Chapter 6

Great Britain

My name is William Foster. I have black hair and blue eyes. I was 19 in 1940.

Warmth and sunshine were the only things to register to my mind when I woke up, ready to take the next shift. The Norwegian winter had been cold and hard, but it was also a godsend because the Soviets could not seem to overcome us. I am a private in the British Expeditionary Force, and I am helping Norway stop the invasion of the Soviets. My shift was next to watch for any signs of a sudden attack on the position I held near the coast of the North Sea. Being only 19, my commanding officer put me on at least one more shift than the rest of my group because they're an odd number of us.

During the lull of attacks, I sit back in my foxhole, thinking about home and my family. We live in Dover; very close to the high, white cliffs with France in the background on the days will clear weather. I live with my mother, two younger brothers, and two younger sisters who are all too young to join this war. I wish for them to never see the beastly and abominable actions good men have to make. With our ever growing involvement, I know they can start to feel its impact.

On January 8, parliament began a mandatory rationing of all supplies need for the war effort all throughout Britain. My mother wrote to me of what she had to get every so often to sustain the family. She receives a buff-colored book that most adults are allowed, but all my siblings receive a blue-colored book. In theirs, they can purchase fruit, the full meat ration, and half a pint of milk because the government deemed children ages five to sixteen need all of that. Luckily my mother is not pregnant, nursing, or I have a sibling younger than five because they would receive a green-colored book that came with fruit, a pint of milk, and twice the supply of eggs.

While thinking of my family, I had let my guard down, so I was not prepared for the sudden attack of a band of Soviet soldiers. Crying out to alert the others, I grabbed my rifle and started to fire on the enemy, crouching low in my foxhole. When I had first starting fighting, I was nearly killed because I was not prepared to actual harm someone. Now, however, I still cringe for every shot I fire, but I know that I might be the person to never to my family again if I miss. Taking out a few already, I didn’t register the footsteps coming in from the side of my position until I saw a blur out of the corner on eye. Turning too slowly, I felt a sharp stab in my right shoulder, and I hit the ground hard.

I saw the soldier who had snuck up on me fall over from one of my comrades bullets. I saw my friend crawl over to me from his foxhole, and he started to put pressure on my wound. “Don’t worry. We’ll get you out and all fixed up in no time. The captain just told me before this raid that we have orders to move out. The Nazis invaded France, and we got to help them over there for now. These Norway people can handle themselves for now,” he said trying to reassure me. I wanted to reply, but I could see the world fading around the edges. I gave him probably not a reassuring smile before I slipped into unconsciousness.

When I came to, I was laying down in the medic room of one of our navy’s ships. I guess I hadn’t dreamed of my last encounter with my friend. I was just relaxing and thinking of falling asleep again when I heard someone nearby turn up the radio. The announcer came on with an important message saying, “Today the 10th of May, 1940, Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, has replaced Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister of Great Britain. Immediately following the invasion of our ally, France, Chamberlain was replaced for inefficiency. No we return to our regularly scheduled program.”

I laid there in shock. Though not for the replacement of Chamberlain because I had always felt he was doing a poor job since Hitler rose to power, but I was in shock because Churchill had actual redeemed himself enough to become Prime Minister. After his failures during World War I, I would have thought Churchill would be the last person to be picked for our leader. I fell asleep soon after, not quite sure how these events would help lead me.

Three days later, in the medical facilities of my army base, I heard another announcement on the radio but this one said in a short while, Prime Minister Churchill would give a speech to reassure our nation. Listening to the speech, I felt moved until toward the end when he makes this remark, “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”

As I slowly recovered from my bullet wound, my friend would write letters to me about the front in northern France that he was fighting on. I felt horrible for I could not be there to help and fight back against the enemy. However, I felt a strong fear for him as well because every letter of those first ten days make it clear that all was not well, and they were being pushed further and further towards the shores. Then I did not hear from him again until June 3.

Rumors flew around the base of what was occurring and what was happening to our boys and allies over in France. I heard bits and pieces, and from what I could piece together, the high command had issued an evacuation of all Allied troops from the beaches of Dunkirk.

On June 3, my friend came back to check on me and to tell the whole story of what had occurred. “We tried fighting off the Jerry, but he kept pushing and pushing us until our backs hit the sea wall. I thought it was all over for us, mate. That was, until they stopped coming on May 24. According to some big wigs I heard talking, Hitler stopped his advance and recalled his troops to the canal line. That gave us enough time to arrange a rescue mission. On May 26, the evacuation started, with every available ship and even fishing boats and such crossing the channel to pick up guys stuck over there. I was one of the last troops out on June 1. I picked the last of the people up on June 3, but not before a group of soldiers sacrificed themselves, too, to stop any interference from the enemy. One of the reasons we didn’t get picked off by those Nazi fighters was the RAF kept the skies clear and gave us cover. I hear that by the end of this whole bloody mess, we saved 198,000 British troops, 140,000 French troops, and some Belgian troops, but we had to leave almost all of our tanks, artillery, transports, and heavy equipment on the beaches.” I was so stunned by this story, I just thanked him and left him go back to debrief for our captain.

The next day, while listening to the radio, I heard the announcer say that Churchill would be making another speech in a few minutes so stay tuned. I knew in my gut, this was about the recent events, and that the whole world would be listening in on this one. And I was right because, from the beginning, it captivated me like no other. However, what really inspired me was his ending. “...we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.”

I felt after this that England would fight and live on to see the end of this so called master race and Nazism. I was 19 years old. I wish France would have fared better than us.