



Chapter 5 England

Lane felt unbearably lonely after leaving Quality. He wished there had been some other way. But he had known her attitude about violence and war from the outset, so in that sense he had brought it on himself. It was as if he had now separated from his better self.

His flight testing was in Ottawa. First he had to pass an extremely thorough physical examination. He had never enjoyed such things, but knew he would do well, because he was in excellent health. He was correct.

They brought him to an American-built plane, a bright yellow Harvard. This was heavier and faster than anything he had flown before; its top speed was 210 miles per hour, and it had wing flaps.

The instructor saw him gazing at it. "Think you can handle it, mate?"

"Oh, yes," Lane said quickly. "But not letter perfect."

"That's why I'm along. I'll take her up, then you'll try it. If you get confused, don't bluff; tell me. We want to come down safely too, you know."

Lane suspected that the man thought he would be incompetent. He hoped to refute that. But he could indeed make mistakes. He would much rather suffer embarrassment than a crash!

The plane was equipped with dual controls, so that the trainer could take over at any moment. He took off, leveled it, and turned to Lane. "Take her, mate."

Lane took it. He had been watching carefully, getting the feel of the craft. It was bigger, but not essentially different from the light sports planes he had flown. The underlying principles were the same. In a moment he had the feel of it, as if his nerves were extending out to the wing-tips and tail assembly.

"Bank her left," the trainer said.

Lane did so. Now the feel was different; the response was somewhat alien. But he was catching on to it. It was like shifting gears on a new car: it was apt to be jerky until the left foot got the precise feel of the clutch, but then it was smooth. Unless the gearbox was balky, as some were. Minimum experimentation could get it straight.

"Barrel roll."

Lane went into the slow roll; this was familiar to him, and it helped him gain further understanding of the machine.

"Chandelle."

This was a shift to the side and a climbing turn. It was a maneuver used to get out from under an attacking fighter plane, and with luck reverse the advantage.

"Can you loop the loop?" the trainer asked after routine maneuvers were done.



Lane laughed. "Maybe you could, in this plane. I wouldn't try, and I'd rather be on the ground before you do."

"Lost your nerve, mate?"

"You bet. I don't know much about this airplane, but I just don't think its built for that kind of stress. I'm not suicidal. Give me a plane I know can do it without sheering a wing, and I'll try it. I love to do tricks, if I'm sure of the limits."

"Stand by, then." The man took the controls, sent the plane into a small dive, then brought it up into the steep climb of the loop. Lane saw where he had misjudged it: this was a faster plane than he was familiar with, and it could go farther up without stalling. It could indeed do the loop.

The trainer brought it over the top and back down, completing the circle. "Your turn, mate."

Good enough. Now Lane had confidence in the craft, and he had noted the velocities and attack angles as the loop was performed. He emulated these as well as he could, and managed a somewhat less stable loop.

The man nodded. "You'll do, mate. Take her down."

Lane realized that he had already passed his flying test. Nobody wanted a fool as a pilot, but in battle there had to be nerve and competence, not argument. He had balked at the loop for the right reason, and come through when satisfied that the plane was up to it. He oriented carefully on the landing strip and started down.

"The flaps, mate."

Oh. "I've never had flaps before. Maybe you'd better--"

"I'll talk you through it."

But Lane knew the man would never have let him try the landing, if he had not been almost certain he could do it. This was a significant vote of confidence.

His landing was a trifle wobbly, because of the unfamiliar drag of the flaps, but he followed directions implicitly and made it without event. Only as the wheels touched the pavement did he become conscious of his underlying feeling. It was exhilaration.

Next he reported to the Air Ministry Headquarters in Ottawa for a series of personal interviews. He had to submit several letters of reference from officials in his home town. He had come prepared, and had them with him. The background check took several days.

"You made friends with a Nazi?" the interviewer asked him sharply.

Oops. "Ernst Best, a German exchange student. His father worked for the German Embassy here, so he took two years of college. It happened to be where I was going. I befriended him. We always did disagree on politics."

"Suppose you come up against him in another plane?"



"No way. He's not interested in flying. He does gliding, but otherwise he's landbound."

"What was your interest in a Nazi?"

"None. I didn't care about his politics. Every person is a creature of his own society. In Russia they are Communists, in Germany they are Nazis. They'd be traitors if they weren't. I don't much like either brand of politics. But when one is taken out of his culture, he's different, and my sympathy is for those who are different."

"Why?"

"It's just the way I am. My fiancée is a Quaker pacifist, and I'm not. I can get along with different people."

The interviewer gazed at him for a moment, then moved on. Lane wasn't sure whether his answer was satisfactory. He had heard that one otherwise qualified man had been booted because he had written one bad check to his father. But this was hardly criminal behavior, it was tolerance for other ways. That shouldn't disqualify him. By his reckoning, the world needed more tolerance. It was intolerance that made for trouble. Now why hadn't he thought to say that, and really make his point?

"Your face is scarred. How did this come about?"

"Childhood fight." Lane smiled. "I lost."

"The whole story, please."

"You asked for it. I was sort of weak and clumsy as a child. A friend stood up for me, but then his family moved and I was on my own. For a while the boys were cautious, afraid my friend would return to even the score if they picked on me, but gradually they got back into it. I tried to stand up for myself, and I think I gave a credible account, considering. But I simply lacked the physical power and stamina to make it stick. So I got my face rubbed in the gravel, and suffered moderate but painful lacerations, as the doctor put it."

Lane paused, but the interviewer didn't seem to be satisfied yet, so he went on. "I was unlucky. The abrasions became infected, and the left side of my face swelled up, disfiguring me. It was blood poisoning. I wound up in the hospital. I think my dislike of needles dates from then. I got every kind of blood test, along with X-rays, enemas and pills. I really got to hate that hospital! They were searching for the specific agent of disease, so they could match it to the specific treatment. And they found it. Also, serendipitously, they found a chemical imbalance in my system that accounted for my general malaise. They prescribed medication--I called it horse pills--with a complex formula relating to hormones or trace nutrients or antibodies. I didn't see how mere pills could help, but I took them. At least there was hope.

"And you know, it did work. The blood poisoning passed, my face healed, except for those faint scars, and I felt better. My body filled out and my coordination slowly improved. I was recovering from the malady that had held me back, and maybe making up for lost time, because my growth outstripped that of my peers. I came to match their average in mass and power, then to exceed it. It took them some time to catch on, but after I beat them they did." He smiled. "There's nothing like doing it *back* to a bully to teach him manners. By the time I reached college, my frailty was long gone. But I never forgot what it was like to have to scramble to be not quite as good as others, and I was always nervous about it. I had



to prove myself in everything, beating others not by picking fights in the street but in track or wrestling. I got into running and weight lifting, making sure my body would never lose what it had gained."

He looked up, realizing something. "Ernst--that's where I met him. He came out for wrestling too, and I worked out with him. What got me was that he was just like me in size and complexion and hair color, but of a different culture. When he spoke, it was with that German accent, that set him right apart. Just the way my girlfriend Quality was just like any other girl, until she opened her mouth. So I guess I was attracted to each of them for the same reason. The way they spoke, which showed how different they were. Because I'm different too, inside. And I don't think I'm wrong in having those friendships. They're good people, both of them, even if they don't think much of each other."

The interviewer pondered a moment, in that mystical way of his, then went on.

In due course Lane learned that he had passed the character assessment. He was made a Pilot officer in the Canadian Royal Air Force, and his combat flight training began.

Now he got into the good stuff. His combat training was done in a Miles Master, which was a two-seater, gull-winged, all wooden plane with a top speed of 264 mph. It was the fastest trainer in the world. The pilots were trained to operate in three-plane formations called a "vic"; two vics made up a flight, and two flights were a squadron, twelve aircraft. They kept in touch by radio, but it wasn't necessarily clear. They learned that singing in a high voice generated a clearer transmission. "Let's shape up, girls!" someone would singsong teasingly.

They also learned the operative terms: "pancake" meant to land immediately. "Buster" meant to proceed at full speed. "Scramble" meant to take off for battle. "Angel X" meant they were X thousand feet high. "Trade" meant an enemy formation. And "tallyho" was the R.A.F. battle cry. This was Canada, but the R.A.F. was where they were heading, once they were ready. "The greenhouse" was the cockpit of the plane.

The plane had a machine gun, but for training a motion picture camera was substituted. When the trigger was pulled this was activated, recording hits and misses. It was a lot of fun, and Lane was pretty sure he would be able to work with a real gun as effectively when the time came.

They also did do target shooting with a stationary machine gun, and then they fired at box kites towed by Fairey Battles, a light British bomber. They had to learn to recognize both friendly and enemy aircraft. They practiced Morse Code, navigation, night flying, and blind flying. They learned meteorology and the detection of thermals, because the weather could make a big difference when flying. Lane already knew that, of course, but realized that in war he would not be able to choose his flying weather, as he had as a civilian flyer. Also radio transmission procedure, aircraft maintenance, and the care and spot repair of engines and machine guns.

Lane was issued his uniform, indoctrinated into the military routine, and got his identity tags, which were on fireproof composition fiber. He was now a combat flyer.

The other trainees celebrated their success by going out on the town and getting drunk. Lane would have gone along, but he thought of Quality, and couldn't. It was not just that such celebrations were known for womanizing, which he wouldn't do, but that Quality, as a Quaker, would neither touch liquor nor associate with anyone who did. He had not had any since knowing her, and felt it would be a betrayal of her if he did so now. So he remained clean, perforce. Of course his participation in training for combat was a betrayal of Quality's nature too, but somehow that was less personal than the small



ings. So he remained home, as it were, and wrote her a letter.

After two months of combat training, Lane was transferred to his permanent unit: the 242nd Royal Air Force Squadron in England, a unit flying the all metal Hawker Hurricane. This was a tough and durable fighter with a top speed of around 320 miles per hour, armed with eight Browning .303 machine guns. This was the fastest and fiercest aircraft Lane had encountered, but what fascinated him was the combat gunsight.

The gunsight was a circle with a horizontal crosshair. It had three controls. The first was a key to give power to the sight, making the circle and crosshairs glow. The second was a rheostat which controlled the intensity of the glow. The third was a dial which controlled the size of the circle. The dial could be set for the wingspan of the enemy craft that the pilot expected to engage. When the wing-tips touched the edges of the circle, the craft was in range. The eight machine guns were aligned to form a small circular clump of fire at a range of 250 yards. The Hurricane's guns could fire tracer, incendiary, ball, and armor-piercing bullets at a cyclic rate of 9,600 rounds per minute.

Lane whistled. "I pity the enemy plane that gets into range!" But he realized that the enemy plane was likely to have similar firepower, and a similar range. When he got close enough for the kill, he would also be close enough to be killed.

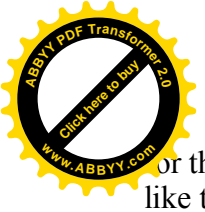
The guns were covered with a wooden shield, to decrease wind resistance and enable the plane to fly faster, as well as to cut wind noise and keep foreign matter out of the barrels. When the guns were fired, the wooden shield was blown away, so a ground crew could immediately tell when a pilot had fired on an enemy. As if they weren't going to take the pilot's word about it?

There was further training and preparation carrying him through the year 1939. There was a permanent flying station in the R.A.F that helped establish a comfortable, homelike atmosphere. A central brick building housed the pilots' bedrooms, restaurant, bar and quiet room. There was a laundry service, and batmen in attendance. The building was surrounded by lawns and tennis courts. The ground crews assigned to each pilot were very protective of that pilot, and would fight, it seemed, at the drop of a hat if anybody said anything against him.

The "wake up" drink of the R.A.F. was tea. Lane had found this quaint at first, but soon enough settled into the habit and developed a liking for it. He also learned to respect the tray of vitamin A pills which sat in the mess with the sign "for night flying personnel only." They did seem to help, when he had night practice, though he wasn't sure whether this was real or imaginary.

The flying uniform was a thick silk-lined "teddy bear" and a fireproof coverall flying suit called a sidka. For very cold weather there was a fur-lined Irving suit. When flying, the pilot wore a parachute, silk gloves under flying mittens, a heavy helmet with earphones, a throat microphone and an attached oxygen mask. The helmet plugged into the radio. The safety belt was a Suddon harness: straps over the shoulders and across the chest to the back.

He received letters from Quality, who had gone to Spain, to his surprise, and seen the civil war there first-hand. She was not a passive pacifist, but an active one; she sought to do whatever good she could in the world. He could hardly fault her for that, but he wished she were well away from that battle-torn nation. Some of what she described horrified him; she should never have been exposed to such horrors. He was relieved when he learned that that war was over and she was all right. He had no liking



or the insurgent generals who had turned against their own country and conquered it, but he just didn't like the thought of Quality possibly getting hurt.

In September, Germany invaded Poland. War had been building, and now it had come. Lane had mixed feelings. He had been training for this, and hoped to see action soon. Yet he knew it would have been better if Hitler and the Nazis had never existed, so that peace had remained. He was both eager to put that bully Hitler in his place, and guilty because of the way Quality felt about violence and war.

The 242nd Squadron was transferred to France to help bolster its defenses. Lane was in the Air Component of the RAF, known as the AC. It was stationed between the town of Lille and the river Somme in the northernmost part of the country. The planes did not go near Germany, to Lane's frustration; they did not even do a great deal of drill. They just waited. Since he was not interested in exploring the favors of the local French girls, it was a dull time.

On the ninth of April, 1940, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. Still the squadron did not act. It was saving itself for the defense of France, and was coordinating with the French, who seemed marvelously efficient in taking no action. They depended on their fancy Maginot Line to the east, and on the sanctity of the territory of Holland and Belgium to the north, buttressed by the British Expeditionary Force. This was part of the Air Component of that Force, commanded by General Gort.

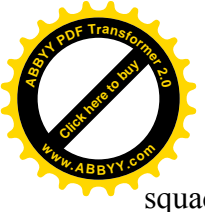
On the 10th of May, Germany invaded Holland and Belgium, on the way to France. Now at last it was time for action. The planes went out: two bomber squadrons and two fighter squadrons. Lane did not; he was in one of the fighter squadrons held in reserve for the moment. This was because the situation was so confused that the commander did not know where the greatest need would be.

It turned out to be hell out there. The moment the bombers approached the advancing German lines, they were attacked by swarming German planes. The fighters tried to engage the Germans, but were outnumbered and outpiloted. They took horrendous losses. In fact, the unit suffered 50% casualties, and it was doubtful whether they had inflicted significant casualties in return. At first it was hoped that some planes were merely late coming back, but as time passed it was obvious that they had been lost. When a plane ran out of fuel, it had to come down wherever it was. Probably that had not been the problem; they had been shot down.

Lane went out the following day. The German positions were not where he had been told; they were closer. In fact they were rushing west at an alarming rate, directly toward the Air Component base. Caught by surprise, Lane and the other planes of his squadron tried to attack the Luftwaffe bombers, but could not even get close before being engaged by the snarling ME-109's. He quickly discovered that he was up against a superior plane; the Messerschmitt could outclimb, outdive, and outspeed him. But he was able to turn inside it, and that was his one advantage. Lane wanted to make a scrap of it, but he saw two of his companions go down, and the others turned to flee. He was in danger of being isolated in the midst of the enemy, which was sure disaster. He had to turn tail himself.

And the retreat was worse than the brief battle, because the Germans pursued, shooting down two more before quitting the chase. It had been mostly chance, Lane realized, that had saved him from that fate. He just had not been among those targets chosen by the hunters.

But there was no safety back at the field. No sooner had he landed than he had to refuel and take off again--for a field farther to the south. Because it was apparent that the Germans could not be stopped, and would soon overrun this field.



That was the beginning of a continuing disaster. The unit was reinforced by several more fighter squadrons, but communications were poor and coordination with the ground forces was worse. Contact with the Advanced Air Striking force was lost; the Germans had driven a wedge between the northeast and northwest of France. The lack of ground transportation was another critical problem; many units were forced to abandon equipment and burn planes which were too damaged to fly safely. There were stories of other squadrons which would retreat one day, fly a mission the next, and retreat again that night. Lane's unit retreated to an airfield near Amiens, bedded down for the night, and woke just in time to take flight before Guderian's advancing tanks. They were shunted from one airfield to another, receiving scant welcome anywhere. It became every man for himself, with each pilot scrounging for his own food, servicing his own plane, and sleeping under its wing. They had to search for enough fuel to take off and fight. And still the Germans came on, relentlessly.

By May 19 the AC was forced to retreat entirely from the continent. The squadrons were posted to Kent in England, their pilots abandoning everything but the clothes on their backs as they fled. They had lost half of their planes at that point. It wasn't better for the land forces; they were coalescing about a town at the seacoast named Dunkirk, hard-pressed by the Germans.

They hoped to continue flying missions over France, but the range of the Hurricanes was not enough for them to fly prolonged missions across the channel. They were unable to coordinate properly with the other units. About all they could do was harass the Germans who were closing in on Dunkirk, and try to protect the boats that were carrying the allied troops across to England. That was a horrendous business; there were well over three hundred thousand stranded men, and every type of boat was being marshaled to bear them to safety.

But the fact was that none of the unit's planes were considered truly flightworthy at this point. Not one had escaped France unscathed, and the pilots were demoralized. They had given what was best described as a poor account of themselves. Seven of them had died, two were wounded, and one had a nervous breakdown. As the Dunkirk evacuation was nearing completion, because by some miracle the Germans were not bringing full force to bear, the remnant of the 242 was transferred a hundred and fifty kilometers north to Coltishall, a place so small it wasn't on the map. There they had to share quarters with the 66th Squadron. It was near Norwich, where they had to go for any big-town action.

The new Squadron leader was Douglas Bader, a man who had lost both his legs because of an accident in 1930. The pilots expected him to fly very little, because of his handicap. They were afraid that he would be just another figurehead.

Douglas Bader, they soon learned at a detailed briefing, had crashed his bulldog fighter while attempting a dangerous aerobatic maneuver. The surgeon was forced to amputate his right leg above the knee, and his left leg about six inches below the knee. They fitted him with metal artificial legs, and he proceeded to rebuild his life. His determination was amazing. He taught himself to walk again, and to dance, to play golf--exceedingly well--to play squash, and above all, to fly. In fact he flew as well as he ever had. But the R.A.F., more conservative than Bader, decided that he was medically unfit for duty and forced him to retire. Only after Britain entered the war did the R.A.F. decide to allow him back in the service. His obvious qualification finally prevailed against their prejudice.

He was posted to a Spitfire squadron, where he soon became a flight leader. But he was impatient with the R.A.F.'s tactical methods. The Fighter Command theoreticians believed that modern fighters were too fast for dogfight tactics. (At this point Lane and the other pilots burst out laughing, somewhat bitterly. They had been virtually annihilated by German fighters who had practiced dogfighting.) The only approved method for a fighter attack on a bomber formation was for each three plane vic to line up and play follow-the-leader, firing in orderly turns during the run. Bader argued that these tactics exposed



the fighter's vulnerable belly to the bomber's tail-gunner. ("Now he tells us!") He favored the use of dogfight tactics similar to those found effective in the War, and the use of several fighters to gang up and join fire against a single bomber. ("What single bomber?") He advocated using the controlling aspects of height and sun in aerial combat.

During the evacuation of Dunkirk, Douglas Bader saw his first combat. He vindicated his views by scoring his first three enemy kills.

So it was that he was given command of the 242nd Hurricane squadron, the only Canadian squadron in the R.A.F. It was obvious that he was being safely put out of the way, just as was the squadron: a man battered into uselessness, in charge of an essentially foreign squadron battered into uselessness. It was an insult to each of them.

Lane and the other pilots were ready in one of the two dispersal huts when Bader came to take command. He was unannounced, but there was no mistaking the lurching walk of the man. He had to kick his right stump forward to move the leg, then kick it down to straighten the hinged knee. But he did move along well enough.

No one moved. The pilots just studied him quietly. They could do this because they had not been introduced; theoretically they did not know who he was.

"Who's in charge?" Bader demanded.

A heavysset young man rose slowly. "I guess I am."

"Isn't there a flight commander?"

"There's one somewhere."

"What's your name?"

At this point the man realized that he had carried the masked insolence about as far as he dared. "Turner. Sir."

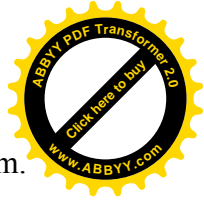
Bader turned angrily and left the hut. He lurched to the nearest Hurricane and strapped himself in. He started it, taxied out to the field, took off, and proceeded to give a display of aerobatic flying that drew them all from the hut to watch. Lane was amazed. This man was *good!*

When he landed, Bader did not take any further notice of the Canadian pilots. He walked to his car and drove off.

"I think maybe we have a commander," Lane remarked. The others nodded. The next time Bader appeared, he would be treated with proper respect.

The next morning Bader called all of them into his office. They reported with alacrity, and were absolutely respectful, but the man was unforgiving. "A good squadron looks smart. I want to see no more flying boots or sweaters in the mess. You will wear shoes, shirts, and ties." He glanced at Turner. "Do you have a problem with that?"

"Yes, sir. Most of us don't have any clothes except what we're wearing now."



Bader stared at him. "I am not a man for humor. Is this the truth?" He looked at the rest of them.

"Yes, sir," they chorused.

"How did this happen?"

They told him of their disastrous flight from France, and their treatment since. "Our requests for allowance due to loss of kit have been turned down," Lane said. Ordinarily those who had lost their uniforms and personal things in the line of duty were allowed to draw replacements.

"Well, that will change," Bader said. "Order new uniforms, all of you, from the local tailors. I will guarantee that they are paid for. Meantime, for tonight, you beg or borrow shoes and shirts from someone. I've got some shirts, and you can borrow all I've got. Okay?"

"Okay," they agreed, taking heart.

"Now I want to hear about your engagements in France."

They told him, and he listened attentively. His open and friendly manner transformed their attitude toward him; not only was he an expert pilot, he was a decent person. They had judged him by his metal legs, and he had judged them by their sloppy clothing, but those judgments had evaporated.

Next came spot flight testing. He took them up in pairs, and discovered that all of them flew well (those who hadn't, had not survived), though their formations were somewhat sloppy by his standards. The next few days took care of that. When Lane's turn came, he looked down and was amazed: the airfields were camouflaged so as to be nearly invisible from the air. This had not been the case in Canada or France--but Canada was not in immediate danger of being bombed, and France--well, everything about that had been a disaster. When landing at night an R.A.F. pilot would give the colors of the day with a flare gun, or flash the letters of the day in Morse code from an amber light in the tail assembly to authenticate his identity. This was no casual thing; an enemy plane could cause a great deal of damage if allowed to sneak in unchallenged.

Bader made good on his word about the uniforms, and they sharpened their appearance and their flying skills. Morale was restored, and the squadron began to thrive.

But there was another problem. The 242's engineer officer, Bernard West, told Bader that the ground crew's spare parts and supplies had been lost in France, and that his requests for resupply had been denied. They would be unable to keep the planes even remotely flightworthy much longer.

"Well see about that," Bader said grimly. Lane was there when he put in a call to the supply officer.

"Coltishall is a new station," the supply officer responded. "I literally haven't got enough staff to type out the forms."

"To Hell with your forms and your blankets and your blasted toilet paper! I want my spares and tools, and I want 'em damned soon."

But nothing happened. Lane and the others waited with increasing interest; they knew that Bader seldom brooked being ignored. Sure enough: a few days later Bader sent a signal to the Group



headquarters. □242 SQUADRON NOW OPERATIONAL AS REGARDS PILOTS BUT NONOPERATIONAL REPEAT NONOPERATIONAL AS REGARDS EQUIPMENT. That was pretty blunt by R.A.F. standards, and could lead to trouble.

It did. Soon Bader was ordered to report to Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding. Lane and the other pilots saw him off. "Sir, we just want you to know--"

"That you know I'll get those damned supplies," he finished, and drove off.

They exchanged glances. That had not been their concern, at this point. They were afraid that he was going to be relieved of command for his impertinence.

But they had underestimated him again. It was the supply officer and his superior who were replaced. Next day the 242's supplies arrived.

An anonymous cartoon appeared on the bulletin board. It showed two airplanes being shot out of the air simultaneously by one. They were labeled "Supply." Below was a scrawled "five" marker, suggesting that someone had upped his notches from three to five. If Bader noticed it, he gave no indication. That was significant, because he was a stickler for form, and would have removed anything he felt was inappropriate.

On August 13, 1940, the "Battle Over Britain" began. The Germans sent everything they had, determined to blast the British out of the sky so that they could bomb with impunity. The British met them bravely, refusing to be intimidated. Day by day, the battle in the air raged.

But the 242 squadron was stationed too far to the north to take part in that action. Its fighters were being held in reserve, to protect the northern industrial areas. Bader chafed at this, and so did Lane and the other pilots. Bader repeatedly asked for his squadron to be deployed to a more southerly base for combat duty.

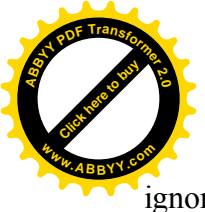
He could not be denied. On August 30 the squadron was ordered to deploy to Duxford. But fifteen minutes after they took off, they were ordered back to Coltishall. Bader, furious, put in a call. An hour later they were ordered to deploy again, and this time no counterorder was issued. They arrived in Duxford by noon.

There they had lunch in the dispersal area, waiting impatiently for action. Finally, near five o'clock, the phone rang: "242 Squadron scramble!"

That was it. They were finally back in action, and this time they were far better prepared than they had been in France. The four vics, a total of twelve planes, took off in order: Red Section under Bader, called Laycock; then Yellow, where Lane was, Green, and Blue.

"Laycock Red leader calling steersman. Airborne. What height?" That was the query about the position of the enemy planes.

"Angels Fifteen. Trade approaching North Weald. Vector one-nine-zero. Buster." That meant that the enemy planes were at 15,000 feet, heading toward North Weald. The squadrons were to go ten degrees west of south, at full speed.



The sun was in the west, and the enemy liked to try to come out of the sun. Therefore Bader ignored the steersman's instruction and moved in a direction calculated to negate that advantage. His sections checked in: "Yellow Leader--in position." "Green Leader--in position." "Blue Leader--in position."

"Blue Leader to Laycock Red Leader, three bogies, three o'clock low."

Bader ordered the Blue section to investigate the three dots. The rest of the squadron continued toward North Weald on an intercept course.

"Red Two here--bandits ten o'clock level."

As they got closer, Lane was able to make out two boxes of thirty or more bombers, each moving toward North Weald at about 12,000 feet. Then he saw another group of dots above the bombers: fighters, higher than the 242.

"Green section--take on the top lot."

The Green vic climbed and peeled off to the right. That left the Red and Yellow sections--six fighters to engage the bombers. They were mostly twin-engined Dornier 17's, the so-called "flying pencils," with a few ME-110 twin-engined fighters interspersed among them. The bombers were headed northeast and were grouped in rows of four to six.

Bader's squadron headed south by southeast to intercept them from slightly above, out of the sun. He led his section on a dive through the third line of bombers. The hurricanes opened fire. The startled bombers scattered.

The Yellow Section followed, and scattered the bombers further. Then all six Hurricanes climbed up to attack the scattered Germans.

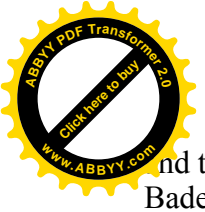
It was a piece of cake. Lane oriented on his target, and it was helpless. He fired, and scored, and the bomber went down. He oriented on another, and scored on it, but couldn't get a critical hit.

Now all the bombers were fleeing, and their fighter escort with them. The sky was clear. The Hurricanes regrouped and headed for home.

When they landed, and everyone was present, Bader quizzed his pilots. It turned out that the 242 had made twelve enemy kills, and damaged several more--without suffering a single loss. And the enemy had fled without dropping a single bomb on North Weald.

There was now no doubt: Bader's strategy was sound. He had taken the broken 242 Squadron and made it into a completely successful striking force. The way to foil the Germans was threefold: use large formations of fighters to inflict maximum damage, scramble early--as soon as the enemy was identified--so as to gain maximum height, and use the three combat principles of height, sun and close-in shooting. He argued his case before his superiors, and was given the opportunity to test his theories on a larger scale.

On September 2 Bader was given control of the 310 and 19 Spitfire squadrons at Duxford. Lane



and the other 242 pilots became de facto instructors, helping to show the new pilots how to integrate the Bader way. In three days of intensive practice the three squadrons were able to scramble in just over three minutes. They were ready--they hoped.

The Battle for Britain was still being waged. The Germans seemed determined to prevail, making what seemed like suicidal sallies, and all over south Britain it was a struggle to hold them back. London was taking a beating.

On September 7, in the late afternoon, they were given the order to intercept a German bomber formation. They scrambled, but it was already late; they had not been given enough warning.

Bader was not only a good flyer and an effective leader, he was a master at disarming tension among his pilots before combat. When the unit scrambled Lane heard his voice on the radio. "Hey, Woody, I'm supposed to be playing squash with Peter this afternoon. Ring him up, will you, and tell him I'll be a bit late." "Woody" was Wing Commander Woodall, who gave them instructions from the ground. This was hardly mission business!

"Never mind that now, Douglas," Woody replied, and tried to get on with business. "Vector one-nine-zero. Angels 20."

Bader pretended to ignore that. "Oh, go on, Woody. Ring him up now." Lane was smiling, feeling the tension draining away. It was almost as if they weren't on their way to a life and death struggle with the enemy.

"Haven't got time, Douglas," Woody, the straight man, said patiently. "There's a plot on the board heading for the coast."

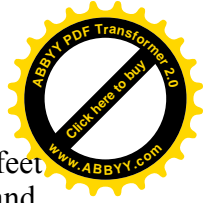
Still Bader pretended to ignore it. "Well, damned well make time! You're sitting in front of a row of phones. Pick one up and ring the chap."

"All right, all right, for the sake of peace and quiet I will. Now would you mind getting on with the war?"

And Lane was laughing, having gotten the war into perspective. That was just as well, because they were headed into trouble, and could afford no tension-induced mistakes.

They had reached 15,000 feet when they spotted a formation of Dorniers and ME-110's at least 5,000 feet above them, and ME-109's even higher. This was similar to what they had broken up without a loss before, but this time they lacked the critical advantages of height and surprise. Lane climbed with Bader's squadron to engage, but the Spitfires climbed more slowly than the Hurricanes and weren't there in time. Thus the Hurricanes engaged without any real support. Even so, they scored eleven confirmed kills. Bader took some cannon shells in his left wing, and the others suffered similar damage. One pilot was killed, another was shot down but survived the crash landing with a cut face, and four other planes were damaged. The Spitfires had participated only in showing a reserve force, but that had counted for something, because it convinced the Germans to break off the engagement. It was possible that there would have been heavier losses otherwise.

"We've got to scramble earlier," Bader said. "We have to gain great height before engaging." And Lane knew that he was telling exactly that to his superiors. Next time the order to intercept an enemy formation would come sooner.



It did. Two days later the scramble order came early, and the three squadrons reached 22,000 feet before spotting the enemy bomber formations. This was much better. All three squadrons engaged, and by the time it was done they recorded 20 victories at the cost of four Hurricanes and two pilots. As engagements went, it was phenomenal, because the Germans were hardly pushovers. The ragtag band of foreign flyers had become one of the outstanding R.A.F. units.

Bader still wasn't satisfied. He lobbied for a still larger group of fighters that would be able to inflict even heavier damage. Too many enemy planes were getting away, and they would only return for more mischief on other days.

He was given his chance. Air Vice Marshall Leigh-Mallory was now a convert to the Bader strategy, and other squadrons in 12 Group were being urged to mirror his tactics of breaking up enemy formations by diving through their centers. He had even nicknamed the 242 the Disintegration Squadron in honor of this technique. So on September 10 he was given two more squadrons, the 302 and the 611, and there came into existence a new outfit: the 12 Group Wing. All of the original 242 pilots felt the pride of it.

On the 15th, 12 Group Wing was scrambled twice to meet Luftwaffe attacks. The second time they were scrambled late, and forced to attack from below. They hated it, but had to make do. Still, when the engagements were reviewed and tallied that evening, 12 Group Wing claimed 52 confirmed victories and 8 more possibles. What a day!

Bader was to receive the Distinguished Service Order in recognition of his accomplishments. But they weren't done yet; the Germans were still coming, day by day, still determined to bomb Britain into surrender.

On the 18th they scrambled in the afternoon, and were cruising just below a thin layer of clouds at 21,000 feet when they spied two groups of German planes about 5,000 feet below. There were some forty planes--and they were all bombers! No fighter escort.

"Fish in a barrel," Lane murmured, hardly believing it. Apparently the Nazis were so determined to bomb that they had stopped making fighters. That was their folly.

When the action was done, they had claimed 30 bombers destroyed, plus 6 probables and two more damaged. There had been no casualties on the British side.

By the end of September the German attacks were becoming less frequent and destructive. The Battle over Britain continued, but the days of the heavy bomber raids were coming to a close. The R.A.F. was establishing its supremacy over the skies of Britain. This aspect of the war was being won.

But Lane knew that this was only the first phase. The war would not be over until the Nazis were defeated on their home soil. That would be no fish-in-a-barrel shoot!

Indeed it was not. Lane went on a routine mission, and got ambushed by a German fighter plane, and had to pancake. He brought his plane down safely, but his face had been scratched by shrapnel from an enemy round and the blood impaired his vision.

A medic came to attend to him as he climbed out of the cockpit. "I'm okay," Lane protested. "It's just a scratch. Just let me get cleaned up."



"That's no bleeding scratch," the medic said. "You've got a round in your head!"

Lane laughed. Then he passed out.

Things were hazy after that. They kept him sedated, and there was surgery. When he recovered full consciousness, his head was thoroughly bandaged and his vision blurry.

He was given leave as he recovered. Unable to stand and watch others flying when he could not, he went to London--and was surprised by the changes there. As war loomed closer to Britain, nearly everyone in London carried a gas mask. A large percentage of the people were in uniform, including the women. Newspapers carried features such as "These Are Your Weapons, and How to Use Them." Balloons attached to cables were hung at an altitude of about five thousand feet, to prevent German bombers from flying low enough to aim accurately. Lane, like other pilots, didn't much care for the balloon barrage system, because balloon officers called what they did "flying." Also, when visibility was poor, British planes sometimes got snagged on the cables. Just which side were those balloons on?

When his recovery was complete, he reported for duty, but was met by a curious diffidence. The other pilots seemed glad to see him, but were vague about plans.

Bader gave him the bad news. "Your body is fine, your brain is fine. But that wound did things we don't understand to your vision. Maybe you will recover completely, in time. But we can't risk you in a plane now."

"But I still have missions to fly!" Lane protested. "There's a war to see through!"

"You need perfect vision to fly. Otherwise you will be a risk to yourself and others in the squadron. Would *you* want to be dependent for your life on another man who couldn't see straight?"

Lane saw the way of it. "But I'm otherwise fit. There must be something I can do. I can't let a little injury wash me out."

"I understand." Bader glanced down at his own legs. He understood better than any man alive! "Your fiancée--she's in Spain?"

"Yes. Only I haven't heard from her since June. The Quakers had to leave Spain, but she wasn't with them. I've been worried sick."

Bader nodded; it was evident that he had known this. "Would you like to investigate our facilities in Gibraltar? I understand they may be expanded, to give us better leverage in the Mediterranean theater. It would be better if a battle-experienced flyer had a look."

"Gibraltar! That's near Spain!"

"Which remains an officially neutral country. Possibly a passport could be arranged."

Lane saw what the man was doing. He was giving him a chance to try to check on Quality directly. Lane reached up to shake Bader's hand.



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