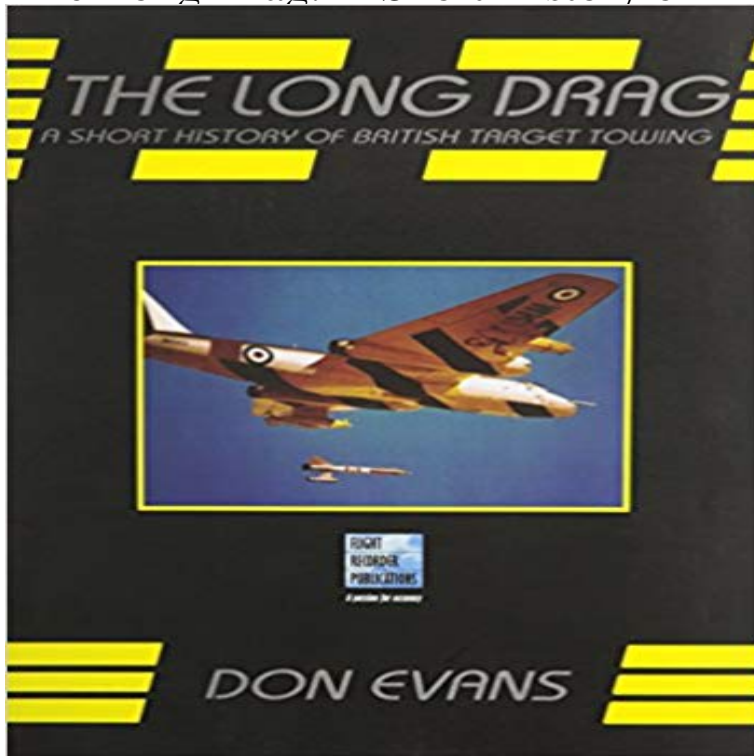


The Long Drag: A Short History of British Target Towing



Written by Don Evans, who joined the RAF in 1942 and served as a Flight Mechanic working on Hurricanes and Defiants. Posted to Weston Zoyland in 1944 to service Martinet, Henley and Defiant target tugs, he was persuaded by the princely sum of ninepence a day flying pay to complete 90 hours as a target winch operator. He transferred to the Fleet Air Arm in 1945 until demobilisation in 1947, whereupon he began working at the A&AEE at Boscombe Down until his retirement in 1989. For 12 years he was supervisor of the Towed Target Development Section, where he was when awarded the British Empire Medal for the design of the Trident Target and the Rapid Target Exchanger. He is still involved with Boscombe Down where he looks after over 1,000 scale model aircraft. When compared to combat operations, target towing to most aviation enthusiasts is a non-event. Most of the time, however, air forces are at peace, but they need to prepare for war. In the absence of actual hostilities therefore, the only way for pilots, gunners and aircrew to learn how to fire their weaponry and hit their mark is with the aid of dummy targets. Consequently, providing the targets for the combatants to practice against is a vital, yet almost totally ignored role. In this concise yet fascinating history, possibly for the first time the ways and means by which the necessary aerial targetry and the associated equipment was provided for the British Services is described and explained in some 31,000 words, aided by photographs, technical details, diagrams and specifications. The human side of the target towing task, now almost a lost art, is not forgotten either, for as the author notes, the men who tow tails have tales to tell.

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