
VOICES IN FLIGHT:
RAF FIGHTER PILOTS IN WWII
MARTIN W. BOWMAN

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Chapter 1
Legless Ace

On a raw November day in 1932 a young RAF fighter pilot drove his little red MG sports car along the winding A505 in Cambridgeshire to take up a new posting at Duxford airfield just south of the University City of Cambridge. This RAF fighter station forty miles north of London was home to 19 Squadron flying Bristol Bulldog IIA biplane fighters. At weekends the airfield hosted undergraduate members of the Cambridge University Air Squadron who were learning to fly and to become officers in the RAF. Duxford would normally have been a Mecca too for the 22 year old ex RAF College Cranwell graduate, accomplished pilot and all-round sportsman who had flown Gloster Gamecocks in tied together aerobatics at Hendon air displays. But for Douglas Bader his posting to 19 Squadron was a bitter pill to swallow. Both his legs had been amputated following a horrific crash during low level aerobatics at Reading Aero Club at Woodley airfield on 14 December 1931 when the wingtip of his Bulldog clipped the grass and the aircraft smashed into the ground. Lesser men would have died but expert medical care and his own tremendous fighting spirit and a strong will to live pulled him through. He endured the long ordeal of operations and rehabilitation and when given artificial legs Bader confounded the doctors who said that he would never walk unaided again. He not only proved them wrong, he proved to his RAF superiors that he could still fly aircraft but the service was unable to pass him fit for flying because 'there was nothing in King's Regulations which covered his case'. Instead, he was posted to Duxford and on his arrival the wing commander in charge of the station told him, 'Glad to have you here Bader. You're taking over the Motor Transport Section.

Duxford and the Big Wings 1940-45[1]

The fascination exercised by the sea over sailors is well-known and there is no doubt that the air exercises a similar fascination over many airmen who have fought and trounced the German legions in the skies. Just as the born sailor feels in his element when he is at sea, so must Wing Commander Bader feel in his element in the air, for his eagerness to fly at

all times was always impossible to conceal.[2]

Born in London in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park in 1910, Douglas Robert Stewart Bader went to St. Edward's School at Oxford to receive his education. By the time he was eighteen years old he had thoroughly made up his mind that he wanted to be a pilot in the Royal Air Force. Accordingly he went from school at Oxford to the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell as a cadet to receive a thorough grounding in the theory and practice of flight and in 1930 he received with pride his commission as a Pilot Officer in the Royal Air Force.

The very keenness and mastery of the air which he displayed almost led to his undoing. Taking off in a Bristol Bulldog on the morning of 14 December 1931 he flew around and diving low, started to stunt about ten feet from the ground. A slight misjudgement, a touch of the aircraft on the grass and Pilot Officer Bader who had been stunting so joyously a second earlier lay mangled among the wreckage. He was shockingly injured. His right leg was nearly severed above the knee, his left terribly smashed below, with broken ribs and an injured lung to make his recovery seem almost impossible. The extraordinary thing is that he remained conscious all the time. His body was shattered, but his mind remained clear. It was a significant fact which showed the beginning of that strength of mind which was later to become manifest to the world.

Tenderly he was extricated from the wreckage and rushed by ambulance to the Royal Berkshire Hospital at Reading where his clothes were cut from him and he was put upon the operating table and under an anaesthetic without delay. With the right leg practically off, there was nothing to be done except amputate it. Deftly the surgeon tied up the blood vessels and applied the dressings. The left leg was carefully examined, the fractured bones set, in the hope of preserving it.

Somehow his wonderful vitality enabled him to survive the shock, but it became increasingly evident that his left leg could not be saved, so it was amputated a week after the accident. During the following fortnight death hovered very near, his black hair making more pronounced his pallid face which was as white as the pillow. The lamp of life burned very dimly indeed in his body throughout those three weeks.

Then a most pronounced change took place. He started to improve and, once on the way to recovery, made rapid progress. His well-developed, sturdy body gathered strength, the stumps of his legs healed. The day came when a wooden peg was strapped to his leg and he took a pair of crutches and began to get about again. It felt strange to a young man who had been used to playing games, whose whole temperament was keyed up to rapid movement. Without legs, condemned to getting about on crutches - the disability must have been very bitter. Yet, strangely enough, he was not depressed. The kindness all about him in the hospital helped him more than he knew.

Directly after the accident the main concern of the doctors was to save his life. They were compelled to do the best they could with his maimed limbs in order not to add to the shock, which would otherwise have killed

him, although it was plain that his limbs would need further attention later on. In three months when he was fit and strong again, he was wheeled once more to the operating theatre where the stumps of his legs were re-amputated for permanent healing. His physical condition at that time was so good that in a fortnight he had his wooden peg on his leg again and was moving about on crutches. He spent two more months in the hospital at Reading, amid the kindness of doctors and nurses that will ever remain in his memory.

It seemed rather ironical that while he was lying in bed without legs his promotion to Flying Officer should have been gazetted, yet so it was. Most men in his position would have been convinced beyond all doubt that his flying career was at an end. Flying Officer Bader was the one young man in the world who was not convinced. On, the contrary there was in his mind the idea that somehow at sometime he would once more climb into the clouds and be as free as the birds on the wing.

Five months after his accident, he went off to Roehampton to be fitted with his two duralumin legs. That was his testing time, when the strength of his mind alone triumphed over the disabilities of his body. He was determined, no matter what happened, that once his legs were fitted he would never make use of a stick to help him to walk. He never did. The first time his legs were fitted, he rose upon them unsteadily and walked a step or two. He strove to walk again, just like a baby, falling down sometimes, but rising with his determination to succeed growing stronger than ever. Occasionally he would take the arm of another patient for support, but always there was the inflexible mind to drive his body to do his bidding. Time and again he tried, learning how to balance his body upon his metal legs.

Only he knows the difficulties he surmounted. Sometimes he was depressed beyond words. No one could help him. He had to fight the fight alone and win the victory in his mind, to abolish all doubts, to feel sure beyond peradventure that he could stand as firmly upon his artificial legs as he once stood upon his own. Orderlies and the boys in the hospital watched him fighting his battle. They lent what aid they could and he was filled with gratitude to them; but they could not know the depths he plumbed, he who had been so active.

It took him three weeks to learn to walk, three of the most depressing weeks of his life. By then he had largely mastered the technique, the art of balancing; all the little movements of walking and sitting and rising from a chair. By then he began to feel that the seemingly insuperable difficulty had been overcome and that the rest would follow... it was just a matter of time and practice.

Following that month in hospital at Roehampton, he was granted two months leave, part of which was spent at his home in Yorkshire. Then he went off to spend some of his holiday with his friend Sir Philip Sassoon.[3] While there he experienced the greatest thrill of his life. An aircraft stood before him - it was an Avro 504K and he climbed in, not with the old agility, perhaps, but with considerably greater ease than most people

exercise the first time they clamber into an aircraft. He settled himself into place, had a good look round the cockpit, waggled the stick, fingered the throttle and swung the rudder from side to side with his artificial legs just to get the feel of it.

He was going to fly again. He felt sure he could do it. There was no doubt about it. Perhaps, far, far back in his mind there lurked the merest shadow of uncertainty, so slight as to be almost unnoticed. So he took off, as he had done hundreds of times before to enjoy the ecstasy of flight, landing perfectly to demonstrate to the world that a man, given the will and skill, can fly as well with artificial legs as with his own. He had no trouble at all. That day he proved to himself that the so-called impossible is possible.

In September 1932 he went back to duty at Uxbridge. Later he was posted to the Central Flying School where he was permitted by the medical board to fly in dual controlled aircraft. It soon became obvious that he flew as competently and confidently with his artificial legs as any pilot could fly with his own legs. The accident had not affected his nerve. He could do all the aerobatics with the same joy and abandon as of old. The result was that he flew all the normal service types of aircraft without any difficulty and went off from the Central Flying School with a letter written to the Air Ministry saying he was 100 per cent competent as a pilot.

Fortified by his recent flying experience, with such a letter to back him, he went up for his final medical examination before the Central Medical Board, thinking it would be merely a formality and that he would at once be passed as fit. Physically he was as fit as any man alive. To his consternation the Board refused to pass him. He could hardly believe his ears. 'I'm sorry we cannot pass you fit, because there is nothing in the King's Regulations which covers your case,' said the President.

It was true. There was nothing in the King's Regulations to cover the case of the one man in the world who was genius enough to fly as well with artificial legs as the ordinary pilot flies with his own legs.

The iron will which had sustained the brilliant young pilot through all those dark days and had enabled him to accomplish a miracle broke down before that verdict. He lost his temper. The injustice of deluding him by letting him go back to fly and then rejecting him when he had proved himself fit was too much for him to suffer in silence. His protests, however, made no difference. A few weeks later he received a letter from the Air Ministry asking him to resign on the grounds of ill-health. In the circumstances there was nothing else he could do, so Flying Officer Bader was forced to relinquish the career he loved, the one which he had chosen above all others, the one in which he had sacrificed his limbs and nearly his life and for which he had learned to do what no other man had ever done. It was a black day for him when he dropped his resignation in the post.

So the young pilot gave up his career in the Royal Air Force and in May 1933, joined the staff of the Asiatic Petroleum Company[4] donning a hard hat and the clothes of a city man in place of the air force blue, reaching the

office at 9 o'clock in the morning and leaving for home at 5 o'clock. But if his artificial feet were anchored to the earth his heart was still in the sky. Now and again in the course of his duties on the aviation side of the business he flew in a passenger liner to the continent. Then the urge to fly must have welled up in him stronger than ever. At very rare intervals he took up an aircraft for a short time to taste again the joys of flying.

Determined in 1935 to get back to the Royal Air Force, he had an interview with Air Vice-Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill, who was then Air Member for Personnel and later became the Chief of the Coastal Command. Sir Frederick Bowhill received him most sympathetically, but the earlier ruling seemed to preclude all possibility of the pilot rejoining the Royal Air Force. Bader bowed to the decision, but in his heart he did not accept it. Meanwhile he continued to live the life of a city man and go to his office regularly.

The tense atmosphere of Munich in 1938 drove him once again to try to get back to the Royal Air Force. Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, who is now Chief of Air Staff, was then Air Member for Personnel and to him Bader wrote a letter asking if he could be taken back on the reserve in order to be in flying practice if war broke out. The reply he received from Sir Charles Portal set his mind at rest. Although it pointed out that the Medical Board would not hear of it, Sir Charles added that he could rest assured that in the event of war they would accept his services. The young city man, who longed to don the Royal Air Force blue again, was content. For a year he continued to go to the office, while the European skies grew darker under the menace of German might. In the six years since he had left the Royal Air Force he had flown for perhaps five hours, no more. But he had no doubt about his ability to fly. At the outbreak of war his application to rejoin the RAF was answered by an appointment to see Air Vice-Marshal Frederick Crosby Halahan CMG of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve Selection Board.[5] Fortunately for Bader and for the country, this officer was his Commanding Officer while he was at Cranwell and was therefore well aware of his outstanding abilities and the miracle he had accomplished in learning to fly with artificial legs. This time the Medical Board was instructed to see if he was organically sound, apart from the loss of his legs and as he was in perfect health he was passed as fit. Off to the Central Flying School he went for a test, which gave him no trouble at all and on 26 November 1939 he took out his uniform and donned it once more as Flying Officer D. R. S. Bader.

Since his resignation from the service six years earlier, aircraft had made big strides; Spitfires and Hurricanes were coming into production, so he went to the Central Flying School for a refresher course on modern aircraft and flew like a bird - his artificial legs caused him no difficulty.

Posted as Flying Officer in February 1940 to 19 Spitfire Squadron, he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant two months later and posted to 222 Squadron with which squadron of Spitfires he fought and patrolled over Dunkirk. During patrols over Dunkirk he proved his ability by shooting down a Messerschmitt 109 and 110; but strangely enough although

patrolling with the rest of his flight twice a day looking for the enemy, they did not often make contact, while other squadrons at different times of the day ran into flocks of German aircraft.

From high in the sky he saw Dunkirk ablaze. He stated afterwards that one of the most remarkable things was the sight of a great column of solid black smoke from the oil tanks pushing through a blanket of cloud over which he was flying at 10,000 feet. There was the great white level sea of cloud, with a dense peak of black smoke thrusting through the surface. It was an unusual sight that he will not soon forget. His graphic description of the evacuation from Dunkirk calls up the whole picture in a few words: 'The sea from Dover to Dunkirk was like the Great West Road on a Bank Holiday. It was covered with shipping of all descriptions.'[6]

His dash and leadership over Dunkirk brought him further promotion on 24 June 1940, when Air Chief Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory gave Bader command of 242 (Canadian) Squadron languishing at RAF Coltishall having been decimated in the Battle of France. In late September 1939 when Lord Gort's BEF moved across the English Channel to France, four Hurricane squadrons - 1, 73 85 and 87 went with them. By mid November 607 and 615, equipped with Gloster Gladiators were sent to reinforce them. All political attempts to persuade the RAF to send Spitfires to France were resisted but the movement of the Hurricanes and the Gladiators left Dowding with about 35 on paper for the defence of Britain. On 15 May 1940 Winston Churchill promised France's Premier, Paul Reynaud ten fighter squadrons. On 16 May any thoughts of sending fighter squadrons to France was vetoed emphatically by Sir Cyril Newall, Chief of the Air Staff. He told Churchill that he did not think that a few more fighter squadrons would make any difference between victory and defeat in France. By then the ten Hurricane squadrons in France had lost 195 Hurricanes. Some squadrons were down to two and three fighters and another had lost 26 pilots. One of the worst hit was 242 Squadron. Between May and June 1940 the all-Canadian fighter squadron had lost every pilot of Flying Officer rank and middle echelon officers, over enemy territory. Canadian Flying Officer Russ Wiens had noted: 'The war in the air today makes shows like Dawn Patrol look like Sunday School.'[7]

These were the fighters whom he led so brilliantly throughout the Battle of Britain. Their Hurricanes tore through the German masses and wrought terrible havoc. So cleverly were they led, so fiercely did they fight that their losses were trifling compared with the losses they inflicted.

On 11 July Squadron Leader Bader claimed his second victory, a Dornier Do 17Z off Cromer. It was the first of eleven victories Bader scored while leading 242 Squadron before he was promoted to Wing Commander Flying of the Tangmere Wing in March 1941.

The German air offensive began to flare up in earnest on 30th August when the Canadian fighters shot down twelve of the enemy without loss to themselves. Fighter Command lost 39 fighters on 31 August, when the RAF flew 2,020 sorties and the Luftwaffe almost 2,800 sorties against London's sector airfields. These were the worst losses of the Battle so far

and they brought the number of RAF pilots killed and wounded that week to 115 with 65 of the fighters downed on the 30th and 31st. By Friday 6 September, a huge German invasion fleet appeared to be ready to sail. British forces were put on 'Alert No. 2' meaning that an attack was probable in the next two days. On Saturday 7 September 984 Hurricane and Spitfire pilots were flying with the squadrons, a deficiency of nearly 22 pilots per squadron and of these 150 were only partly-trained.

Bader's firmly-held belief that more damage could be done by large formations of fighters led directly to the 'Big Wing' argument between his AOC, Trafford Leigh Mallory and the 11 Group Commander, Keith Park. By September 1940 he was frequently leading a mixed Hurricane and Spitfire Wing of five squadrons into action with controversial results. AVM Trafford Leigh-Mallory told Bader that 242 and 310 Squadrons' Hurricanes would use Duxford daily. Together with 19 Squadron operating out of the satellite at nearby Fowlmere, they would form the 'Big Wing'. At first there was no 'trade' for Bader to pursue and he practiced with the 'Duxford Wing' for four days, reducing take-off times to just three minutes, the same as a squadron, climbing 242 on a straight course followed by 310 Czech Squadron and 19 Squadron. Though they were not called into action on 1 September, Fighter Command sent up 147 patrols involving 700 fighters and lost fifteen aircraft from which nine pilots survived. The Luftwaffe lost fourteen aircraft. The Duxford Wing began to operate on the morning of Friday 6 September but no contact was made with the enemy. (Later, the Wing was joined by 302 'City of Poznań' with Hurricane Is and 611 'West Lancashire' AAF, with Spitfires. On paper this was the equivalent of sixty or more fighters). On Monday 9 September they chased the enemy bombers over London and came up with them over the Thames at Hammersmith - I happened to be in a train packed solid with passengers when bombs were dropped and that fight was going on overhead, but people were so interested in the air battle that they completely ignored their own danger - that day the 'Duxford Wing' drove the enemy aircraft towards Enfield around which eleven [of the 28 enemy aircraft officially destroyed this day] all crashed, while only one pilot of 242 Squadron was lost [sic].[8]

On Saturday 14th September the Canadian squadron destroyed twelve. On 15 September claims by the Duxford Wing at the end of the day were 44 enemy aircraft shot down, with eight probables. Overall, Fighter Command claimed to have shot down 185 aircraft, but the true figure was 56 German aircraft shot down for the loss of 26 RAF fighters but thirteen pilots were saved. On the 18th they shot down eleven without any losses to themselves. Altogether, the Duxford Wing claimed thirty destroyed, six probables and two damaged in the air battle. Ten were claimed by 242 Squadron while 19 and 302 Squadrons had claimed seven each and 310, six. Despite the Duxford Wing's claims, only nineteen Luftwaffe aircraft had been shot down during that memorable afternoon with II./KG77 losing nine Ju 88s over the Thames Estuary. Twelve British fighters were lost but only three of the pilots were killed, in the course of 1,165 sorties.

The last 'Big Wing' 'thrash' came on Friday 27 September when the Luftwaffe mounted heavy attacks on London and one on Bristol and made phased attacks on airfields in Nos. 10 and 11 Groups. The Canadians shot down six for a loss of one pilot.[9] Total claims by the 'Duxford Wing' for 27 September were twelve destroyed. This brought Bader's Big Wing claims to 152 aircraft shot down for the loss of thirty pilots. The Luftwaffe lost 55 aircraft including 21 bombers and 19 Bf 109s. The RAF lost 28 fighters. In all, during the Battle of London, Squadron Leader Bader's Canadians destroyed 63 aircraft and lost only three of their own pilots. It was a magnificent record.

While those battles were raging, Squadron Leader Bader himself shot down ten of the enemy aircraft. Two of them were fighters, Messerschmitt 109s[10] but the remainder were all bombers, twin-engined aircraft, Junkers 88, Dornier 17 or Messerschmitt 110. Once he was leading eight pilots of his squadron when they ran into 100 of the enemy at about 15,000 feet. The Hurricanes promptly sailed in to such good effect that the nine fighters between them shot down twelve of the enemy, completely breaking up the formations and sending the survivors fleeing for their lives. From that battle the Canadians emerged unscathed.

Once a friend asked Bader if he was ever bored. 'I'm never bored except by lack of fighting,' he replied. 'The Germans never dodge - they always run away.'

During the mass attacks on London, he saw one German bomber shot down and crash right into the heart of a fiery furnace. There was another day when his eagerness to get at the enemy might easily have ended his life if the little god of chance had not been watching over him.

Notification of an impending attack reached him a little late and he and his squadron were unable to take off in time to reach the required altitude. In his anxiety to come to grips with the enemy he gave his Hurricane full boost and shot ahead so rapidly that he left the rest of his formation, with the exception of one pilot who kept up with him, trailing out behind him. Approaching him over the Thames Estuary were 36 bombers, with attendant Messerschmitt fighters above. Without hesitation he and the pilot who followed him made a beam attack. As he swept past the formation, he turned in behind the bombers. At once the German bombers opened up with all their guns upon the two Hurricanes. In the concentrated gunfire of the 36 bombers their destruction appeared to be certain. The squadron leader said afterwards that he could see the tracers streaming past him like hail. To make his position more deadly some Messerschmitt 109s dived down and started to fire on the Hurricanes from behind, so the two British fighters were fairly caught between two fires. Instantly Squadron Leader Bader did the sensible thing and broke off the attack. In turning away a Messerschmitt 110 came right into his sights and he immediately shot it down. As his companion swerved to avoid colliding with another German bomber he gave it a burst which sent it crashing, so they took their toll in the very act of escaping. When the two Hurricanes landed they were simply riddled with bullet holes - they were in fact unfit

to fly, although the two pilots managed to fly them safely home. The other pilot got a bullet right through his reflector sight, yet it did not touch him; Squadron Leader Bader got an explosive bullet in the cockpit which missed him by just two inches. Anyone seeing those two aircraft would have sworn it was impossible for the pilots to escape, yet neither was touched. The little god of chance was certainly looking after them that day. To see the Canadians lounging in their chairs at the dispersal point, with the yellow dope on their Mae Wests almost rubbed away by continual usage and to watch the way they were galvanized into life by the entrance of their squadron leader and his terse: 'Come on!' was to witness a living example of leadership. He was the captain of their team and they would have followed him anywhere, as they did. They flew into the fury of the fight undismayed by any odds. It must have been a sad blow to them and to him when his promotion to the rank of Wing Commander in March 1941 compelled him to relinquish his command and go elsewhere.

As the Battle of Britain entered its final phase it was clear that the Duxford Wing was unlikely to see much further action as speed of reaction was essential when trying to intercept incoming high level fighter sweeps. For another fortnight the Duxford Wing assembled each day at Duxford and patrolled London, usually twice a day, but the Luftwaffe had been reigned in during the daylight hours and victories were few and far between. On 12 October Hitler postponed Operation 'Sea Lion' [the intended invasion of Britain] until the following spring.

Honours and promotion have come to Wing Commander D. R. S. Bader DSO and Bar and DFC and Bar for his fearless leadership and the many victories he has won in the air. But his greatest triumph of all was won when, deprived of his legs, he determined to prove that if the will be strong and the spirit be right, the gravest physical disabilities of man can be overcome.

He has proved it to the world and most relentlessly of all to the fifteen Germans whom he has sent flaming out of the skies down to the earth they have defiled.

Endnotes Chapter 1

1 *Duxford and the Big Wings 1940-45; RAF and USAAF Fighter Pilots At War* by Martin W. Bowman (Pen & Sword 2009). Later Bader brought his wife Thelma down to stay at the 'Red Lion' at Whittlesford just outside Duxford. 'Her landlady was a formidable woman known as 'The Sea Lion' because of a tendency to a straggling black moustache. She dominated everyone and Thelma was getting a little restive until Douglas gave 'The Sea Lion' the benefit of his overwhelming personality, fixing her eyes with his glittering eyes and speaking a few forceful words. 'The Sea Lion' and he became great friends after that and Thelma was happy.' *Reach for the Sky* by Paul Brickhill (Collins 1954).

2 Douglas Robert Stewart Bader was born in St. John's Wood, North London on 21 February 1910, spending the early years of his life in India, before being sent home to school. He gained a prize cadetship to the RAF College at Cranwell in September 1928, and on graduation was posted to 23 Squadron in July 1930, flying Gloster Gamecocks. He played rugby for the RAF, Harlequins, Surrey and Combined Services teams, and cricket for the RAF. In 1931 he represented the squadron in the pairs' aerobatic competition at Hendon, now flying Bristol Bulldog IIAs.

3 Sir Philip Albert Gustave David Sassoon, 3rd Baronet, PC GBE CMG (born 4 December 1888) was a British politician, art collector and social host, entertaining many celebrity guests at his homes, Port Lympne Mansion, Kent and Trent Park, Hertfordshire. Sassoon died on 3 June 1939, aged 50, of complications from influenza.

4 Later renamed Shell. And he got married, to Thelma.

5 AVM Halahan died on 17 October 1965 aged 85. Flight Lieutenant Michael Frederick Crosby Halahan his son was killed while serving on 74 Squadron on 18 March 1941 at age 29.

6 On 1 June he scored the first of his twenty aerial victories when he shot down a Bf 109E over Dunkirk and also was awarded a half share in a He 111 'probable'.

7 *The Few, Summer 1940, the Battle of Britain*, by Philip Kaplan and Richard Collier (Orion 2002). Flying Officer Russell Henry Wiens (22), who was wounded in the Battle of Britain, was killed in an Anson he was flying on 20 May 1941 at No.31 ANS, Port Albert, Canada. The crew was flying a navigation exercise and whilst the aircraft was at 4,000 feet, Wiens tried to fire a Very cartridge but it did not ignite. He withdrew the pistol and examined the cartridge which fell on the floor and ignited. The crew's attempts to extinguish the fire were unsuccessful and four RAAF men abandoned the aircraft safely. Wiens then attempted a forced landing in a small field 5 miles North of Listowel, Ontario but the aircraft crashed and he received fatal injuries.

On 11 July 1940 Squadron Leader Bader claimed his second victory, a Dornier Do 17Z off Cromer. It was the first of 11 victories Bader scored while leading 242 before he was promoted to Wing Commander Flying of the Tangmere Wing in March 1941.

8 The 242 Squadron ORB (Operational Record Book) for 9 September said: Squadron Leader Bader leading wing consisting of 242, 310 and 19 Squadrons patrolling over London encountered large formation of e/a bombers and fighters. 242 Squadron led the attack and shot down ten aircraft. 310 (Czech) Squadron shot down seven and 19 Squadron two. One pilot of 242 killed [Pilot Officer Kirkpatrick MacLure Sclanders a Canadian died when he crash landed his Hurricane I (P3087) near Rye after being attacked in the air]. One pilot [Sergeant Robert Henry Lonsdale, who was shot down by Bf 109s] bailed out and returned to the Squadron the next day unhurt. Congratulations received from Air Officer Command and Chief of the Air Staff.

9 Pilot Officer M. G. Homer in Hurricane P2967 who was shot down and crashed near Sittingbourne in Kent after combat with Bf 109s near Dover.

10 One of the two Bf 109Es Bader claimed on 27 September was credited as a victory; the other was recorded as a probable. On 1 June he was credited with a Bf 109E and a third share in a Heinkel 111 probable. From 11 July to 18 September 1940 Bader's claims totalled ten aircraft destroyed and three Do 17s damaged. His final wartime score reached 20 and 4 shared destroyed, 6 and 1 shared probables, 11 damaged. *Aces High*.

Chapter 2

Heavy Odds

An American-born fighter pilot tells something of his experiences and excitements he's been through while serving in the RAF. He has shot down eight enemy aircraft and badly crippled three or four more and for these feats he was awarded the DFC yesterday. He is a Flight Lieutenant and his squadron has shot down more than fifty enemy planes.

BBC Broadcast, 9 June 1940.

James William Elias Davies was born of Welsh parents in Bernardsville, near Morristown, New Jersey, in 1913. His father ran a big farm there. James went to school first at the Morristown High School and when the family left there for Connecticut, he went to the Gilbert School in Winstead, Connecticut. The Davies' lived for a long time in New Hertford, Connecticut and James had many friends over there. He left the United States when he was about eighteen or nineteen years old. His parents, who had gone out to America two years before he was born, returned to Europe and settled down in Bridgend, South Wales. James went to Cardiff College to study wireless for a while and after doing 'this and that' for a year or two, he took a short service commission in the RAF. That was in 1936. Flying Officer Davies was posted to 79 Squadron immediately he had finished training - in March 1937 - and the fighter pilot liked it more and more each day.

'I got my first German on 21 November 1939' said Davies in a BBC radio broadcast. 'It was the first enemy aircraft to be shot down in the Straits of Dover in this war. I was on patrol between Deal and Calais, leading a section of Hurricanes from my squadron when we spotted, at 12,000 feet, a Dornier 17 'flying pencil'. He was about 2,000 feet below us and as we hadn't seen a German machine up to then, we went down carefully to make sure. We soon recognised him as an enemy and as I turned to attack he tried to attack me. My Hurricane quickly outmanoeuvred him. I got on his tail and gave him three sharp bursts of fire. Another member of the section got in three bursts too, as he dived towards the clouds. The last I saw of him was just above sea level. He had

turned on his back and a moment later crashed into the sea. When we got back to the mess we were handed a parcel. It contained a bottle of champagne - with the compliments of the Station Commander. You see it was our first fight - and we'd won. In those days, one German aircraft was something to celebrate.[11]

'On 10 May, when Hitler invaded the Low Countries we went over to France [operating from Vitry for a period and then over Dunkirk, Davies acting as 'A' Flight Commander]. We went up that same afternoon. That time we didn't see anything, but the next day we really started. We carried out three patrols east of Brussels and on the third patrol we saw three Heinkel 111s. We shot down one and badly damaged the other two. The day after that we got two Heinkel 111s, one of which was credited to me.[12] I shot mine down from 12,000 feet.

'All the same, those skirmishes were child's play to what was to come later. On 14 May, after we had escorted a number of Blenheim bombers into enemy territory, we were on our way back when we saw three Dornier 17 'Flying Pencils'. It was a trap, for when we gave chase to the Dorniers, we suddenly found ourselves in the middle of between fifty and sixty Messerschmitt 109s and 110s. I was leading the flight that day and when I realised how hopelessly outnumbered we were, I gave orders to the boys to sort out their own targets and not to keep formation. We broke up and began to set about the Messerschmitts. I got four Me 110[13] and other members of the flight got four more. On the way back to our base, I saw two Heinkel 126s, one of which I shot down and damaged the other with the rest of my ammunition. It was a good day. We routed an overwhelming number of enemy fighters, beat up two of their Army reconnaissance planes and we all got home safely. Our bag on that day was six. There were six of us, so we averaged one each.

'There were several other days when we ran into heavy odds of enemy fighters[14] It is really amazing, looking back, that we should have had the success we had. But it certainly was a success each day. We never ran into the Germans without shooting some down. When we were patrolling Dunkirk, for instance, giving protection day after day to the BEF we always got a few. I remember once [on 7 June, in the Abbeville area], when we found ourselves in the thick of six squadrons of Me 109s and 110s, we saw an unusual type of enemy fighter. They were the new Heinkel 113s. Naturally we couldn't resist the appointment. We got one of each type and three or four of what we call 'probables'. I was attacking a Me 110 when I suddenly realised that there were six Heinkel 113s on my tail. I made a very quick turn to get away from them and then shot down the Heinkel 113 on the extreme left of that particular formation. That was in the afternoon. We had an 'appetiser' before lunch, when we met twenty Heinkel 111 bombers. I got one. He went down in flames.[15] And others of the squadron got their share. 'The smoke from innumerable fires in Dunkirk and other French coast towns was terrific about that time. A fellow pilot described it as being like a gigantic piece of cotton-wool lying right across the seashore, following the coast down the Channel as far as

he could see, even from two or three miles up. There were times when we found that same smoke of great assistance in outwitting enemy fighters.

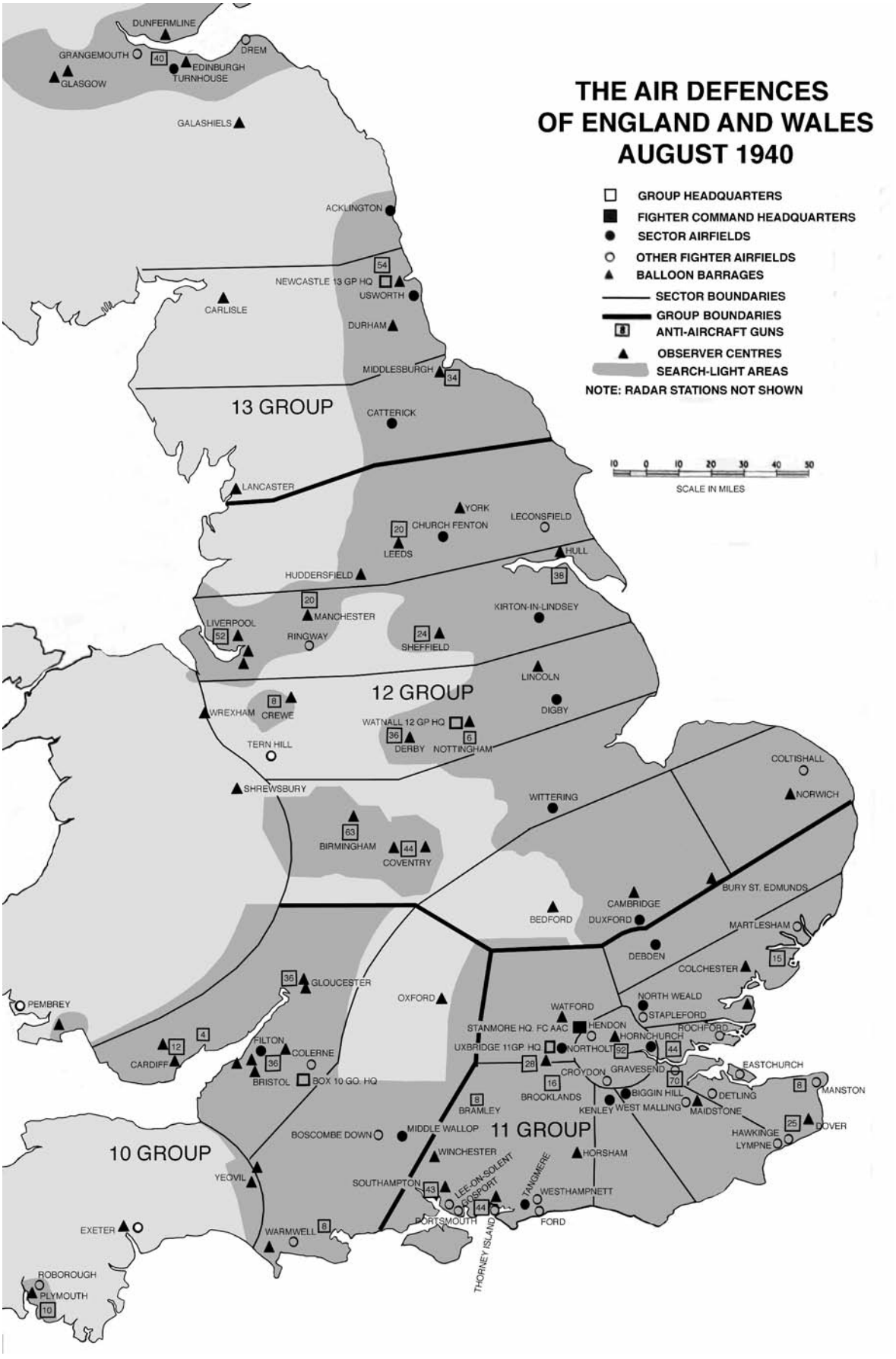
'One of our squadron, for instance, used up all his ammunition in shooting down two Me 110s one day and found himself being chased by two more. Without ammunition he could do nothing, so he dived into the smoke over Dunkirk. He emerged above the smoke a few miles away and there the Messerschmitts were still waiting for him. They simply stuck above the smoke waiting for him to emerge, a victim for their guns. But he outwitted them by diving back into the smoke and was able to slip away home, only to be off again into battle the same evening.

'We were stationed in France for eleven days. I remember that when we went away the roses were in bud; and when we came back they were in full bloom. In between we'd had eleven glorious days of action, but it was very hard work.'

'On 27 June James Davies was returning from escorting a formation of six Blenheims to St Valery in France when the 79 Squadron was 'bounced' by Bf 109s and he failed to return. A second Hurricane pilot bailed out and a third escaped. The award of a DFC was announced on 8 June and the medal was due to be presented to him by the King at Biggin Hill on the day he was lost.

Endnotes Chapter 2

11 Davies was awarded a half-share in the destruction of the Dornier Do 17.
12 His claim for a second Heinkel 111 was unconfirmed.
13 Davies was awarded with just one Bf 110.
14 Davies was awarded a Do 17 on 18 May to take his score to four and one shared destroyed. On 27 May he was awarded a Bf 110 destroyed and a Bf 110 damaged.


THE AIR DEFENCES
OF ENGLAND AND WALES
AUGUST 1940
GROUP HEADQUARTERS
FIGHTER COMMAND HEADQUARTERS
SECTOR AIRFIELDS
OTHER FIGHTER AIRFIELDS
BALLOON BARRAGES
SECTOR BOUNDARIES
GROUP BOUNDARIES
ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS
OBSERVER CENTRES
SEARCH-LIGHT AREAS
NOTE: RADAR STATIONS NOT SHOWN
10 0 10 20 30 40 50
SCALE IN MILES
13 GROUP
12 GROUP
11 GROUP
10 GROUP
DUNFERMLINE
GRANGEMOUTH
40
EDINBURGH
TURNHOUSE
DREM
GLASGOW
GALASHIELS
ACKLINGTON
54
NEWCASTLE 13 GP HQ
USWORTH
CARLISLE
DURHAM
MIDDLESBURGH
34
CATTERICK
LANCASTER
YORK
20
CHURCH FENTON
LEEDS
LECONSFIELD
HULL
38
HUDDERSFIELD
20
MANCHESTER
KIRTON-IN-LINDSEY
LIVERPOOL
52
RINGWAY
24
SHEFFIELD
LINCOLN
8
WREXHAM
CREWE
DIGBY
WATNALL 12 GP HQ
36
DERBY
6
NOTTINGHAM
TERN HILL
SHREWSBURY
COLTISHALL
NORWICH
WITTERING
63
BIRMINGHAM
44
COVENTRY
BURY ST. EDMUNDS
CAMBRIDGE
BEDFORD
DUXFORD
MARTLESHAM
DEBDEN
15
COLCHESTER
36
GLOUCESTER
OXFORD
PEMBREY
WATFORD
NORTH WELD
STAPLEFORD
STANMORE HQ. FC AAC
HENDON
HORNCHURCH
ROCHFORD
4
12
CARDIFF
FILTON
36
COLERNE
UXBRIDGE 11GP. HQ
NORTHOLT
32
44
28
EASTCHURCH
CROYDON
GRAVESEND
70
BRISTOL
BOX 10 GO. HQ
16
BROOKLANDS
BIGGIN HILL
DETLING
8
MANSTON
8
BRAMLEY
KENLEY
WEST MALLING
MAIDSTONE
BOSCOMBE DOWN
MIDDLE WALLOP
25
DOVER
HAWKINGE
LYMPNE
WINCHESTER
HORSHAM
YEOVIL
SOUTHAMPTON
43
LEE-ON-SOLENT
GOSPORT
TANGMERE
WESTHAMPNETT
44
PORTSMOUTH
FORD
EXETER
WARMWELL
8
THORNEY ISLAND
ROBOROUGH
PLYMOUTH
10

Chapter 3

Eagle Squadron

'An unidentified Pilot Officer RAF'

This is the story of 'Red' Tobin. Late in 1939 three Americans - Andrew 'Andy' Mamedoff, a 29-year old Jewish-American whose family were White Russian émigrés from Siberia and Eugene Quimby 'Red' Tobin and 26-year old Vernon Charles 'Shorty' Keough crossed into Canada, the three soldiers of fortune, some would have called them mercenaries, intending to head for Europe and fly for the Finns in the Russo-Finnish war. Tobin was a lanky 6 foot redhead from Los Angeles, the son of a real estate broker, who had learned to fly in the late 1930s, paying for his lessons by working as a guide and messenger at the MGM studios in Hollywood. Peter Townsend remembered that 'He was a fine and gentle man who might have stepped straight out of a Western. His language was coloured with phrases like 'Saddle up boy; I'm ridin' that sent his fitter running to start up his Spitfire.' Keough was a 4 feet 10 inch New Yorker from Brooklyn. He had been a professional parachutist and stunt pilot, had made more than 500 jumps and had logged several hundred flying hours, scraping by as a barnstormer. Apparently he was so short because he had two vertebrae removed after a parachute accident. When Finland fell they were told that they would be able to join the Armée de l'Air so they had set sail for St. Nazaire on the French Atlantic coast, arriving in Paris on 4 June. From then on their escapades read like a Hemingway novel.

'I expect it must seem a long hop from guiding visitors round the movie studios in Culver City to fighting in an eight-gun Spitfire over London. But that's just how it happened to me and all within a little more than a year, with some exciting adventures in between. It was only my second air fight when I helped rout Goering's mass attack on September 15th. And I had the good luck to shoot down my first raider.

During the battle, the air over Surrey, Kent and Sussex was full of bombers and fighters. At 20,000 feet I met a formation of Me 110s. I gave one a burst and saw him giving out smoke. But I lost him in the cloud before I could press home my attack. Then below me I saw a big Dornier 215 bomber trying to seek the safety of some clouds. I followed it down and gave it a long squirt. Its left motor stopped and its right aileron came to bits. Smoke was pouring from it as the bomber disappeared in a cloud. I followed. Suddenly the clouds broke and on the ground I saw a number of crashed aircraft. It was an amazing sight. They had all crashed within a radius of about twenty miles from our fighter station. My Dornier was there

too. I was quite sure I could see it. A little later I learned that the Intelligence Officer's report on the damage to the crashed Dornier agreed with my own, so I knew I had claimed my first definite German victim.

That was a great day for England. I thought this little island was going to sink under the weight of crashed enemy planes on that day. And was I proud to be in the battle! It was the fulfilment of a year's ambition.

But let me go back and tell you the story of this momentous year.

My home is in Hollywood. It was in the wonderful Californian climate that I was born, educated and learnt to fly. I don't suppose there are more than seven days in a year when you can't take the air in California. I learnt to fly at the Mine Fields, Los Angeles. I was always pretty keen on flying and whenever there were no classes at school I hurried out to the airfield to put in all the time I could learning about aircraft and their vices. My instructors were mostly army people. I went through the various graduations and by July last year I was a fully qualified charter pilot.

For nearly two months last year I flew parties up to the High Sierras in California on hunting and fishing expeditions. It was pretty tricky flying, because you get some fierce down drafts and you can't be too careful.
I had a civilian job of course in the MGM studios at Culver City; I finally acted as guide for visitors to the studios. I used to meet all the film stars and found them nice ordinary folk. But my studio jobs didn't keep me from flying and in the winter of 1939 I took a course in aerodynamics at evening school.

Then a number of us met Colonel Sweeny, whose name you will know from his association with the 'Escadrille Lafayette' in the last war.[16] With him we decided it would be a grand idea to form a flight and go out and fly for Finland. But, I guess, that war was over before we could get going.

In May of this year we decided to form a squadron of all American flyers, another Escadrille Lafayette. The adventure was off. Several of us went by train from Los Angeles, through the States to Canada. Finally we finished up at Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we got split up. I joined a large French motor vessel, which was part of a big convoy sailing for France. My boat could do about sixteen knots but she had to travel at only six. In front of us was a boat with 400 mules on board. The stench from the mules was something awful and so was the weather. We had pursuit planes, bombers and munitions of all sorts on board, cargo worth in all about seven and a half million dollars. We rolled and pitched all the way across the Atlantic and were mighty thankful after seventeen days to tie up at St. Nazaire.

All our plans went haywire at St. Nazaire. I had no passport and had lost my birth certificate. Naturally the French treated me with suspicion.
Incidentally, there's a story about that birth certificate. In all my journeys up and down France, I stuck to an old shirt just in case I wanted a spare one any time. Only last week I took out that shirt and from it dropped my birth certificate.

The next thing was to get to Paris and meet the rest of the boys. I took three and a half days to reach the capital and there I met my friends who had disembarked at Bordeaux. Just outside Paris while in the train I had my

first experience of being bombed. The scream of the bombs dropping on the suburban houses from about 20,000 feet was awful.

We made our way to the French Air Ministry, saw high officials there and were given our physical examination. The French didn't hurry and we were in and out of the Ministry for three days. They kept telling us that all would be well and that we would be flying any day soon. Actually we spent a whole month in Paris, doing nothing, for nothing could be done for us.

Then suddenly one day we realised that Paris was going to be evacuated. As the Air Ministry had gone, we made up our minds to get going as well - to Tours. A pall of smoke - which might have been a smokescreen - covered the city and you couldn't see more than a block away. There must have been 10,000 people at one station, all patiently waiting for trains to take them to safety - staunch solemn queues all around the station - men, women and children.

It took us a day and a half to reach Tours and it was an awful journey. Sometimes we had to ride between the cars to get a breath of fresh air. But there was no panic among the refugees, just fear and depression. We didn't lose a bit of luggage on this journey. We spent a week at Tours and were bombed by Heinkels and Dorniers every day. There was a pretty big party of us by now, most of them belonging to the French Air Force. We left Tours by bus for Chinon, about an hour's ride away. We got away just in time, for the Nazis bombed and machined -gunned the main bridge out of Tours just as it was packed with refugees. The bridge was completely destroyed and very many refugees were killed.

Things weren't looking at all good. We were tired and food was getting scarce. We set out for Arcay about four hundred of us of all ranks and from there walked another fifteen miles to Air Vault. Our boots were completely worn out and we had no food and no water. Dog-tired, we lay down in some fields at Air Vault, but not for long. At nearly midnight we were ordered by an elderly French officer to get going once again, this time to Bordeaux. It took us three and a half days in a packed train to reach Bordeaux and when we got there we found that the French Air Ministry could do nothing for us. We Americans were pretty sore by this time and thought that the best thing we could do would be to take some aircraft and fly to England. But that little plan didn't come off and we began our travels again determined to get out of the country.

Our little bunch went by bus to Bayonne. The British consul had left. We had no money and were starving. Eventually we made our way to Ste-Jean-de-Luz and were lucky enough to get the American consul. He was a fine guy and treated us pretty handsomely. But he told us the situation was pretty bad and advised us to quit. There was a crowd pouring into Ste-Jean-de-Luz and the quayside was crowded with refugees. They came any old way they could, in cars, on motorcycles and cycles. The cycles they did not bother to park, but simply threw them in the water.

We boarded a British ship, *Baron-Nairn*, a little old-timer of seven knots. We were a mixed crowd on board. Our number included seven hundred Polish refugees. A tragedy occurred as we were going on board. We had only

one suitcase between our little bunch. The handle came off and into the water she went with all our belongings. All the extras I had then were a pair of shorts and a couple of shirts. We sailed across the Bay of Biscay. It was a three-day journey and all we had to eat was a dog biscuit - even the one dog on board wouldn't eat them. The boat had no cargo and rolled pretty badly. But the crew were rather kind and did all they could for us. Eventually we made Plymouth, although I thought at one time we were bound for South Africa judging by the ship's course.

I guess we weren't too popular at Plymouth. We had no papers and we were evacuated straight away to London. We were put in an ice-skating rink and had to stay there for three days. We weren't allowed out at all. We rang up the Air Ministry, who sent round an officer to see us. He was very kind but didn't hold out much hope that the Air Force could use us at the moment. We talked it over between us and made up our minds to return to America. We rang the Embassy who sent round a representative to see us. He got our particulars, checked them over with Washington, fixed us up with passages to America and lent us £15 for food and clothing. It looked as if the adventure was over. Then, I forget how, we met a very fine English lady, who after hearing our story told us she was sure that a friend of hers, a well-known Member of Parliament, could do something for us. We met him next day in the Houses of Parliament and he sent us to the Air Ministry. We were given our physical examination at once. All passed and so we were in the Volunteer Reserve of the Royal Air Force for the duration of the war.

We felt pretty good when we went to the American Embassy. The officials there were mad with us at first for upsetting all the arrangements, but we soon smoothed that out. Things moved rapidly. Three of us, all in RAF uniforms, were sent north to an Officers' Training Unit. I had not flown for two months, but after twenty minutes in an advanced trainer I was put into a Spitfire.[17]

After twenty hours' flying in Spitfires I was attached to a station in the south, just in time for the opening of the big Blitz. But I had several weeks' training before I became operational that is, fit to fight. And I guess my first fight was lucky. I was patrolling high over an English port on the South Coast when I saw some Me 110s. I went into them and hit the first guy with my first burst. He was quickly lost in a cloud. Then another Me 110 shot ahead of me. I gave him a long burst and saw my stuff entering his fuselage. He climbed steeply then and then as steeply dived in a sort of spin. I couldn't turn on oxygen and suddenly had what they call over here a blackout. I went into a sort of dream from which I awakened when I was only 1,000 feet from the ground. I think I heard myself say 'you'd better come to, you're in trouble.' Anyway, I landed safely with two probables in my 'bag'.

And now, we Americans are a separate squadron. We wear RAF uniforms with the American Eagle on the shoulder. It's a grand idea this Eagle squadron of all American flyers[18] We must try and make a name for ourselves, just like the famous 'Escadrille Lafayette'. After all, we're all on the same side and all fighting in the same cause. The fellows in the squadron

come from various parts of America - New York, Idaho, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Illinois and California. We're all flyers and very keen. We have got a lot to learn yet, of course and that is why I'm so glad to have been with an English fighter squadron, first. These English pilots certainly know their fighting tactics. My old squadron has brought down at least one hundred German aircraft. The German airmen may be pretty good formation flyers, but the British pilot has got the initiative in battle. He thinks quickly and gets results. He knows how to look after himself.

And are we lucky with our fighter planes? I guess the Spitfire is the finest fighter aircraft in the world. It's rugged and has no vices. I'd certainly rather fight with than against one.

We like England and its people who are cheerful and very easy to get on with. I miss the Californian weather, of course and if I could only have the English people and the Californian weather combined, everything would be grand. Everyone in the Royal Air Force is most kind to us all. They somehow seem to understand us and go out of their way to be helpful.

It's grand to say hello to everyone on behalf of the Eagle squadron. You can be sure we will do our very best, because we're in this business to try and do a little job of work for England.'

On 4 July 1941 'Andy' Mamedoff and 'Red' Tobin marked another death in the Eagle family when on that Independence Day afternoon they and the pilots of 71 Squadron bade their farewells to Billy Fiske, the first of the Eagles [sic] to fall, at a Memorial Service at St. Paul's cathedral in London.[19] Mamedoff became the first of the Eagles to take a war bride when he married Penny Craven, one of the most eligible young women in England, the daughter in the wealthy Craven cigarette family. Vic Bono, his best man, persuaded several members of the squadron to fly two 'honour guards' of the cannon armed Hurricanes after the church ceremony at Epping! The new bridegroom was posted to Coltishall on 1 August 1941 to be a flight commander in 133. A month later, on 7 September 'Red' Tobin went missing on 71 Squadron's first fighter sweep over France when six pilots of JG26 including Oberstleutnant Adolf Galland over claimed the three Eagle Squadron's Spitfires that were shot down. It is possible that the gangly 24-year old tangled with 22-year old Joachim Müncheberg commanding 7th Staffel, JG26 who downed the Spitfire northwest of Montreuil for his 53rd Abschuss (victory). Gone too were Hillard Fenlaw, like Mamedoff, recently married and Pilot Officer Bill Nichols, who shot up and forced to crash-land was soon captured. Tobin's sister Helen was visiting relatives in Denver when she received word that Gene was reported missing in action. His girlfriend in Los Angeles, 24-year old Anne Haring, a tall Irish beauty, contacted the International Red Cross as soon as she learned that he was missing. It was not until late October that she finally received confirmation that Tobin was dead. Mamedoff was now the only surviving member of the three brave, brash musketeers who had set out full of spirit and adventure to fight in Europe.

Early in October 1941 133 Squadron fled the Eagle's nest at Duxford and moved to Fowlmere. The Eagles' winter sojourn was short because on the

8th the fifteen Hurricanes piloted by American nationals left for Eglington, eight miles from Londonderry in Northern Ireland where they were to take further instruction amid rain, more rain and mud. At Fowlmere Mamedoff took off first and led them to Sealand to refuel. In less than hour they touched down at the transit station but overhead, storm clouds began rolling in from the Irish Sea. Only six of the Hurricane pilots that took off again reached RAF Andreas on the Isle of Man, a tiny pinprick in the Irish Sea, having missed several hilltops by only a few feet. Three landed at an intermediate airfield. Two more turned back for Sealand. The other four Eagles never arrived. One of them was Mamedoff. Local farmers found the 28-year old's broken body and blazing Hurricane in a field near the village of Maughold, southeast of Ramsey. On 14 October a telegram arrived at Lev and Natasha Mamedoff's Russian Bear restaurant in Connecticut telling them of their only son's death and that he was to be buried in Brookwood Military Cemetery in Woking.[20]

After the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 most of the Eagle Squadron pilots wanted to immediately join the fight against Japan. Representatives from 71 and 121 Squadrons went to the American Embassy in London and offered their services to the United States. The pilots from 71 Squadron decided they wanted to go to Singapore to fight the Japanese and a proposal was put to RAF Fighter Command, but it was turned down. The Dieppe Raid on 19 August 1942 was the only occasion that all three Eagle Squadrons saw action operating together. 71 Squadron moved from Debden to Gravesend in mid-August in anticipation of the Dieppe action, while 121 operated from Southend. 133 Squadron moved with 401 Squadron RCAF from RAF Biggin Hill to Lympne on the south coast. 71 Squadron claimed a Ju 88 shot down, 121 a FW 190, while 133 claimed four FW 190s, a Ju 88 and a Dornier Do 217. Six 'Eagle' Spitfires were lost, with one pilot taken prisoner and one killed.

By the end of September 1942 the three Eagle squadrons had claimed 73½ German aircraft destroyed while 77 American and five British members were killed. 71 Squadron claimed 41 victories, 121 Squadron, eighteen and 133 Squadron, 14½. On 29 September the three Eagle squadrons were officially turned over by the RAF to the fledgling Eighth Air Force and became the 4th Fighter Group, with the American pilots becoming officers in the USAAF. The Eagle pilots had earned twelve Distinguished Flying Crosses and one Distinguished Service Order. Of the thousands that volunteered, only 244 Americans served with the three Eagle Squadrons; sixteen Britons also served as squadron and flight commanders. About 100 Eagle pilots had been killed, were missing, or were prisoners and only four of the 34 original Eagle pilots were still present when the squadrons joined the USAAF. They retained their Spitfires until P-47 Thunderbolts became available in January 1943, conversion being completed in April 1943.

Endnotes Chapter 3

16 Charles M. Sweeny - soldier of fortune who fought in seven wars under five different flags - was born in Spokane, Washington on 26 January 1882. He enlisted as a Private in the Spanish American War fought in the Philippines and received an appointment to the USMA class of 1905 but dropped out around 1903. He then went to South America and participated in several revolutions there. In 1908 he joined the French Foreign Legion and was the first American ever to serve as a commissioned officer. He had a hand in organizing the 'Lafayette Escadrille' and may have flown with them. When America entered WWI he received a direct appointment to Major in the US Army and commanded an Infantry Battalion in the AEF. After WWI he served as a Brigadier in the Polish Army fighting the Bolsheviks. Later he served as a Brigadier with the White Russians fighting the Reds in the Russian Civil War. In 1920 he fought as a General with Gamal Atta Turk and helped organize and run the Turkish Revolution. Around 1925 he was back in the French Foreign Legion as a Colonel and fought Abdel Krim in North Africa. When WWII began he helped organize the Eagle Squadrons and served as a Group Captain in the RAF. When America entered WWII he moved to Switzerland to help Allen Dulles run agents in and out of the occupied countries. After WWII he was back in the French Foreign Legion fighting the Viet Minh in Indochina. He reportedly died of cancer, a wealthy man, in Las Vegas on 27 February 1963 and his tombstone supposedly reads 'Charles Michael Sweeny: Fought in every war worthy of the name War since 1898.'

17 On 26 September 1940 the three inseparable American soldiers of fortune were posted to Drem in Scotland where they became the proud founder members of 71 'Eagle' Squadron. The three Americans were posted to 609 Squadron at Warmwell in Dorset where they took part in the fighting. Tobin shared in the destruction of a Do 17 on 8 August and Keough shared in the destruction of a Do 17 on 18 September. 'Shorty's lack of height had never proved to be an impediment. 'Barring circus freaks', Keough was the smallest man some men had ever seen, had to be given a leg up into his Spitfire and he almost failed his medical board because of his lack of height. They thought that he would never ever reach the rudder bar in a Spit but Keough produced two seat cushions that he had brought with him all the way from the States via France especially for the purpose. One went under his parachute and raised him up, the other he wedged in the small of his back. Now he was able to see out of the cockpit and reach the bar! During a protection convoy just off the east coast on 15 February 1941 Keough failed to pull out of dive and his Hurricane smashed into the sea at over 500 mph. Vertigo was suspected but he had simply forgotten to turn on his oxygen and had blacked out for lack of air. The 29-year old died instantly he hit the water.

18 A total of three Eagle Squadrons were formed between September 1940 and July 1941. The first (71 Squadron) was formed in September 1940 and became operational on 5 February 1941 at Church Fenton, before a move to Kirton-in-Lindsey. In April, the squadron transferred to RAF Martlesham Heath in Suffolk for operations over Europe. During May they suffered their first loss when Mike Kolendorski was killed during a fighter sweep over the Netherlands. Intensity of operations stepped up with a move into 11 Group at North Weald by June 1941. On 2 July, William J. Hall became the first Eagle Squadron pilot to become a PoW when he was shot down during an escort operation. The squadron's first confirmed victory came on 21 July 1941 when Pilot Officer William R. Dunn destroyed a Bf 109F over Lille. In August, the Spitfire Mk II replaced 71 Squadron's Hurricanes, before quickly re-equipping with the latest Spitfire V. Numerous air kill claims were made on fighter sweeps over the continent during the summer and autumn of 1941. In December the Squadron was rested at Martlesham Heath, before a move to Debden in May 1942.

The second Eagle Squadron, 121 Squadron, was formed at RAF Kirton-in-Lindsey in May 1941, flying Hurricanes on coastal convoy escort duties. On 15 September 1941 it destroyed its first German aircraft. The Hurricanes were replaced with Spitfires and the Spitfire Mk V arrived in November 1941. The following month the Squadron moved to RAF North Weald, replacing 71 Squadron. In 1942 its offensive activities over the English Channel included bomber escorts and fighter sweeps.

The third and final Eagle Squadron - 133 - was formed at RAF Coltishall in July 1941, flying the Hurricane Mk IIb. A move to RAF Duxford followed in August and re-equipment with the Spitfire Mk V occurred early in 1942. In May the Squadron became part of the Biggin Hill Wing. On 31 July 1942 during a bomber escort to Abbeville, 52-victory 'Experte' Oberleutnant Rudolf Pflanz of 11./JG 2 engaged in combat with 133's Spitfires and after shooting down one was then shot down and killed in his Bf 109G-1 over Berck-sur-Mer. 133 Squadron claimed 3 destroyed and one probable while losing

three aircraft. Pilot Officer 'Jessie' Taylor claimed a Bf 109F and a FW 190 and Pilot Officer W. Baker was credited with a FW 190 destroyed. On 26 September eleven of the unit's twelve new Spitfire Mk IXs were lost over Morlaix, when escorting 8th Air Force B-17 Flying Fortresses in heavy cloud cover. Strong winds blew the unit further south than realised and short of fuel, the Squadron let down directly over Brest. Six of the squadron were shot down and taken prisoner, four were killed; one bailed and evaded capture, while one crash landed in England. (Flight Lieutenant Gordon Brettell; one of the British pilots taken prisoner, was to be shot as one of the escapees in The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III in 1944).

19 Billy Fiske died of his wounds in hospital 48 hours after being shot down on 16 August 1940. He was never an 'Eagle' Squadron pilot but flew only with the RAF, on 601 Squadron.

20 *The Few; The American 'Knights of the Air' who risked everything to fight in the Battle of Britain,* by Alex Kershaw (Da Capo Press 2006).