

The Battle of Britain for the Hearts of Men

Laced white and yellow with wildflowers, the small pond lay peaceful in a classic English meadow, green and chirping with swallows. Yet in this small but influential land of history, great lessons lay beneath its calm surface.

Excited but still jet-lagged and exhausted, I had finished my 11th men's conference in the previous 13 weeks, and my first at an Anglican Church of England. My host had graciously pointed me a few houses down his busy street near Bristol, to an inconspicuous arrow-sign noting "Footpath." Hiking down the narrow lane between two three-story houses, to my delight I soon entered a small forest and reached the Avon river--as in Stratford-on-Avon, where Shakespeare lived. Soaking in this haven of nature, so close yet so removed from the cement cathedrals and roaring airports, I came upon the circular pond, perhaps 20 feet across.

Pausing to thank God for His refreshing Creation, I happened to notice a weathered plaque off to one side. Curious, I stepped over to read it—and was startled to find that my tranquil pond was no natural formation, but rather, the result of an "errant *Luftwaffe* bomb" dropped by a Nazi bomber in 1940, during an attack on the Spitfire fighter-plane factory in nearby Bristol!

Standing there, only several hundred yards from a bustling suburb, I was shocked as only an American could be. Enemy bombs blasting huge craters among houses? Why, real people lived here--ate dinner, brushed their teeth, read the evening paper, made love, chatted with friends! My mind struggled to connect the peaceful scene before me with the horror it betrayed some 60 years earlier. "Oh, Lord," I prayed, "give me the courage to enter into the truth you're showing me here!"

At once, a deep sadness swept over me, and then, a fierce anger. I remembered the story of the leper who fell desperate at Jesus' feet. "If you want to, you can make me clean," he pleaded (Mark 1: 40-41). "Jesus was filled with pity," my Today's English Version reads--then in a footnote, adds, "some manuscripts have *anger*." Pity, certainly, for the broken man before Him. But anger, too--not only at the powers of the world for inflicting a child of God, but also at the man's own distorted image of the Father--as if He might not *want* to heal His son.

I began to sense that the Father was giving me His heart for the men of that country. Sixty years later, the *Luftwaffe* was no more. But in its absence, the true Enemy had been revealed. Indeed, the "ruler of the kingdom of the air," as Paul describes Satan (Ephes. 2:2NIV), has been dropping bombs of father-abandonment squarely on the sons of God, blasting craters of shame and fear, blinding us to the Father's heart for His sons.

The morning of the following weekend's conference in Cambridge, I visited Duxworth, a sprawling air base/museum commemorating the Battle of Britain. In those few months of 1940, when Europe had capitulated to the Nazis and we Americans were hiding in isolationism, a handful of courageous young British airmen held off the entire Nazi Air Force, frustrating Hitler's planned invasion of the US and world takeover. "Never in the field of human conflict," Winston Churchill proclaimed, "has so much been

owed by so many to so few.” In fact, the entire nation resisted heroically. As one exhibit at Duxworth notes, “The Battle of Britain made war a reality for millions of people on the Home Front. Many thousands of civilians were killed, injured, or made homeless during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. It also made people cooperate and take on new roles and responsibilities.”

Before coming to the UK, I had read the story of the battle of Britain to my 9-year-old son, pausing only to contain my tears. I want him to share my respect and admiration for the fathers and grandfathers of the men I was leaving him to address. I told him how that was shared by his grandfather, my dad—who visited the UK in 1945 just after Armistice as part of a Navy supply force. “The British,” he wrote me in reply to my recent letter, “always find ways to adapt to difficult situations.” I pray they will continue to do so—not only to adapt, but to triumph yet again today, as 60 years ago.

For the Battle of Britain—as for America—rages unto our time, albeit unheralded. A common enemy unites a people, focuses their energy, mobilizes their resources, solidifies their determination. But until the enemy and his destructive intent is recognized—like England before the Battle of Britain—the people sleep. What, indeed, does it take to “make war a reality” for men today, real enough for us to “cooperate and take on new roles and responsibilities”?

While we dawdle in denial, the Father of Lies bombs away. Casualties from our untended father-wound are mounting horrifically among us: the AIDS epidemic (through those confused about their manhood by lack of bonding with Dad), suicide (often from not having a Dad’s embrace to counter the unbearable shame of not measuring up), crime and murder (prisons filled with men whose fathers never blessed their goodness), abortions (men abandoned by Dad as boys, in turn abandoning their own children to be destroyed), domestic violence and pornography (men whose fathers neither taught them about God’s purposes in sexuality nor demonstrated healthy relationships with women)—the battlefronts and body-count seem endless.

I honor the men who fought the Battle of Britain, and all men who battled Evil unto victory in WWII. Ultimately, however, these heroes of the “Greatest Generation” past are not honored by our mere admiration, but only by our readiness to fight the battles they freed us to face in our time. And so, I pray that the Body of Christ around the world will begin to weep for so many wounded men today. And then, get angry at the Enemy and the powers of the world—not only for wounding us so deeply, but for distorting our image of God as a Father who wants more to shame than heal us (Ephes. 1:17). May a new generation of men today rise up to proclaim the truth: Our Father longs to restore us as His sons for His good purposes (Ephes. 2:8-10).

Indeed, may we let Him.