

a novel

FLAME
— of —
RESISTANCE



*their dangerous plan
could change
the tides of war. . . .*

TRACY GROOT

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Flame of Resistance

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For Jack, Evan, Becca, Gray, and Riley
and
For John, Tami, Shaina, Phil, Nikki, and Johnny



*I'm not sure I'll write enough books to dedicate
them separately, you people of my heart, so, as Tami says,
I'll do it all in one "foul" swoop.*

*Whatever happens, the flame of the French resistance
must not be extinguished and will not be extinguished.*

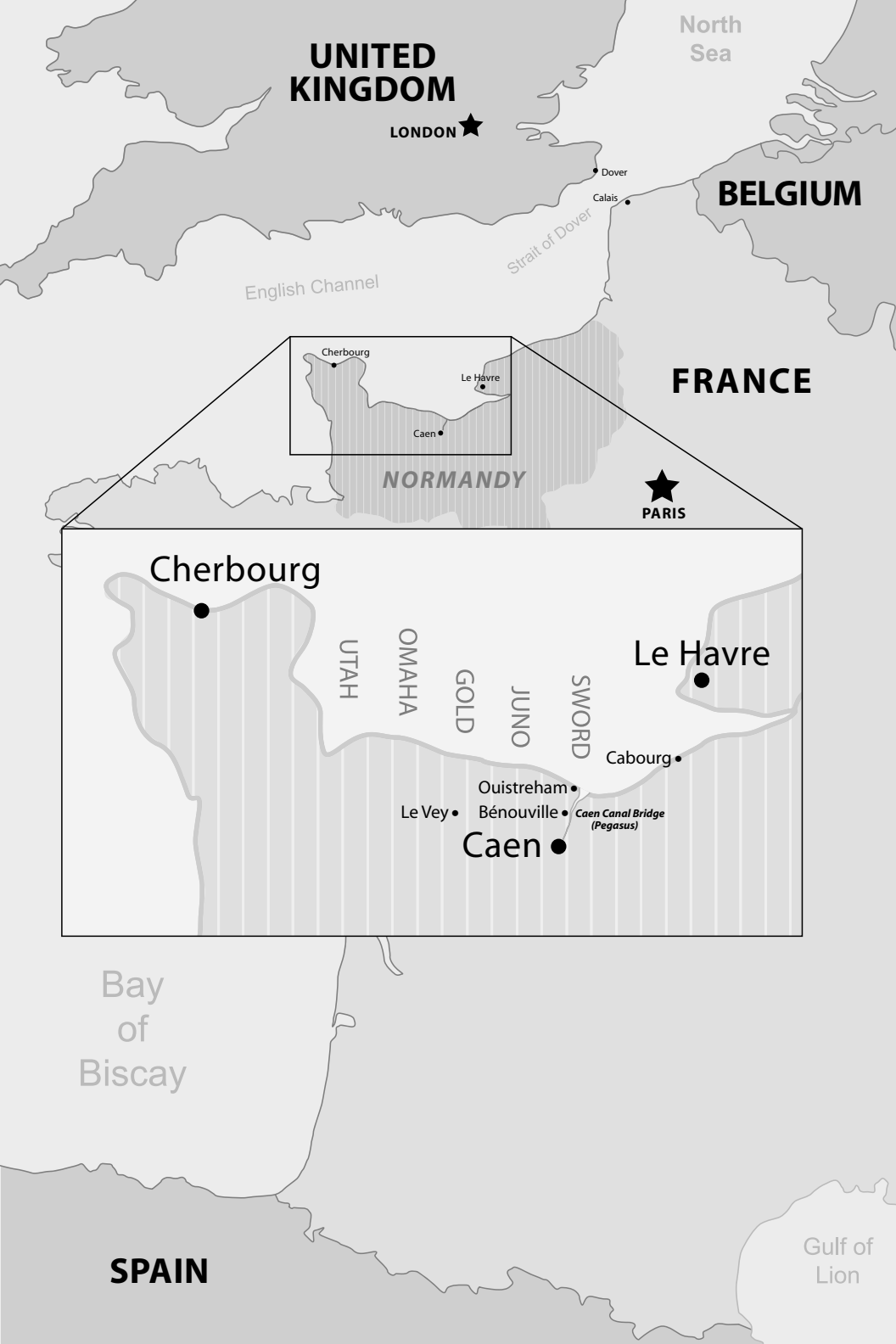
CHARLES DE GAULLE

Better to die on your feet than live on your knees.

AESCHYLUS

Audacity is a tactical weapon.

AUDIE MURPHY



UNITED KINGDOM

LONDON ★

North Sea

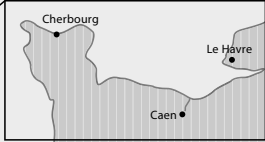
BELGIUM

English Channel

Strait of Dover

Dover
Calais

FRANCE



NORMANDY

★
PARIS

Cherbourg

UTAH

OMAHA

GOLD

JUNO

SWORD

Le Havre

Cabourg

Ouistreham

Le Vey

Bénéville

Caen Canal Bridge
(Pegasus)

Caen

Bay of Biscay

SPAIN

Gulf of Lion

THE SUN CAME warm through the plexishield. The shield squeaked as Tom wiped a patch of condensation. He was no good with words, and he didn't have to be. Plenty of aviators said it for him. One talked of slipping the surly bonds of earth, and of sun-split clouds. Another spoke of rarefied splendor. "Untrespasted sanctity" was a favorite, and those were the words he'd use to tell the folks.

Untrespasted sanctity, he'd say of the English Channel, and of the gut-thrum of his aircraft, of the daily sorties to France, and his placement in the V. It never got old. It was untrespasted. Maybe not invincible, but so far, on his watch, untrespasted.

I know that I shall meet my fate somewhere among the clouds above; those that I fight I do not hate, those that I—

"Angel flight, this is lead." Captain Fitz finally broke radio silence. "Rolling in."

The five Thunderbolts approached the target area, flying in lovely V formation. Tom would ransack his vocabulary for a different word than *lovely* if talking with the guys, but the new

guy from Molesworth stayed on his wing pretty as pie. Someday he'd like to hear a liberated Frenchman say, *There I was, getting beat up by a Nazi; we look up and see this lovely V. . .*

"One and two, take targets on the right. Three and four—"

"Captain! We got movement—"

Antiair flak slammed her belly, blew a hole in the front of the cowling. Tom barely knew he was hit before oil pressure plummeted. "Mayday—this is Angel three. I'm hit! I'm hit."

"Angel three, can you make it back?"

"Pressure gauge says no, flight lead. I'm going in."

"Copy. We'll cap the area." Then, "Good luck, Tom."

"Good luck, Cab," another echoed.

"Guts and glory, Cabby," called another.

Bullets stitched the plane as he peeled off the target. Smoke filled the cockpit, burnt oil singed his nostrils. She was flagging the second she was hit, but he gripped the stick and pulled back to get as much height as he could before bailing.

He tried for a look at the ground but couldn't see through the smoke. Where was he? Too charmed by rarefied splendor and the alignment of his wingman to—

"Normandy," Tom coughed. Northeastern Normandy.

Flak exploded and pinged, black patches pockmarked the sky, and as Tom gained altitude, he heard a conversation in the debrief room.

Then Cabby got hit, and that was it, the whole ground opened up on us.

You capped the area . . .

Stayed as long as we could, sir, but it was too hot.

Where was he in Normandy? Caen? Cabourg? Maybe he could—

But the old girl jerked, leveled, and he had no hope of circling back to bail in the sea.

Why do you call him Cabby?

He looks like he jumped outta the womb hollering, "Heil Hitler," but didn't like us calling him Kraut. So we called him Cabbage.

We called him Cabbage.

I ain't dead yet, fellas. I am, however, about to reacquaint myself with the surly bonds of earth.

He waved off smoke, snatched the picture of his little brother, and shoved it down his collar. He jettisoned the cowl-
ing, and the plexishield broke from the plane in a *whumpf*,
popping his ears, sucking his breath.

There were two ways to bail from a P-47 Thunderbolt. Tilt
the plane and let it drop you out, or, in what Tom felt was a
more stylish way to go, just stand up, rise into the slipstream,
let it carry you away . . .

*Listen, Yank. You get hit, you go down, here's what you do: get to
Paris, get to the American Hospital. Look up a doc there, a Yank
by the name of Jackson. He's with the Resistance. You tell him
Blakeney says thanks. He may not remember me. He's helped a lot
of blokes. You tell him thanks for me.*

"He looks like a boche."

*"I saw him go down. I heard him speak. He's no boche.
He flew one of the new planes. You should have seen them.
Beautiful."*

"What did he say?"

*"Not much. Before he came to, something about a flight of
angels and a fellow named Jackson in Paris. Now look at him.
He's not going to say anything."*

*"That's what worries me. We have to find out if he's
German."*

“I’m telling you, he’s no German. He sounds like the man from Ohio.”

Tom watched the two Frenchmen watching him and tried hard to pick out words. His mother’s friend had given him a little French phrase book from the Great War, when she had served as a nurse with the Red Cross. From sheer boredom between flights, he’d sometimes taken it out. It was in his escape and evasion pack, no longer strapped to his back. Either he lost it in the jump, or the French guys took it.

He was in a dark woodshed with a low ceiling. He remembered fumbling for the chute cord the second he left the plane, waiting until he was clear to yank it. He remembered terror at the descent; he’d parachuted many times, none with fear of enemy fire. He’d never felt so vulnerable in his life, not even after jammed gear and a belly landing—Captain Fitz rushed up with a pint of Jack Daniel’s after that one. But the float down into enemy-held land, the air thick with bullets, the ground exploding, that was one for the books. He heard himself telling it to the guys, heard Fitz’s laugh and Oswald’s quick “Yeah, yeah, yeah, and den what happened?”

I don’t know yet, Oz.

He suddenly felt for the photo. The Frenchmen leaped back, and one pulled Tom’s own .45 on him. Tom held up his hands and pointed to his shirtfront.

“Picture. Photograph.” He added, “Uh . . . *frère*. Picture of *ma frère*.”

“*Mon frère*,” one of them corrected.

Keeping one hand up, he slowly unzipped his flight jacket, unfastened a few shirt buttons, and looked inside. It was stuck in his underwear waistband. He glanced at the men, slowly reached inside, and pulled it out. He held it up for the men to see. “*Mon frère*,” he said. “*Mon petit frère*. He’s thirteen.”

“*Oui.*” The one with the gun nodded, and slipped it back into his pocket.

He looked at the picture. Mother had sent it with the last package. Ronnie wasn't little anymore. The kid was growing up. Still, same old grin, same cowlick, same rascal shine in his eyes. He ignored the rush of pain and affection at seeing the familiar face in this strange place.

“Can't get a word in edgewise even now,” Tom muttered. He held it up to the men. “Kid can talk the hind leg off a donkey.” He rubbed the face with his thumb, and slipped it into a zippered pocket in his flight jacket.

“Who is Jackson?” the man with the gun said in English.

Tom's heart nearly stopped; had he said it out loud? He'd banged his head good when he came down in a tight place between two buildings. He remembered a gray tiled roof coming on fast; he remembered sharp pain, sliding to the ground, then nausea, vomiting. Then he went into some sort of daze, vaguely recollected being bundled into the back of a horse cart. They covered him up with firewood, and the dark invited him to blank out. He came to in this place. First thing he did was to feel for the gun now in the possession of the French guy.

What else did he say when he was out? He cursed himself. *Don't go to sleep, Cabby; they'll get everything out of you.*

The one without the gun had a sullen, suspicious expression. He paced back and forth, shoulders and arms stiff for a fight, eyes never leaving Tom. The one with the gun had the offhand confidence of being the one with the gun. Both were in their twenties, both were spare built and thin, both had the work-hardened look of factory or farm workers. Who were they? Resisters? The Maquis—French guerrilla fighters? The Brits trusted these collection crews more than the Americans

did, maybe because England and France had had little choice but to trust each other. And what choice did he have?

Should he tell them about Jackson? Every instinct said no.

Jackson was a fellow from Maine, a doctor at the American Hospital of Paris. He had a reputation with the British Royal Air Force as a man to trust behind enemy lines. Tom had heard of him more than once from downed airmen given up as MIA. He once witnessed a homecoming at Ringwood, an RAF pilot missing for four months. Once the initial euphoria of his return settled, the guy, Captain Blakeney, had all the men toast Dr. Jackson, “the patron saint of downed airmen.”

What if his captors were collaborators? What if they were French Milice? *One peep about Jackson, and Jackson's a marked man.* How much had he said already? The thought sickened him.

Where was Paris? How would he get there? It hurt to even move his head. He'd assess damage later. He needed a plan, and he always favored three-part plans. *Not a word on Jackson. Get to Paris. Don't vomit.*

“Thees Jackson . . . ,” the gunless Frenchman asked. “Ees een Paree?”

“Thomas William Jaeger. First lieutenant, United States Army Air Forces. One four oh nine six—”

“This is no interrogation, my friend. We are the good guys.” The Frenchman with the gun strolled forward a few paces and sat on his haunches. He pushed his hat up with the tip of the gun. His brown eyes were lively and measuring; his thin face, amused, or rather, ready to be amused. He had the sort of face that invited entertainment of any sort. His English was far better than the other's. “But we do not know if you are a good guy. Tell us why we do not kill you for a spy?”

“Tell me why I should trust you,” Tom said. “I hear you guys sell out your neighbors. Lot of Jews gone missing, too.”

The man wagged his finger. “The question of trust lies with us alone.” He gestured toward his face. “Attend this handsome face. Tell me if you see a German. Then I will get you a mirror, and you will wonder why we have not killed you yet. Hmm?”

“Lots of Americans look like Germans,” Tom scorned. “Some *are* German. I’m Dutch. I was born in the Netherlands. We immigrated to the States when I was nine. I’m from Michigan. Jenison.”

“You are very tall. Very blond. Very square-headed. Pretty blue eyes, too. I am aroused.” The man behind him laughed.

“Yeah? Come to Jenison. You’ll be plenty aroused. And you’re puny.”

“I do not know *puny*.”

“Petite.” He couldn’t keep the sneer out. Payback for *square-headed*.

The Frenchman shrugged. “I do not get enough meat. I would be your size, with meat.” The other man laughed again. “Perhaps from a great height I am puny. You have legs like trees. Trust me, I had to fit them into the cart. Listen, Monsieur Jenison. I am, hmm—” he gave a considering little shrug— “sixty percent you are not a spy. But we have been fooled before. Some of my friends have died because we were quick to believe a pretty face.”

“Where did you live in Holland?” came a voice from the shadows.

A third man emerged from the corner of the shed, and he looked nothing like the other two. This older gentleman was dressed like a lawyer. He wore a fedora. The collar of his gray overcoat was turned up, and he wore a red scarf. He clasped black-gloved hands in front. He had no wariness about him

like the others. He looked as if he were deciding which newspaper to buy.

“Andijk. A small city in the northern province.”

“Where was your mother born?”

“Apeldoorn.”

“Your father?”

“Andijk. Shouldn’t you ask me who won the World Series? Or what’s the capital of North Dakota? Not that I remember.”

The man reached into a pocket and took out a piece of paper and a pencil. He wrote something and held the paper out to Tom. “Tell me—what is this word?”

Tom took the paper. He angled it to catch light from the door. “Scheveningen. My aunt lived near there, in Rotterdam. They bombed it off the map. She and my uncle died in the attack, with my two cousins.”

The man took the paper back. “I am very sorry for your family. *C’est la guerre . . .* to the misfortune of the world.” He turned to the one with the gun. “No German can pronounce that word.” The gentleman touched his hat, then left.

“We are not the only ones who saw you go down, Monsieur Jenison. But we got to you first. The man who lives in the house you fell on took a beating because he could not tell the Germans where you were. Do you think you can trust us? Hmm? Because thanks to the monsieur, we now trust you.”

“I’d trust you more with my gun back,” Tom said.

The man grinned. He had a look Tom liked, that of an amiable scoundrel. He knew plenty of his sort; you’d trust him in a fight but not with your sister. The man rose and pulled out the gun, and handed it butt first to Tom. “You can call me Rafael.” He looked over his shoulder at the other guy and gave a little whistle between his teeth. “Give him his pack.” To

Tom, he said, "Regrettably you will not find your cigarettes. I suggest they were lost in the jump."

"Lucky I don't smoke."

The man with the red scarf, known in Cabourg as François Rousseau, walked rapidly to work. He exchanged pleasantries with his bronchial secretary, suggested mint tea, and slipped into his office. He took off his coat and hung it on the coat tree. He left the scarf on; it was cold in the office, but he did not light the coal in the brazier. What coal the company allotment allowed, he brought home in newspaper to Marie and the children. Thank God spring was coming soon.

He rubbed his gloved hands together and settled down to the papers on his desk. But he could not settle his mind. He finally pushed aside the latest numbers of Rommel's new cement quotas and let his mind take him where it would.

Twice he reached for the telephone, twice he pulled back. He had to work it out in his head, every detail, before he called his brother, Michel. He tapped his lips with gloved fingers. Hadn't they improvised for nearly four years? If there was one thing they'd learned under enemy occupation, it was resourcefulness.

It was a fool's scheme, he knew, but Michel was feeling so very low. The idea could have enough in it to beguile him from the latest blow. And it was an *interesting* scheme. That face? That height?

He thought it through, beginning to end, and picked up the phone. Sometimes, answers to problems literally dropped from the sky. There was only one thing a cunning Frenchman should do with a Yank who looked exactly like a proud German officer. Make him one.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TRACY GROOT lives in Michigan with her husband and three sons. She is the author of *The Brother's Keeper* and *Stones of My Accusers*, which both received starred *Booklist* reviews, and *Madman*, a Christy Award winner that also received a starred *Publishers Weekly* review. Luckily, she and her husband own a coffee shop in Holland, Michigan, where a caffeine junkie can find acceptability and safe haven.

Tracy is a fan of the Detroit Lions, listens exclusively to Rich Mullins and U2, is an avid supporter of nothing in particular, and in her dreams would like to host a talk show with John Steinbeck, Charles Dickens, Michael Shaara, Donald Miller, C. S. Lewis, and G. K. Chesterton. In her dreams, she'd also like to stand on Little Round Top with Colonel Joshua Chamberlain and holler, "Fix bayonets!"

In her spare time she likes to read, knit socks, watch as many movies and TV shows as she can respectably get away with, mess around on the piano, bake very naughty amounts of sweets, and take long walks, preferably in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. She also likes to write, sometimes under the

influence (of sweets, caffeine, misguided notions, and wild seismic fluctuations), sometimes not.

Someday she'd like to ride through the Badlands on a Harley with "Born to Be Wild" blaring on the radio, beat Bobby Fischer at chess, and round Cape Horn in a clipper ship. Her heroes include Mary Ann Patten (who rounded Cape Horn in a clipper ship), Raoul Wallenberg, Corrie ten Boom, Jack Groot, Evan Groot, Becca Groot, Grayson Groot, and Riley Groot.

To learn more about Tracy or her books, visit her online at www.tracygroot.com.