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Reach for the Sky

By Lewis Gilbert

- Contact.

- Contact.

(engine stalls)

(engine starts)

I'm just joining.

New cadets report at the Cadets' Mess
at the top of the road.

Right. Thank you.

Gentlemen...

...atten-shun!

- What is your name, sir?

- Bader.

- Are you a comedian?

- No, sir.

- What is wrong with your hat?

- I can't see it, sir.

Take it off, sir!

Well?

I had an accident on my way here.

- I fell off my motorcycle.

- You fell off your motorcycle.

- How do you expect to fly an aeroplane?

- I expect to be taught.

Another funny man.

And what is your name, sir?

Sanderson, Flight Sergeant.

I bet you don't laugh so much
from now on, Mr Sanderson, sir.

Gentlemen...

...move to the right in fours. Form fours!

Right!

By the left, left wheel...

...quick march!

(Sanderson) As Douglas Bader marched
across Cranwell's parade ground...

...in September of 1928...

...I marched beside him.

Two young men for whom living...

...meant flying.

Douglas was airborne within days...

...on his first instructional flight
in an Avro 504.

From the very beginning,
he loved every minute of it.

You must relax. You're still too tensed up.

Now try another turn.

Don't shove it, guide it gently.

Feel the aeroplane's part of you.

That's better.

I'm beginning to feel the plane now, sir.

Never call it a plane, Bader,

it's an aeroplane.

Yessir.

- I want you to try a landing.

- Right.

OK, you've got her.

Now turn in.

I've got her.

Perhaps we'll try again tomorrow.

You mightn't be valuable to the Air Force,

but I am!

Not bad.

Three in a row without terrifying me.

- Thank you.

- You're nearly ready to go solo.

- How do you feel about it?

- Fine, sir.

Take off, fly a circuit and land,

then come in. I'll be watching.

Very good, sir.

Cut back a bit!

(all hum "John Brown's Body" drunkenly)

(shouting raucously)

- 20 minutes late again.

- Names, gentlemen.

- Bader.

- Sanderson.

(Douglas) Bet I've written this off.

(Sanderson) She's okay.

Douglas... PC Trouble.

You the four who passed me in the lane?

- (All) No!

- Which of you owns the bike?

- Me. Flight Cadet Bader.

- Bayder.

Bader!

Flight Cadet... Bayder.

It's the third time I've had you

for cycling offences.

- You'll get us in trouble again.

- No rear light.

Well, I did have.

You won't pinch me for that?

It's either that

or not being in proper control.

Don't be greedy.

I'll take the no rear light.

Either spells trouble.

I'll serve the summons tomorrow.

Nice to feel wanted!

You're a menace to everybody

on the road.

- Goodnight, officer.

- Goodnight.

(laughter)

You came here a year ago on a prize

cadetship having passed in six.

You've not only done no work...

...you seem to regard authority

as a challenge to be defied.

Now this latest escapade!

Well, have you anything else to say?

l-I think it must be a reaction.

I've been working very hard for the exam.

You may be interested in the results, then.

Yessir.

- Out of 21 entries, you were 19th.

- Oh.

You fly well and you're good at games.

But it's not enough.

You'd better change considerably

or you'll go.

We don't want schoolboys in the RAF,

we want men. That's all.

Yessir.

- How many has Bader got?

- 102. Pity it's his last game.

Four more and you've beaten us.

(applause)

- Well done!

- Thanks.

- The postings are up.

- Are we together?
- Yes, at Kenley.
- 23 Squadron!
- Congratulations!
- And the same to you, sir!

Good innings.

I see you're both going to Kenley.

It'll keep all the trouble in one spot!

We'll liven things up!

Atten-shun!

General salute!

(trumpet fanfare)

- Sanderson.

- Yessir?

Was that you I saw falling out of a roll?

Yessir. Actually, I didn't fall out,

I came out lower down.

They are different from the Gamecocks.

Don't do it without plenty of height.

All of you, no low aerobatics.

- All right if you know your stuff.

- Two pilots were killed last month.

- They knew their stuff.

- They were unlucky.

Since the air display,

you're the worst offender.

Better pilots than you have died.

Surely we don't have to obey

all the regulations.

Rules are written

for the obedience of fools...

...and the guidance of wise men.

- Yessir.

Douglas, a good pilot shouldn't

have to prove it all the time.

I understand, sir.

- See you at the mess dance tonight?

- You bet, sir.

"Love Is The Sweetest Thing"

- You're always in a hurry.

- When was I hurrying?

- Playing rugby for the Harlequins.

- Are you a fan?

You are quite a celebrity.

- What are you up to on Monday?
- Making love to Sally, I hope!
- Care to join Reading Aero Club?
- Yep, count me in.
- Where do you live, Sally?
- About 40 miles away.
- I'll run you home. Let's go.
- What about Johnny?
- Besides, there's Hilda.
- Look.
- I'll get my coat.
- Come on, let's go.

I'll wait here for you.

- And very nice, too.
- Hello, sir.
- Enjoying yourself?
- Rather!

I did mean what I said this afternoon.

About showing off? I deserved it.

It's dangerous to be too sure of yourself.

Just watch it.

- I will, sir.
- Goodnight, Douglas. Behave yourself.

What does he mean, behave yourself?

He's talking about Monday, not tonight!

Must be some Service boys here.

- That's the RAF's standard fighter.
- Terrifically fast.
- Hello, Jones. Just come in?
- Yes, from Heston.

Have you met these RAF chaps?

- Saw your Bulldog.
- I saw you play for Inter-Services.
- It's said you'll play for England.
- Well, I may be lucky.

Well, well, quite the all-rounder.

Rugger, cricket, boxing, Hendon.

Some show you put on at Hendon!

- Pricky Day's a great pilot.
- We ought to go.
- Why don't you beat up the field?
- No chance, old boy.
- Come on, give us a show!
- You heard Sanderson.

- The CO forbids the low stuff.
- Oh(!)
- Come on, we ought to get back.
- Sorry.

These boys only perform...

...when there's a crowd.

(panicked shouting)

See where the ambulance is! Hurry it up!

Hold on, we'll have you out in a moment.

Get those parachutes clear.

Take it easy, Douglas. They won't be long.

- This is damn silly. Let me get up.
- No, hold on, old boy. Lie still.

John... I can't feel my legs.

- (knock at door)
- Come in.

Mr Joyce, have you time to see a young RAF officer?

- He's had a very bad crash.
- I have an appointment.

The House Surgeon says there's very little hope.

- Tell Taylor I'll be delayed.
- You've only just caught him.

Yes, it was lucky.

This patient needs all the luck he can get.

(Joyce) Pulse is stronger.

It's amazing. He should be dead.

- (Price) He must be fit.
- Let me see the X-rays. Right leg.

Left leg.

Hello, you've had an accident.

Don't worry, just lie back.

- We'll fix you up.
- Don't give me anaesthetic, doc.
- I can't bear the stuff.
- We'll see things are all right.

Relax.

Now breathe... quite naturally.

What's the extent of his injury?

Right leg's practically severed, left leg's crushed.

Two ribs broken.

Minor facial injuries.

We have to work fast.
He's lost a lot of blood.
I don't think we've got too much time.
I got here as fast as I could.
- What about his mother?
- I rang her.
- She'll be here tomorrow.
- Helluva mess.
A fellow like him
either flies that way or not at all.
- Oh, sister, what's happening?
- He's in theatre.
- How is he?
- They're amputating his right leg.
What a helluva thing to happen
to a man like Douglas.
- Sister, Mr Bader's mother's here.
- Show her into the waiting room.
All right, nurse,
you can take the dressings off now.
What am I doing here?
Oh, you're awake, are you?
- Of course I am. Where am I?
- In hospital.
- You had an accident.
- Accident?
- You crashed in an aeroplane.
- Bloody silly thing to do.
This is Mr Joyce.
He operated on you.
What did I do? Break a leg?
(Joyce) You broke both of them.
I suppose that sort of thing happens
in an aeroplane crash.
I'm sorry, old chap,
we had to take off the right leg.
- I hope I haven't been a nuisance.
- (Nurse) Ready, sister.
We'd better see
how the other leg's getting along.
This might hurt a little.
I can't remember anything.
Crashed in an aeroplane.
I broke both my legs.

Ahh!

There, the dressing's off.

Right... see you later, old chap.

All right, nurse, you can re-dress the leg.

Well, sir?

I'd better have a word
with the mother, I suppose.

She's in here.

This is Mr Joyce, the surgeon.

I'm Bader's uncle. This is his mother.

How do you do? Your son came through
the first operation very well.

The first operation?

He needs another.

The other leg's infected.

I'm sorry... but I must have
your authority to amputate.

Oh, no!

No! (sobs)

What's the alternative?

There is no alternative if he's to live.

But he can't lose both legs, not both!

I think I can save the other
below the knee.

Couldn't we wait a little while?

- 'Fraid not.

- It's his only chance, my dear.

If you do it... are you sure
you'll be able to save him?

I can't be sure, he's very ill,
but I would like to try.

Very well.

Now, if you'll excuse me.

Give him my love.

Yes, I will.

Mr Joyce will do everything possible.

I'm so afraid that Douglas
will hate me for ever...

...but I couldn't let him die.

- Of course not.

(Sanderson) Knowing the danger...

...Joyce did the second amputation
at top speed...

...and they wheeled Bader

back to his room.
Every ten minutes, day and night...
...they took his pulse.
It was there, but only just.
Douglas was like a man hanging on
the edge of a precipice by his fingertips.
Would he have the strength
when the anaesthetic wore off...
...to face the terrible weight of pain
that would fall on him?
Can't we give him more morphia?
He's had as much as we dare give.
It seems to have no effect.
(Douglas groans)
He lay there... fighting...
...fighting...
...for two days and two nights...
...but there was no relief
and no defence...
...until his body could stand no more.
Then came the morning
when the pain had left him.
He felt warm and peaceful.
He was, in fact...
...slipping away from life.
- (nurses laughing)
- Shh! There's a boy dying!
Dying?
We'll see.
In that moment, the pain started again.
- Send Mrs Williams home.
- Yes, sir.
- How's Bader today?
- I think he's a little better.
- He's still in terrible pain.
- Let's take a look at him.
The morphia seems
to be having some effect.
I think he'll pull through.
Some of the nurses
are in quite a state about him.
Well, you know young nurses...
...and he is good-looking.
I'll see they keep their minds

on their work.
There's life in the patient yet.
How's your pulse rate, sister?
(Sanderson) Hour after hour,
for four endless days...
...the devoted nurses fought for his life...
...and, in the end, they won.
I came as soon as I could, sir.
How is he?
You can see him today.
He's made a remarkable recovery.
What sort of chap is he?
What are his interests?
Flying...
...and sport.
I was afraid of that.
He's always been on top in those things.
He's got a sort of dynamo inside
makes him show off.
He won't accept second best.
- He's going to have to accept it.
- To Douglas, that would mean failure.
He always has to prove himself...
otherwise he feels out of it.
How will he take it when
he finds out he's lost both legs?
You mean he doesn't know?
No, we haven't decided on
how best to tell him.
It's important
he shouldn't find out by accident.
Would you like me to tell him?
Thank you. That's why I asked you
to come and see me.
There's no-one with him at the moment.
Hello, John.
Hello, Douglas.
You look fine.
The boys all send their best wishes.
Thanks, old boy.
Nice of you to come and see me.
Yes, isn't it?
As a matter of fact,
I've come to say goodbye.

What?

I've been posted to the Middle East.

Phworr.

Lucky devil.

I wish I was going with you.

(gasps)

Giving you some trouble?

It's the left one.

Hurts like hell.

It's bound to hurt at first, I expect.

Wish they'd cut it off like they did
the right one. That doesn't hurt at all.

Would you really like them to cut it off?

I don't give a damn what they do
as long as they stop it hurting.

As a matter of fact, Douglas...

...they have taken it off.

Why does it hurt so much, then?

You had to know sometime.

Yes, I suppose so.

Thanks for telling me, John.

It's a bit difficult to...

(sobs)

It certainly does hurt.

I'll try to come and see you
tomorrow, Douglas.

- Well?

- Well, I told him.

- How did he take it?

- I think it hit him pretty hard.

- I'll go and see him.

- I must get back.

- Thanks for doing a difficult job.

- (Both) Bye.

I gather you've done
quite a job on me, sir.

Sorry, old chap.

It's a case for artificial legs.

They're very good these days
so don't worry too much.

That's all right, sir, I'm not worried.

I'll get some longer legs.

I've always wanted to be taller.

Brace!

Brace!

Brace!

Come on, look lively!

- Sally'll be here soon.
- Why all the excitement?
- I'm keen on her.
- You hardly know her!

What? When I met her,

I drove her home 40 miles.

We had punctures every other mile!

- She's keen about me.
- Is she?

She likes smoothing your fevered brow,
but it won't last.

- You old cynic.
- I'm practical.

You don't want to marry her?

If I marry, it'll have to be someone
I met the way I am now.

It's that or no-one.

Blazes, if no-one'll have me,
I'll marry you!

I wouldn't ever marry you!

You'd be killed in the rush!

- Anyone home?
- Harry Day!

Don and Tommy! Come on in!

This is a surprise!

- Well, well...
- Some goodies.

Tinned pears, my favourite! You know

Brace, the only woman in my life.

- Sally!
- How are we today?
- Fine, thanks.
- Are we having a party?

It's not a bad idea.

Don, put the gramophone on.

Tea for five!

- What do you think this is? A cafe?
- Yes, look sharp.

Sally, may I have the pleasure
of this dance?

Please do.

(# jazz)

Waltz me round the garden, Harry.

- I haven't had my exercise today.

- All right, I'll push you around.

They're holding a Court of Enquiry.

- Yes, they'll come to see you.

- They'll know it was my fault.

Don't worry about it.

You'd think you'd been run over

by the Air Marshal's daughter!

- Will they let me stay in?

- They'll just ground you.

Probably promote you into a staff job.

I couldn't stand that, Harry.

Tied to a desk all day. I'd rather die.

Now, Douglas...

I've got to fly again, old boy,

I've simply got to!

All right, don't get excited.

Who says you won't fly?

Look at Freddie West.

He lost a leg in the last war.

He flew solo yesterday.

You wait till I get my tin legs.

I'll show you.

Home, James.

We'll see.

No, I'm all right. Leave me alone.

- You're being obstinate.

- Please, Brace.

I've got to do it by myself.

How long have you been out here?

Only about half an hour.

I didn't hurt myself.

Really, you're worse than a baby.

- How many times did you fall?

- About six.

- Serves you right for rushing.

- It's this blasted peg leg.

- It hurts like blazes.

- I'll have a look at it inside.

You can't expect it to be perfect

in three days. Be patient.

Now, will you be warm enough?

The wind is cold.

I'm all right.

We'll put the rug round you.

I've got some news for you.

I've had all the news I want.

I've heard from Sally.

What's the matter?

- If you must know, she's left me.

- What?

She doesn't say so, but her mother's taken her to South Africa.

- For a holiday?

- For heaven's sake, be your age!

She's not going to have her daughter mixed up with a cripple...

...and she's right.

- You're better off without her.

- Thank you.

Read about Johnson?

Crashed-killed outright, lucky devil.

- Don't you dare say that!

- He is lucky!

I'd rather be dead than like this.

Listen to me. You're alive and you're going to stay alive.

You can see, you can hear, you can talk.

Before long, you're going to be able to walk.

Know something? A lot of people have spent a great deal of time on you.

They've worked for you, fought for you and prayed for you.

And all you can say is that you wish you were dead.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Where's that... that pamphlet?

You don't think they're shooting a line, do you, Brace?

You really can walk on their tin legs?

Yes, of course.

Now, would you like to hear my news?

The Court of Enquiry have recommended that no disciplinary action be taken.

- What?

- Flight Lt Day rang and told me.
- Said to tell you he's delighted.
- (whistles)
- I'm delighted, too.
- So they can't kick me out.

No.

If I'm still in the Air Force,
they can't stop me flying!
I'd like to see them try!

Thanks, Brace.

I won't let you down again, I promise.

I'll be leaving here soon.

I shall miss you.

Will you?

- Come on, twice round the garden!
- I've got work to do.
- I can't spend my time pushing you.
- Never mind your work, let's go.

Mr Bader'll be back in a minute.

He's just gone for a walk.

Cor blimey!

That's the point, isn't it?

- I think it's time we turned back.
- Yep.

I don't know what the devil

I'll do without you, Brace.

The same as ever -

exactly what you want to do.

- The car is here.
- Well... just a moment.

I shan't get another chance to say this.

You don't have to.

- You saved my life. You know that?
- Nonsense.

Yes, you did. The others cut me up,
but you put me together again.

Well, let's say

we fought the battle together.

And we won it, didn't we?

Yes, we did.

Dear Brace.

I've another patient coming in
this afternoon.

Your room is in a dreadful state.

Another patient? Lucky man.

Come along.

Yeah.

Careful of those gramophone records.

Yes, ma'am, don't you worry.

Here they come, sister.

Come along,

you're keeping the RAF waiting.

- Do 'em good! What about my records?

- All aboard, sir.

Ah, we're just in time. Don't worry, Bader,
this is purely a social visit.

We had to come and say goodbye.

How sweet of you, Sister Thornhill.

I'll be back soon on my tin legs.

- We'll have a party.

- Lovely.

- Come on, it's time you were off.

- Right. Well...

Goodbye, doc, and thank you
for everything you've done.

You're going into the outside world.

You've got what it takes. Goodbye.

- Good luck to you.

- Thanks.

Well, sister, it's a good job
I can't shake hands.

- Goodbye.

- Thank you.

Now you, sister.

- Goodbye, and take care of yourself.

- Goodbye and thank you.

Now you, nurse, your turn next.

- Oh, permission to carry on, sister?

- (laughs)

Nurse Nichols. Come on, don't be shy.

I say, what a day this is!

Brace.

Goodbye, Brace.

Good luck.

Thank you, Corporal. All set for take-off?

- Yessir.

- Good.

Right... Goodbye, ladies. Don't let

any of the other patients kiss you!

(All) Goodbye!

(Drill Corporal)

Squad will retire. Left... turn!

Oh, bust again!

- 52,000.02. Like a hand, Douglas?

- With you two sharks? No!

- (drill shouted outside)

- Shut the window.

Anybody'd think we were in the army.

How about a spin in your Bentley, Peely?

I'm bored.

We wouldn't make one good driver!

- It's against regulations.

- Good! If you're windy, I'll drive.

Gentlemen,

you've found yourselves a chauffeur.

- Got my arm out!

- Hope Matron doesn't see us.

- We won't have a leg to stand on!

- Speak for yourself!

Open up a bit,

we're not going to a funeral! Let me!

If I'm to have my arm broken again,

I'd rather a surgeon did it.

I can use my peg leg on the clutch
and the hand throttle.

- What do you think, Vic?

- Well, a few more broken bones...

All right.

That's fine, Douglas,

but how are you going to stop?

Let's worry about that

when the time comes. Hang on!

(revs up engine)

I'm getting the hang of it!

- Yes, but how will you stop?

- Stop? You can't have everything!

Look out!

What's your name, mate? Death?

- I missed him!

- Go on doing that, will you?

- Stand by for take-off!

- Contact.

Chocks away! (whistles)

(whistles cheerfully)

- Ah, tea!

- Tea? What for? I'm enjoying myself.

- You may be, we're not.

- Yes, pull over.

- Well, we made it.

- Let's have my prop.

Thanks.

Where are we going? There?

Poor dear.

I bet you could do with a cuppa!

- Three teas.

- Cream or plain?

Cream. Not a conversationalist,
but very nice.

- I wonder if there are any more like her.

- Aye-aye!

Hey, what sort of place is this?

- I thought you were off.

- I'll just serve those three boys.

- (laughs) Want any help?

- No, thanks, I can manage.

I was a bit worried about Paddy.

I noticed we were getting too close
for comfort, so Danny...

- You seem to have crashed.

- It's a habit.

If you take your plane off the table...

I'm so sorry.

Do you mind if I leave the bill?

I'm going off now.

You ought to do that, too,

then we'll both have good luck.

- I wonder if she's got a sister.

- No, a brother, six-foot-four(!)

- She's left her pencil.

- I'll take it.

- He doesn't miss a trick!

- Swindler!

- Pour the tea, be back in a sec.

- Will you be mum? No, perhaps not.

You forgot your pencil.

Oh, thank you.

It's a pleasure.

How did you get on, Douglas?

I'm going to ask that girl out one day.

- No time like the present.

- Go on, Douglas.

Oh, I don't know,

I don't suppose she'd want to...

You just wait till I find my feet.

(Desoutter) Bring the other leg.

Get this foot firmly on the ground.

Let's get moving, boys,

I'm going to a dance.

Try and stand on this one.

Can I have the crutches, please?

Thank you.

Feels good.

Much better than the peg leg.

Right, we'll try a step, shall we?

Right, here goes.

Lift your leg a little higher

to keep your toe clear.

Right.

- How's that?

- Well done.

Now let's have a shot at the right leg.

Thank you.

Take those.

- All right, Walker, you'd better slip it on.

- Very good, sir.

I didn't expect all this harness,

Mr Desoutter.

You'll feel a bit like a parcel,

but your right stump's weak...

...after doing nothing for six months.

You need all the support you can get.

- That's it. Pass those crutches.

- Try standing without them.

All right.

Good. Now let's have a go, shall we?

Good Lord, this is impossible!

That's what they all say the first time.

I thought I'd walk out tonight,

be running about in a fortnight.

I think you ought to face it,

you'll never walk again without a stick.
I'll never walk with one!
No-one with your disability has...
- What's that got to do with it?
- All right.
Let's try a step or two.
What do I do? It's impossible!
Try kicking the right stump forward
as if you were cracking a whip.
Very good.
Come on.
My God, I can't move!
Don't panic. You've no toe or ankle muscles
to spring you forward.
You must learn to do without them.
Pull me over this damn leg.
Pull me again, for God's sake.
Now let's turn.
Push harder on my right side.
Again.
You'd better have a rest now, sir.
- I'll never get it.
- Yes, you will.
It'll take time.
See what six months will do.
Six months?
You know... you'd find a stick very useful.
No stick, not me, never.
- Come on, let's have another go.
- Take shorter steps, it's easier.
A bit better.
Shorter steps seem to be the secret.
Taking half an inch off the right leg
might make it easier.
- How long will it take?
- Half an hour.
I've got to see a girl in a few days.
I want to be walking by then.
All right, we'll make it 20 minutes.
- Haven't you done enough, sir?
- Good idea, that half inch off.
That'll do for today.
You'd better be getting back.
I'm not going home

until I can walk on my own.
All right, if you think you can.
Now let me go.
Now stand back, all of you.
I want to do this on my own.
You know what you can do
with your damn sticks!
- You did tremendously well.
- Can I take them?
You'd better come here to practise.
They're expecting me at Uxbridge
on my own two feet.
You'll get your legs soon enough.
Come on, let's give him a cup of tea.
(Thelma squeals and laughs)
- Wasn't that awful!
- I must go, I'm terribly late.
See you on Thursday. Bye-bye.
- Don't forget your coat.
- Bye.
Bye.
- Hello.
- Hello. Is that your boyfriend?
- No, my cousin.
- Ahh!
Um... do you ever go out in the evenings?
- Well, I do sometimes.
- Oh.
How would you like
to come out with me one night?
I don't know you.
I don't know you, but I'll take a chance.
I'm getting new legs -
I must have somebody to dance with.
- I don't know your name.
- Douglas Bader.
- I'm Thelma Edwards.
- Join me?
- I don't...
- There's nobody about.
All right.
- Will you take tea?
- Thank you.
Cream or plain?

You're going to be about an inch shorter.
My new girlfriend's not very big.
If you get a change of heart, come back.
We'll make you taller!
It's still difficult, but it's easier
than it was three weeks ago.
You're making wonderful progress.
Now away you go, boys,
let's have another go on my own.
Done it!
How the devil do I turn?
It's something you have to practise.
It's the hardest one of all.
We'll see about that.
There you are, they're all yours.
You've found your feet again.
It's a bit soon to let you have 'em
but you'll only complain if I don't.
- Shall I wrap them for you?
- No! I'm walking out on 'em!
Ah-ah.
It not only looks good, it feels good.
You look fine.
Mr Walker, put that back in the cupboard!
Now, what about a stick?
No, I'll go on the way I've started.
Don't expect too much.
You've done darn well.
- Thanks for putting up with me.
- Car's waiting.
Goodbye, sir.
- Goodbye, Mr Walker.
- Good luck, sir.
Mr Tullitt.
- Come back if you have any trouble.
- I will.
Goodbye.
Thank you.
Hello, Douglas! Let's give you a hand.
- I can manage!
- Don't be so touchy.
Sorry, Peely,
I've got to work this out for myself.
Long John Silver's

got his undercarriage back!

(babble of voices)

- How goes it, Douglas?

- I've got 'em.

- I look normal if I don't move!

- Do a circuit, Douglas.

Well, I'm flaked out,

I've just climbed the stairs.

Bet you five shillings

you don't make your own bed.

You're on!

- Hold those, Peely.

- Come on!

- Come on, Douglas, you can make it.

- (shouts of encouragement)

I'll take the boy with the tin legs!

- Slow.

- That's it, boy, you'll make it.

- Don't weaken, Dougie, come on!

- Watch it.

- Yes, steady.

- I get my leg next week.

There goes my five bob.

- Come on, try, man, try!

- Dougie's coming up.

(cheering)

You can go and pick up that five bob!

- You all right, sir?

- My stumps hurt like the devil.

- I must've rubbed the skin off.

- You're overdoing it.

If they're going to chafe,

how can I walk very far?

I'll put some sticking plaster

on the stumps.

- Good idea. Then I'll try again.

- That wasn't what I meant.

Never mind that, I'm telling you

what I want. Get that plaster.

- Where's your boyfriend these days?

- What boyfriend?

- The boy who had the accident.

- I hardly know him.

- I thought he asked you out.

- That was some time ago.

Maybe he can't get around much.

(# jazz on gramophone)

Oh, blast!

- Are you all right?

- That's enough, Douglas!

- You've been at it all afternoon.

- Let's sit down.

Let me go, boys,

I've got to get the hang of it.

Don't bust yourself, she'll wait.

I can't go and see the girl like this.

(Douglas whistles cheerfully)

Look, boys, no hands!

- Is this the big day?

- It is.

Change your socks.

It's getting noticeable.

- I've had my shoes on for two weeks.

- Send your legs to the laundry!

- John, what news of the leg?

- It'll be stiff for good.

There you are, what did I tell you?

Have it off, old boy, have it off!

Ah, here we go.

- All ready for you, sir.

- Good.

Be careful. They can't put a tin head
on you. Hang onto the wooden one!

- Wish me luck.

- Give her my love.

Fat chance of that!

- Blimey, he'll take off in a minute.

- That's one thing he'll never do.

Not any more.

Hello.

I'll bring it straight away, madam.

- We've had our tea.

- Oh, I'm sorry.

- You look wonderful.

- I was going to say that about you.

Thank you.

(Both) I...

I know a wonderful place for dinner.

Like to come out and celebrate?

Celebrate? Oh...

I'd love to.

- When do you finish?

- 6 o'clock.

- I'll pick you up.

- Thank you.

All right you talking about dinner,

I haven't had my tea yet.

She won't be long.

Leave a good tip.

(instrumental)

"Love Is The Sweetest Thing"

Then I went to Cranwell, learned to fly.

Nothing much happened till I met you.

Well, one or two things.

- We must do this again. In London?

- Yes, I'd like to.

I won't be here much longer

now I'm more mobile.

- I'm going to Kenley next week.

- 23 Squadron.

- How did you know?

- My father was a Wing Commander.

I've got three cousins in the Air Force.

- I know more about you than you think.

- I shall have to be more careful.

- Why didn't you say?

- You didn't give me a chance.

What are you doing at that restaurant?

Some friends run it, I was helping.

I'm leaving on Friday.

I'm rather sorry, it's been great fun.

Mightn't going back to Kenley

depress you?

Why should it?

I'm going to stay in the RAF and fly.

- Haven't you had enough of flying?

- No fear!

I've had my crash now.

Anyway, I've got no more legs to lose!

Good for you.

(instrumental) # "Goodnight, Sweetheart"

- Like to dance?

- Yes, of course, if you'd like to.

Why not?

- I didn't know you could dance.

- Nor me yet.

If I can walk, I can walk clutching a girl!

If I trip, I'll hang onto you.

We're doing very well.

- Ooh.

- What's the matter?

- You're standing on my foot.

- Oh, I'm sorry!

It's all right.

(# quickstep)

Come on, I can't cope with this.

These new legs are marvellous!

When I was standing on your foot,

I couldn't feel a thing!

I haven't done that for a long time.

- I've really enjoyed myself.

- You've been wonderful company.

That's the nicest thing

anybody's ever said to me.

Thelma... wish me luck at Kenley.

It's important, isn't it, going back?

There's nothing more important!

(knock at door)

Come in.

- Hello, Bates, how are you?

- Nice to see you again, sir.

I bet them all you'd walk in
one of these days, and here you are.

What about my kit?

- It's all here, sir.

- Good. Why's it all so quiet?

- 32 Squadron's away.

- Uh-huh. Hello, Harry!

Hello, old man. Good to have you back.

- I'll unpack your bags later, sir.

- Thank you, Bates.

Take a good look, old boy, the very latest!

Knobbly knees, hair, corns, the lot!

- Splendid.

- (aeroplane flies by)

These always were good boots.

Somebody ought to have 'em re-studded.

I'll want to use this again.

If you pass your medical,
you'll be going for a test.

- I'll pass. There's an Avro here.

- Yes. Hey, wait...

- I'd like to get the feel of it.

- Sorry. Against the rules.

Rules? Written for the obedience of fools
and the guidance of wise men.

- Well, how are you feeling?

- Fine.

- All set?

- All set.

- Blast!

- What's the matter?

Bit of cramp, I think. Both wrists.

Too much office work!

- You'd better take her, Douglas.

- Thanks, Harry! Hang on to your hat!

That was a nice take-off.

Just the same as it always was.

No aerobatics, now.

- What's that?

- I said, no aerobatics!

I'm sorry, I can't hear!

Sorry you've had to wait so long, sir.

Shouldn't be long now.

It'll be worth waiting for.

- How was Central Flying School?

- I enjoyed it.

- Heard anything about my medical?

- The Wing Commander knows.

Hope I go to my old squadron.

Mr Bader, Wing Commander Hargreaves
will see you now.

Good luck, sir.

- Afternoon, Bader.

- Afternoon, sir.

Sit down.

Sorry we kept you waiting so long.

Was my report from Central Flying School
satisfactory?

Your instructor said

he couldn't teach you about flying.
In fact, you taught him a thing or two.
Unfortunately,
we can't pass you fit for flying.
Nothing in King's Regulations
covers your case.
But I was sent to the Central Flying
School to see if I could fly!
- It's not my decision.
- They expected me to fail.
I'm sorry it's turned out like this.
You mean I'm grounded for good?
I'm afraid so.
- There must be some alternative.
- You can go on the retired list.
Leave on the grounds of ill health.
- Sell bootlaces on the street(?)
- You'd have your retired pay...
...and no doubt a total disability pension.
Yes, that just about says it all.
You don't have to make up your mind now.
Take your time. After all...
Yessir, thank you.
They failed me.
- Well, it's all over.
- Why, what happened?
The book doesn't say anything
about people like me flying, that's all.
- Does that mean no more flying?
- Yes.
You'll still have a career in the Service.
Thelma, I won't take a ground job.
If I can't fly, I'll leave.
There are other things besides flying.
For instance?
Us.
I'm not much of a proposition.
No money, no job, no legs.
- We'll make out.
- We'll have a darn good try!
(bugler plays)
- Goodbye, sir.
- Goodbye, Bates.
Good luck.

Hope you find the job you're looking for.

- (plane flies overhead)

- Yes... thanks.

- Dear sir...

- You haven't given me the address.

What? Oh... er... Melbourne office.

Dear sir...

...um...

No smoking, Mr Bader.

Oh.

Dear sir, with regard to your...

Delete that.

Bader, this letter you wrote earlier
is a little abrupt.

- Sorry, what's the matter?

- It's like a telegram.

Wrap it up a bit -

such as "we would suggest".

"Perhaps you've considered."

I write letters people can understand.

- Get used to different ways here.

- Right.

- Where were we?

- Dear sir.

Reference is made to your...

We beg to point out. That's polite.

We beg to point out that reference
is made to your communication...

(Sanderson) The routine of his new job
made each day seem a month.

He was the prisoner of his legs.

Then he found what he needed

- A new challenge.

- Good shot, Adrian.

- Well done!

- You're a good 20 yards up on me.

- Walk round with us, Douglas?

We'll stay here and potter around.

Leave me a club and a ball.

- Give me a niblick.

- Here, sir.

This one cuts more grass

than my lawn mower!

- Ball, ball!

- Oh, yes.

Ta.

- How's it feel?

- Not bad.

- Can't be all that difficult.

- Oh, do be careful, Douglas!

Now, then, let's see about this.

Oh, Douglas! (laughs)

I kept my head down, anyway!

Don't worry, I'm not hurt.

The going's pretty soft.

All right, stand back a bit.

- I'm all right, I'm all right!

- Let's go and have some tea.

It's just a question of balance.

Nothing to it. Get back a bit.

Now, keep still, you little devil, keep still.

Ahhh... I moved it!

Did you see that, darling?

Only five yards, but I moved it!

- Well done, darling.

- Fetch it, will you?

Now, then, let's have another go.

Pop it down there. Stand back. Bit more.

Tee it up a bit. You're allowed to

on the tees, anyway. Back a bit.

Ahh...!

I hit it!

Slap bang in the middle of the club!

- I hope you're satisfied!

- Not by a long chalk!

- You won't be beaten, will you?

- Not by a ruddy golf ball!

No, Douglas, come and sit down,

have a rest.

All right.

You know, darling,

this is a game I could play...

...and on equal terms, too.

No favours.

- I like you looking after me.

- Somebody has to.

- You have to be fit for work.

- Why worry for 200 a year?

Less 2 for last night
and 5 last weekend.
That leaves 193 -
more than most people get.
I don't suppose
they drink champagne, though.
Your trouble is you've got a conscience.
- Yes, I'm sorry.
- I don't mind.
I wouldn't change you.
Thelma, we ought
to think about getting married.
That's what I like about you,
you're so passionate(!)
Well... I'm sorry...
- But what else does one say?
- You could...
I won't be much better off for years
so let's take a chance.
- The most romantic proposal ever(!)
- Good, then that's settled.
Now let's have another whack
at that golf ball.
Sorry, darling, no crossed swords,
no guard of honour.
- It was all so quick I hardly feel married.
- We'll do it in church one day.
I'm happy just as it is.
- You never thought I'd settle down.
- For a pipe and the fireside?
Yes, bung on the old slippers,
it's me for the quiet life!
(Sanderson) Thelma knew that in golf,
as in everything...
...he would drive himself too hard.
But she also knew why.
He might not be flying,
but he was fighting.
He fought 18, sometimes 36,
holes in a day...
...and he beat them.
So life for Douglas Bader
achieved some sort of compromise.
It might've continued but, in 1939...

(air-raid siren)

(air-raid siren continues)

Dead on time. You must be keen.

I'll take you round now.

- Have any trouble?

- He said he'd be delighted to see you.

- Did you put in a good word?

- Of course.

- We're short of aeroplanes.

- So?

- You were careless with them.

- But I've changed.

So have the aeroplanes!

You remember Bader, sir.

Remember you?

I nearly kicked you both

out of Cranwell once.

Good luck, Douglas.

- Hello, sir.

- Nice to see you again.

Good of you to see me so promptly.

I'm always interested in my old boys.

I gather you want a job.

- What sort of job would you like?

- Flying, of course.

Oh... I'm very sorry,

I'm only dealing with ground jobs.

That's no good to me, sir,

I'm a trained pilot.

- In the circumstances...

- Sir, it's difficult...

...but I've got to get back again

and only you can help me!

I must fly!

I beg your pardon, sir,

but... I've got to fly again.

Tell you what I'll do, I'll give you

a note for the medical people.

Excuse me, please. Thank you.

- Mr Blake.

- Hello, sir.

- What is it this time?

- The same. They'll pass me now.

- Not for flying, sir, never.

- We'll see.

We'll get you through the doctor's
as soon as we can.

- They'll never let you fly.

- How are you keeping?

You seem to be 100% fit...

apart from your legs.

- It's not fair to drag them in, sir.

- Why not?

It's like saying a man's fit

apart from a cold...

...when he hasn't got a cold.

Or a Flying Officer's sane

when he has no brain.

- Yessir.

- But legs can't just be ignored.

(whistles to himself)

Have you read this

from Air Vice-Marshal Halahan?

He seems to be on your side.

Yessir.

Let's leave it to the Central Flying
School to assess your capabilities.

If I pass again?

You can shake the moths
out of your old uniform.

- Thank you, sir.

- All the best to you.

Thank you.

Excuse me.

Mr Blake!

- Sir?

- Where can I buy a Spitfire?

Good fun, Douglas. As for your idea,
the attack formation, I see your point.

- Why don't we all do it?

- Hold your horses.

- It's not in the book.

- Blast the book!

Nobody knows if it's right or wrong.

The chaps in the last war did.

Mark my words,

their tactics will be successful again.

- Maybe you're right.

- I know I am!

Let's go have some breakfast.

- You can soon test your theories.

- Why?

Tubby wants you as a Flight Commander.

- But what about the AOC?

- He's agreed.

What!

- I can still stay at Duxford?!

- Uh-huh.

- (men shout)

- What's got into the boys?

- Paddy, what's happening?

- It's on, sir!

Jerry's invaded France

and the Low Countries.

Good. Now we can really get at 'em.

(knock at door)

- Sir... sir.

- Mm?

There's a flap on, sir.

Squadron's taking off at 4.

- What time is it?

- 3 o'clock, sir.

- Get your legs on!

- What's up?

We're flying to Dunkirk-an evacuation.

Evacuation? Phew!

This could be it.

Good luck, Douglas.

Good luck, chum.

- Send in a cup of tea!

- Right.

"Enemy aircraft, enemy aircraft ahead."

(rapid gunfire)

(rapid gunfire)

- Any luck, Dave?

- No. How about you, Douglas?

Got a One-0-Nine south of Dunkirk,
smashed his tail.

- Cut it off like a knife!

- I saw. You fixed him!

- Everyone back?

- The CO of 19 Squadron's missing.

- Johnny Sanderson?
- I saw a Spitfire go down in smoke.
- What happened?
- I couldn't see how it finished.
Poor old John.
He'll turn up in a day or two,
having hopped a boat from Dunkirk!
Got a good squirt at a One-0-Nine,
bits flew off-a "probable".
I've been hearing of your work
as a Flight Commander...
...so I'm giving you a Squadron - 242.
Yessir. Thank you, sir.
You don't seem pleased. What's up?
Sir, I broke a Spitfire last night,
overshot the landing.
- You won't have heard about it yet.
- You're lucky.
Your new squadron has Hurricanes.
Your pilots are mostly Canadians.
They've had a rough time in France.
They're fed up with authority.
They want good leadership.
- You might be the man.
- I understand, sir. I'll do my best.
Well, good luck.
We'll need every squadron we've got.
The Luftwaffe's gathering
across the Channel.
Hey, you chaps, come on.
- Brace yourselves. New CO's here.
- Arrived, has he?
- Be here at any moment.
- What's he like?
Brace yourselves. He's got no legs.
- Whaddaya mean?!
- He's got a couple of tin ones.
Great, now we carry a passenger
in the driver's seat.
Who's in charge here?
Who's the senior man?
Is anyone in charge?
I guess I am.
What's your name?

Turner.

Turner what?!

Sir.

Start her up.

Come on, come on, jump to it!

Not bad... not bad at all.

Peter, I want to see all pilots
in my office in an hour.

Yessir.

It's not smart to walk around
looking like mechanics!

A good squadron is a smart squadron...

...and I want this to be a good squadron.

You're the scruffiest lot I've ever seen.

And no more sweaters
and flying boots in the mess.

When you're not flying,
you'll wear shoes, shirts and ties. Clear?

Most of us haven't got shoes,
shirts and ties.

- Why?

- We lost them in France.

That's not all.

Half our boys were casualties.

We scrounged food
and slept under the aircraft.

- We were shunted all over.

- We had to search for petrol to take off.

We got bust up,
made our own way back to England.

And then they sent us up here.

- We're no better off.

- We should've stayed in France.

- (murmurs of agreement)

- All right.

I'm sorry. I apologise for my remarks.

Go to Norwich,
order what you want from the tailor's.

I'll guarantee the bill is paid.

We've also been trying to get tools
for the aircraft. But nothing happens.

- You haven't got any?

- Crowley-Milling has a penknife.

We'll see about that.

- Mr West, what's our equipment state?
- 18 Hurricanes.
- But we have no tools?
- Lost in France.
- Put in for more?
- Yes, through the usual channels.
- Well?
- Channels seem to be clogged, sir.

Oh, are they?

Well, we'll ruddy well unclog 'em.

Listen, it's in Section 2, Sub-clause 4.

It states that airmen only get one issue.

Mugs, one, knives, one...

- I want the tools for 242 Squadron.
- I can't produce them on demand.
- What's the hold-up?
- The paperwork...

To blazes with your paperwork!

I want that stuff fast!

The book says I must wait
three months before I...

Fine! We'll ask Goering
not to invade for three months!

Sir...!

I want those tools
and I want them quick!

- Thomas, been working all night?
- Yessir.
- Had breakfast?
- Yes, sir.

Good show.

Ah, just on my way to find you, sir.

The boys are fit, but we've no tools
so I've sent this signal to Group.

"242 operational as regards pilots,
but non-operational...

...as regards equipment."

What?

- You should've sent it to me first.
- I'll take any kicks coming, sir.
- You can't do this!
- I've done it.
- There'll be a row at Group.
- And at Fighter Command.

Your squadron will either get
new equipment or a new CO.
I don't know which.
Better be available for the C-in-C.
Yessir. I'll be in my office.
Same old trouble-fingers.
Seriously, I think the book's wrong
about fighter tactics.
Principles that paid off in the last war
are still good today.
The chap who's got the height
controls the battle...
...especially if he comes out
of the sun and the...
- Fighter Command HQ on the phone.
- Spares and tools.
This is it.
Bader.
Squadron Leader Edwards.
What's the meaning of this signal?
This squadron is out of action
until I get some tools.
- You can operate with what you've got.
- I've told you what I want.
Until I get it, this squadron
remains non-operational.
You don't seem to care,
but this will bring you a lot of trouble.
- The Commander-in-Chief's furious.
- "Oh, clot!"
Well, that's telling 'em, skipper.
Come on, I'll buy you a beer.
Squadron Leader Bader...
...the Commander-in-Chief
will see you now, sir.
What is all this about equipment
and your signal?
I've done all I could
to get my spares and tools.
If the Germans attack, my Squadron
would soon be unable to fly.
I see.
And those remarks on the telephone
to Squadron Leader Edwards.

Did you think that would help?

It was an argument between
officers of equal rank.

He tried to shake me
by saying you'd be furious.

He said I was furious?

I won't have officers taking my name
in vain or predicting my emotions.

- I'll see Edwards later.

- Very good, sir.

You must not short-circuit
the usual channels, Bader.

No, sir.

What exactly do you want?

- Satisfied, Mr West?

- I can service all the planes, sir.

Never call it a plane. It's an aeroplane.

Sorry, sir, aeroplane.

Inform Group and Fighter Command -
242 Squadron fully operational.

Turner, round up the boys.

Take-off, 30 minutes, battle practice.

Some passenger!

Legs or no legs, I've never seen
such a fireball. Come on, Crow.

(All) # Do you know the muffin man,
do you know the muffin man

Who lives down Drury Lane? Hey!

- # Yes, I know the muffin man...

- (shouts of encouragement)

- Watch it! He made it!

- (raucous shouts)

(All) # Do you know the muffin man,
do you know the muffin man

Do you know the muffin man

who lives down Drury Lane? Hey!

Yes, I know the muffin man...

(song drowned out by laughter)

(shouts of encouragement)

- Well, what do you think of 'em?

- They're eating out of your hand.

At least they're not biting it now.

Good bunch, coming along nicely.

You're longing for more fighting, aren't you?

Hey, fellas, shut up! Shut up!
(Churchill) "The Battle of Britain
is about to begin."
"Upon this battle depends the survival
of Christian civilisation."
"The whole fury and might
of the enemy...
...must very soon be turned on us."
"Hitler knows that he will have to break us
in this island or lose the war."
"If we can stand up to him,
all Europe may be free."
"But if we fail...
...then the whole world,
including the United States...
...including all that we have known
and cared for...
...will sink into the abyss
of a new dark age."
"Let us therefore brace ourselves
to our duty...
...so bear ourselves...
...that if the British Empire
and its Commonwealth...
...lasts for a thousand years...
...men will still say...
...this was their finest hour."
(Radio) "Here is the 1 o'clock news.
This is John Snagge reading it."
"At 11 o'clock this morning, enemy bombers
attacked a convoy in the English Channel...
...and three seaport towns
on the South Coast."
"Some damage was done to the ports
and there were some casualties."
"Five enemy aircraft were shot down,
two of our aircraft are missing..."
Controller, quickly.
Turn that damn thing off!
(phone rings)
Woodhall.
Woody, Douglas Bader here.
Has the balloon gone up?
Looks like it, Douglas.

What are we waiting for?
When do we go?
Hold your horses. I can't bring
you chaps in until they reach our area.
The south needs every fighter it can get!
If we go there,
Jerry will attack the Midlands.
Are we supposed to do nothing?!
Just take it easy,
the war won't finish overnight.
Hello, Mrs Richards, how are you?
Nice to see you.
Keep an eye on John, one of our
new WAAFs seems keen about him.
Well, sir, seems to have started.
Yes. This party might be the last
for some time.
I agree with you, sir. Excuse me.
Cheer up, Dicky boy! Why so gloomy?
Stan, keep an eye on him.
- Hello, darling.
- I didn't know if you'd be here.
Johnny Sanderson's mother rang.
He's safe, a prisoner.
I knew it! Thank God.
Poor John. Won't be long before
he escapes! I beg your pardon.
- Come on in.
- Squadron Leader Bader, sir?
We're posted to you, sir. I'm Jones.
- How do you do?
- This is Pilot Officer Nicholson.
- How do you do, sir?
- Stan, two more for us!
Get 'em a drink. See you later.
Come on, I'll buy you a drink.
Douglas, they look so young.
They'll be all right. I'll look after them.
Who'll look after you? You're not immortal.
I've an engine in front of me, armour plate
behind, and tin legs underneath.
How the devil can they get me?
(engine whines)
(explosions)

(phone rings)
242 Squadron.
Clothing parade, 1530.
Uh-huh, here it comes.
They'll be asking for reinforcements
down south any moment.
(phone buzzes)
Operations.
Yessir!
(phone rings)
- Squadron, scramble!
- (cheering)
This is Laycock Red Leader.
Hello, Steersman. Am airborne. Over.
Hello, Laycock, Steersman answering.
Vector one-nine-zero buster.
70-plus bandits approaching North Weald.
It's about time, Woody! Over.
Red Leader,
bandits should be in your area now.
Woody, can't see any planes hereabouts.
Over.
Hello. Bandits should be close to you.
Patrol North Weald.
That's no good to me.
Turning west, climbing up sun. Over.
I hope you're right, Douglas.
We're sticking our necks out.
Enemy aircraft, 10 o'clock level.
Green Section, take on the top lot.
Go through the middle of 'em!
Achtung!
(rapid gunfire)
- "Six bandits behind us!"
- (rapid gunfire)
(rapid gunfire)
Watch out!
(rapid gunfire)
"Six bandits behind us!"
"Look out, he's right on top of you!"
(rapid gunfire)
"Crow, one's on your tail, break right!"
"I can see him in the mirror."
- Put me down for two. Definite.

- Right.
- What's the score?
- 12 confirmed, several probables.
- No bombs dropped.
- No casualties.

Here's Leigh-Mallory, skipper.

- Good show, well done.
- Wish we'd had more aircraft, sir.
- One squadron not enough for you?
- With three times the number...
- ...we'd have shot down three times as many-we had height, sun.

How would you have handled, say, three squadrons?

The same as one-get in the best attack position and then attack.

Once the battle starts, it's every man for himself and that's that. I'd rather have started it with 36 aeroplanes than 12.

I agree with you.

It's a good idea. We'll try it.

Woodhall, arrange that 19 and 310 fly with 242.

Yessir.

I'll tell the Squadron Commanders.

Bader will lead with 242, of course.

Try to keep him out of trouble.

- Yessir.

- I'll have a word with the boys.

Mr West!

I've collected a few bullet holes...

...and the cockpit's full of glycol.

- Get it ready in half an hour.
- It'll take two days.
- No! I said half an hour.
- I can't let it fly, sir.
- All right, get it done as soon as possible.
- You caught a bullet hole yourself.

Near miss. Must be getting careless.

- Hi, Woody.

- Well, how was it, Douglas?

Not so good. I had to attack on the climb.

We got bounced by the enemy.

- Somebody got you.
- Should see the other fella!
- Crowley-Milling got him.
- Good.

If we were up there waiting for 'em,
we could fight on our own terms.

With five squadrons,
I could really start something.

The AOC's coming tomorrow.

Tell him. I'll back you.

Good show. Thanks.

(Sanderson) Douglas was soon leading...

...a unique formation of five squadrons.

This became known as the Duxford Wing.

His pilots looked on him as a superman...

...and his breezy confidence in the air
reassured young pilots.

(Woody) "Douglas, Vector 190,
orbit North Weald."

Woody, do me a favour. I'm playing
squash with Peterson in an hour.

Ring him to say I won't be back till later.

I haven't got time, Douglas.

Can't you make time?

Just pick up one of those telephones
in front of you.

For the sake of peace and quiet, I will.

"Now, would you mind
getting on with the war?"

(rapid gunfire)

(Sanderson) By the 12th October...

...Hitler had postponed his invasion
until spring.

Hitler the invincible
had suffered his first defeat.

The Battle of Britain was over.

Well, Douglas,
the Duxford Wing did splendidly.

- What was it? 150 enemy aircraft?
- 152, sir.
- Oh, thank you, Turner.
- You're welcome, sir.
- Like to be a Wing Commander?
- I'd like it very much, sir.

Good.

We want to carry the fight to France.

- We'll build more fighter wings.

- Would I stay here?

- You'd go to Tangmere.

- With my squadron?

No, you'd have three Spitfire squadrons.

- You can't post our CO, sir!

- Why?

We won't work...

Turner, stop poking the AOC
with your pipe.

Oh, sorry, sir.

- Let me get you another drink.

- Thank you.

If I can't take my squadron with me,
I'm not sure I want to go.

- You'll do as you're told.

- Very good, sir.

Dougie.

Welcome to Tangmere.

If I'd known you were here,
I'd have thought twice!

The old man wouldn't let you think once!

Your office.

- Bags of bump?

- Floor to ceiling!

Just in case you thought you'd be
flying all day. See you later.

Thanks, Woody.

Hello, hello, what's all this?

Three bus drivers waiting to sign on, sir.

I must want my head examined!

- (knock at door)

- Come in.

- Who are you?

- Sgt Williams, sir, orderly room.

- What are these?

- Files for your attention, sir.

I see. Now they've had it.

Anything else?

- No, sir.

- Good.

- Let's get on with the war.

- What's the gen?
Looks like a sweep over Rouen...
No, I'm sorry,
you must have the wrong number.
- Hello, dear.
- Oh, darling!
You were so late! I've got some coffee
for you. Come and sit down.
Thank you. I lost three pilots today.
All first-class chaps.
If only I could... (sighs)
I don't know.
Don't start blaming yourself again.
You can't do any more than you do.
You've done more sweeps
than anyone in Fighter Command.
- This can't go on indefinitely.
- Who says?
The AOC for one. Woody spoke to him.
He thinks you should have
a spell off operations.
Why? I'm fit.
I'd like to finish the season.
Sounds like a cricket match!
Why can't you rest?
Because the Wing needs me.
If you're killed,
the Wing'll have to do without you!
Let's go to Scotland for a fortnight.
We'll tour the golf courses.
No.
They're lovely courses,
the best turf in the world.
By the sea.
You'll find them far more difficult
than the English ones.
I'll think about it.
No, this time you're going to do
something about it.
Twice a day I know you're 30,000 feet
over France. You may not all return.
One day, I know it's going to be you.
I'd like a week off. Just a few days
of knowing you'll be home for dinner.

It would help you, too.

All right, I'll go.

- When, Douglas?

- Next week.

Promise?

Yes.

(knocks on wood) Touch wood.

Darling, it's not that I'm selfish.

A dead hero's no good to the Air Force.

By now, everyone in the Wing

felt Douglas was invulnerable.

It was as if his presence shielded them.

The whole station came to believe

the enemy would never get him.

Dogsbody calling.

Enemy aircraft 10 o'clock below.

OK, chaps, let's get 'em.

(rapid gunfire)

(Radio) "Heinkels behind."

(rapid gunfire)

"One-0-Nines overhead."

(gunfire)

(rapid gunfire)

(explosion)

You haven't said anything.

What do you really think?

You'll have to face it. We should've

heard something by this time.

I'm sorry... I guess he's had it.

(phone rings)

Hello? Yes?

Yes...

Well, where is...

Yes... thank you, Woody.

- Douglas is a prisoner.

- (men cheer)

- You were quite wrong.

- I'm always wrong.

Where? How?

Woody doesn't know, but the Germans

asked for a leg to be dropped.

- We'll do that.

- No, they'll do it on a bombing raid.

In my heart, I knew they'd never get him.

- Ah, bonjour, Lucille.

- Bonjour, Commandant.

Thank you.

What's that?

A step in the right direction -
all you need now is clothes, a rope...

...and you're in luck.

- You have everything you want?

- Not exactly, doctor.

I've got my legs,

but I can't walk around in my nightshirt.

- Why not?

- It's embarrassing for the nurses.

- It's regulations.

- Can't you make an exception for me?

Don't forget I'm invited to tea
at the aerodrome.

I suppose it is all right. I'll have
your clothes brought back to you.

- Thank you, very decent of you.

- Lucille, vous venez avec nous.

Now all we need is a rope.

(clock chimes)

(whimpers)

(clock chimes)

- Got enough sheets?

- Got the lot.

Feel spiteful taking that boy's,
but what else can I do?

- I'll tell him when he wakes up.

- All right, but don't forget.

(boy whimpers in his sleep)

(boy cries out)

If they hear him, I'm sunk.

They'll send a nurse in.

(whimpers)

(footsteps approaching)

Hope it takes the weight.

If you're left hanging, you won't be able
to climb back up or drop down.

That's a chance I'll have to take.

Here goes.

- Good luck.

- Thanks.

What about the curfew?

...the curfew!

- Monsieur De Glacerer?

- Oui.

Vite, va ici.

It will not be easy. We must walk 3km.

Will you be all right?

I'll manage. Let's go.

(distant marching)

(marching recedes)

- All right?

- Yes.

Be careful. It is a long way

and there is a curfew.

I've had it, old boy.

Can you give me a minute or two?

- But it is only the next house.

- I know, Gilbert.

Attention! Boche!

Now take my right arm.

On my back, monsieur.

Entrez vite!

- Merci, madame.

- (Gilbert) Ses jambes ont mal.

Venez-vous asseoir ici-dans ce fauteuil.

Gilbert, il faut partir.

- You are refreshed, monsieur?

- Yes.

Thank you for the ointment for my legs.

I'll be glad when it's dark.

If they find me, you're liable to be shot.

They will not find you.

Tonight my son-in-law

will take you to some more friends.

- Now, drink your coffee.

- Merci, madame.

- Boches!

- Mets-le sous la paille!

Venez!

Vite, monsieur.

(shouting outside)

- Here?

- Oui, oui, oui, oui!

Oui, comme a.

Bon.

(shouting outside)

Bonne chance, monsieur!

Seh' dir das mal hier an!

All right!

Hold it, hold it.

- Lhr mt anstndig geguckt haben.

- Wir haben alles durchsucht.

- You win.

- Wing Commander, we caught you.

You speak English well.

I lived in London, Streatham, for 11 years.

- The people didn't know I was here.

- So I understand. After you.

Where to? Back to hospital?

No, first to headquarters in St Emer.

From there we'll go to Germany.

Die beiden auch.

- They had nothing to do with it!

- It's just routine questioning.

We will take your legs away

until you are in the camp in Germany.

You will not escape again.

(Sanderson) In fact, he escaped twice more during the next eight months.

It was the old story.

If there was a battle to be fought,

Douglas was going to fight it.

Herr Wing Commander, you are leaving the camp. You will go tomorrow.

Again? Where to this time?

We're taking you somewhere more comfortable.

I'd rather live in a pigsty with friends than a palace by myself.

- I won't go.

- The Kommandant says you must.

- Take me to him.

- He'll see you when you move out.

He won't. Not unless he drags me out.

I'm staying here.

Gewehre in Anschlag!

I'm staying here.

- Nicht doch.

- Ruht!

Stand to attention

when you address a German officer!

I don't need a lesson in manners!

Shut up!

- Mu man sich das gefallen lassen...

- Wir besprechen das morgen.

You leave tomorrow.

Kolonne, halt!

Pity Sanderson isn't here. He'd have enjoyed this-like the old days.

Wing Commander Bader, I have instructions to transfer you to another camp.

- No.

- You still refuse to go?

- That's right.

- Then we must use force.

You can always try.

Wing Commander Day...

...as senior British officer, please persuade Bader to obey our orders.

You may have three minutes.

They're within their rights.

Ah, to blazes with 'em!

You've given 'em a lot of headaches.

We're on your side.

But it only needs a spark to start an incident.

This place is too crowded to have bullets flying around.

All right, Harry, you win.

- Goodbye, Douglas.

- Goodbye, old boy.

They'll send for my kit.

See to it for me, will you?

- Good old Douglas!

- (laughter)

He's inspecting the bastards!

(roar of laughter)

Schlu mit dem!

(cheering)

(Sanderson) Douglas was moved from camp to camp...

...until inevitably

he ended up at Colditz Castle.

It was here that he finished
his four years of captivity...

...on a spring morning in 1945.

(cheering)

Hey, they've arrived! The Yanks are here!

We're glad to see you, Colonel.

Any Spitfires in the area?

I'd like to fly before it's all over.

- The British squadrons are up north.

- Oh, thanks. See you in a moment.

Haven't they had enough? Why don't
they forget about it and go home?

Darling, why didn't you tell me
you were coming?!

I came as soon as possible.

I thought it'd be a bit of a surprise.

A bit of a surprise?!

Oh, darling, you look wonderful!

Funny, I was going to say
the same about you!

(Both) I...

I can't think of anything to say
and there's so much.

I know.

It'll all come back gradually.

Yes, there's plenty of time now,
all the time in the world.

Well, the war isn't over yet.

It is for you, my darling.

Douglas, please!

Look, we'll talk about that later, shall we?

God, haven't you had enough?!

I'm still in the Air Force.

The war's still on in the Far East.

I want just one last fling
before it's all over.

Thelma...

...do you know something...

...I'd forgotten

what a very pretty girl you are.

I suppose it won't

make any difference what I say.

You'll still have your last fling.

(cheering)

And so Douglas never had his last fling.

But on September 15th, 1945...

...the fifth anniversary of the greatest day
in the Battle of Britain...

...300 aircraft were to pass
in triumphant procession.

In the forefront...

...12 survivors of the Battle...

...a few of the few
flying again over London...

...the city they had defended.

Their leader was

Group Captain Douglas Bader.

- Sir.

- Hello, Bader.

Wing Commander Crowley-Milling, sir.

Group Captain Turner.

How do you do, sir?

Well, Johnny, I wish you were with us.

We might be tempted to beat up

Buckingham Palace!

- Will you wait here?

- Course.

- Quite a moment, isn't it?

- Yes. Time we were off.

Don't get into any fights this time.

Good luck, darling.

I'll be back in an hour.

- Time to start up, sir.

- See you later.

Thank you, sir.

Let's go.

This is a story of courage.

It has no end

because courage has no end.

It is the story of a man

made famous by war...

...yet for whom the war was only
an episode in a greater victory...

...fought for and won in silence and pain.

The victory of a man's own spirit...

...creating strength and hope
out of disaster.