

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 46

Dearest Grandchild,

In today's letter I want to tell you the story of two pilots from W.W. 2. This information comes from the book "A Higher Call" by Adam Makos.

Ludwig Franz Stigler, the German pilot, was born in Regensburg on August 21st 1915. He came from a devout Catholic family, and to his mother's delight, began training for the priesthood. Facing the reality that this decision would please his mother more than God, he chose instead to pursue a career in aviation. After logging 2,000 hours as a pilot for Lufthansa his government ordered him to fly supplies to Nationalistic forces fighting in Spain's civil war. After this he became an instructor, and later a fighter pilot. He was a celebrated German Ace with 487 combat missions. Among his other achievements, he was privileged to fly the jet powered Me262 which was the fastest airplane in the world at that time.

2nd Lt. Charlie Brown was a farm boy from Weston, West Virginia". He was a B-17 pilot assigned to the 379th Bomber Group stationed at RAF Kimbolton in England. After one combat mission as a co-pilot, he flew his first mission in the left seat on Dec. 20, 1943. He was only 21 years old at the time. After dropping his bombs over Bremen his plane was hit by flak and attacked by German fighters. The Plexiglas nose was smashed and 200 mph sub zero winds filled the front part of the airplane. But this was only a minor problem compared to the other damage they suffered. The tail gunner was killed and much of the stabilizer, rudder, and elevators blown away. One engine wouldn't work at all and two others were reduced to only partial power. Gaping holes were in both wings and the fuselage. The plane was in a spin at over 20,000 feet and the pilot and crew were unconscious from the lack of oxygen.

Miraculously, when they spun through 10,000 feet the death spiral broke into a dive, and the pilot and crew awakened in the oxygen rich atmosphere. The plane was barely flying and in order to get home they had to traverse the German coastal area which was rich with radar and deadly anti-aircraft fire. It seems that only a miracle could save them.

At that point they noticed a Me 109 off the right wing. The pilot was Franz Stigler, and the plane was full of fuel and ammunition. Stigler saw the dead tail gunner, and the gaping hole in the fuselage permitted him to see the desperate crew trying to save the life of a wounded comrade. God filled his heart with compassion for these fellow human beings and he escorted them through the German coast to the North Sea, then saluted them and returned to Germany.

For more than 40 years the story of this act of heroism and compassion remained untold. Had Hitler heard of this dereliction of duty Stigler would have faced the firing squad. So also Charlie Brown and his crew were forbidden to tell the story for fear that allied aviators might mistakenly assume that other German pilots were also merciful.

For more than 40 years both pilots pondered the fate of the other. Stigler wondered if the stricken bomber made it home, and Brown was baffled by why his enemy showed such compassion. The likelihood that both men survived the rest of the war, and would be still alive over 45 years later was quite remote. Yet each pilot still searched for and longed for answers.

In January 1990 their mutual search came to an end. Charlie Brown discovered that Stigler was living in Canada and their reunion provides a beautiful contrast to the hatred and bitterness of war. The 379th Bomb Group made Franz Stigler an honorary member, and CBS News featured the story on the Morning show. Charlie and Franz toured together, telling their story to anyone who would listen. Their love for one another was undeniable.

Stigler died in March 2008 and Brown died soon after in November. Belatedly, the Air Force reopened their records and awarded Charlie Brown and his crew nine Silver Stars and one Air Force Cross. We pray that God will open His records and give these brave men an even greater reward.

This might be a good time to consider the inspired words of Paul to the Ephesians. **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph 6:12)**

I was 5 years old when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. In those days there was no doubt who the enemy was. It was Japan and Germany. The Russians and Chinese, of course, were friends. Today, the Japanese and the Germans are our friends and the Russians and the Chinese are our enemies. Paul insisted that our struggle is not against flesh and blood. Anyone who bleeds is therefore not the real enemy. Spiritual forces of evil manipulate men like pawns on a chess board. The pawn is not the problem, the problem is the mind behind the hand that moves it.

Please prayerfully consider the testimony of Paul: **“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” (1 Tim 1:12-16)** Note that while Paul was a highly educated man, he was a blasphemer, and persecutor, and a violent man because of ignorance. As the worst of sinners, God used him as an example. If the worst of sinners could be saved, other sinners can be saved too.

The trials of Job did not take place in a vacuum, and neither do ours. Decisions made in the “heavenly realms” directly affect all of mankind. At least 5 times in Ephesians Paul focuses our attention away from flesh and blood to the “heavenly realms”. Jesus has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the “heavenly realms” (Eph. 1:3). God seated Jesus at His own right hand in the

“heavenly realms” (Eph. 1:20). God has seated us in the “heavenly realms” (Eph. 2:6). Though the church the manifold wisdom of God is made manifest to spiritual rulers in the “heavenly realms” (Eph. 3:10). Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, and powers of the dark world in the “heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). While evil men do bad things, our ultimate enemy is the devil. This truth needs to be constantly emphasized to correctly identify the enemy!

While physical battles may be inevitable, the ultimate solution to our problems involves spiritual warfare. Daniel, for example, prayed a pious prayer that was heard from the very first day, but the answer was delayed for 21 days because of a spiritual struggle with the prince of Persia (Dan. 10:12, 13). Spiritual forces, however, cannot be destroyed by physical weapons and physical armor cannot protect us from spiritual weapons. That’s why we need to put on the “whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11). Not one item in the armor of God is physical!

There is nothing wrong with owning a sword for Jesus once told His disciples to sell their cloak and buy one (Lk. 22:36). So also civil authorities should be armed because they are God’s servants who do not bear the sword in vain (Rom. 13:4). Our real enemy, however, is still the devil!

Thanks for taking time to read what I have written. May this story of enemies who became friends inspire you to also aspire to a “Higher Calling”.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce