Chapter 8

Battle of Britain

My name is Robert Jones. I have blond hair and brown eyes. I was 32 in 1940.

The sky is a crystal clear blue for miles upon miles no matter where I look. This is the kind of sky I love to see in my windshield, not a cloud in sight. Flying up in that expanse of blue makes me feel free and strangely powerful. I might not get the experience of a silent flight with my trusted Spitfire, but as a Captain in Great Britain’s Royal Air Force, I have the opportunity to sorrow above the cities. Unfortunately, I also get shot at a lot when I’m protecting my bombers, or when I’m firing at the German bombers. This happened a lot when I was taking a shift overhead of the Dunkirk evacuation.

My wife doesn’t know I flew shifts over the coast to protect our men. She stayed home with my three children in Norwich in Southeastern England. My beloved Mary and I have an 11 year old, 8 year old, and 5 year old, and they are all as smart as Mary and look like her, too. When I’m home to visit, all they want to do is go flying with me or hear of the “adventures” I have in the sky. I have never told them of what really happens in the sky, nor do I ever plan to. I hope this war will end before my oldest is old enough to join the air force with me. This may be a long war, however, with how this battle ends up continuing no matter where we fight.

And long it seemed to be. On July 10, another battle began, but the battle of the skies was what this one ended up being. The Luftwaffe is a large, formidable foe that has vastly superior numbers, but they by far do not have the best pilots. This became apparent when I flew in one of the first battles of what was becoming the Battle of Britain. At my air base, the sirens started to wail in the early morning with the approach of German planes. I hopped a ride on the jeep that took all of my fellow pilots to our planes on the air strip. We all launched into our planes and started off down the tarmac. This was one of my favorite parts was the takeoff. I loved the feeling of acceleration, gaining speed to fly high.

Up in the air, I felt free until I saw the swarms of German fighters and bombers coming in toward the factories and airbases beneath us. Moving in formation, we were almost upon the enemy fighters when we split apart to attack the planes individually. The bombers were like sitting ducks, but the fighters were fierce, giving no room for errors. The dog fight was short with one bomber shot down and none of their fighters. Once they dropped their loads, they turned tail quickly and proceeded to fly back to the mainland.

For more than a month, the German bombing offensive increases against airfields and factories. Daylight raids seemed to be the most common ways during August, and mission after mission, I flew and shot down fighters and bombers who threatened my England. With this increase, I had no time both to visit my family and see that they were safe. It seemed, too, that Hitler was planning an invasion with all of these attempts to control the skies. From reports on the sea, Hitler had ordered a blockade of the British Isles on August 17.

Every day and night now, too, the Germans would fly overhead, dropping bombs onto the factories and airbases. This was war and acceptable, but what is not acceptable is dropping bombs on unsuspecting citizens in any country. On the night of August 23 and early morning of the 24, the first German air raids dropped bombs on Central London. I had thought it was an unspoken rule not to intentionally harm the innocents of this war, but I guess the Germans have no morals. To defy them, I was part of the group to escort the first British air raids on Berlin on the night of August 25 and the morning of the 26. This went on now back and forth of bombings on the cities, and the only good thing about this was the Nazis stopped trying to bomb our airbases.

From intelligence reports, Hitler has indeed planned to invade my Island with his Operation Sea Lion. His plans for an actual invasion were not together until September 3, though. On September 7, I could feel the real invasion plans have begun with the specialty of the German military. The Blitz against Britain had begun.

By far the climax of this came on September 15 with a massive German air raid on London, Southampton, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, and Manchester. Fighting high in the air, many planes were shot down on both sides as each of us tried to get the upper hand. After all this fighting, the final count was 56 planes lost from the Luftwaffe and only 28 RAF planes.

For twelve weeks, the Battle of Britain fought on until October 12 when the Germans postponed their plans for Operation Sea Lion. At the end, 1,733 Luftwaffe planes were lost with only 915 RAF planes shot down. When the activity died down for the fall, I went home to my wife to make sure she knew I was ok. I was 32 years old. I wish I had more of me to help out with what was happening in Africa.