



THE  
**LAST CHANCE**  
DETECTIVES™

**MYSTERY LIGHTS  
OF NAVAJO MESA**

JAKE THOENE & LUKE THOENE

THE LAST CHANCE DETECTIVES

*Canyon Quest*

*Mystery Lights of Navajo Mesa*

*Legend of the Desert Bigfoot*

*Escape from Fire Lake*

*Terror from Outer Space*





*Mystery Lights of Navajo Mesa*

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# MYSTERY LIGHTS OF NAVAJO MESA



**JAKE THOENE & LUKE THOENE**

Based on the story and characters created by  
Robert Vernon and the screenplay by Jake Thoene, Luke Thoene,  
Brock Thoene, and Bodie Thoene

**FOCUS**  
ON THE FAMILY<sup>®</sup>

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# Chapter 1

*Ambrosia, Arizona—1994*

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD MIKE FOWLER sat in the pilot's seat of the old B-17 bomber and heard the rattle of machine-gun fire as bullets zipped by the cockpit. Turning sharply to peer over his shoulder down the interior of the plane, Mike watched as his best friend, Ben Jones, maneuvered his weapon in the waist-gunner position.

A voice that sounded like movie star John Wayne's warned, "*Eighteen Mitzi attack bombers three points to your right about fifteen thousand altitude!*"

Mike saw Ben swing the twin machine guns to intercept incoming fighters. He heard a loud banging on the fuselage.

“Mike! We’re hit!” Ben yelled. “They blew our left wing off!”

Mike concentrated on controlling the bucking B-17. He shouted at Ben, “No, they didn’t blow our wing off! The plane can’t fly if the wing is OFF! If they blew our wing off, we’re going to die five minutes into the movie and that’s it!”

Ben paused to think it over. “Oh . . . oh yeah.”

Mike reached behind him and turned up the volume on the combination TV/VCR that was playing the John Wayne movie *Flying Tigers*.

“*Don’t try to win this war all by yourself,*” Wayne said. “*Stick close to element formation . . . DING HOW!*”

“Ding how!” Mike shouted.

Ben responded with the same phrase, and both boys returned to their mock battle, the movie providing the sound effects. The banging continued on the outside of the plane. Then Mike heard the voice of his Navajo friend Wynona Whitefeather.

“Hey! Let me in!” she shouted. “Come on, you guys! Mike Fowler! Ben Jones! You open up or I’ll . . .”

Mike and Ben chose to ignore her until the battle was over, then both turned to watch the screen as John Wayne exited his plane.

Winnie was still yelling: “Come on, guys! Let me in!”

Mike and Ben looked at each other and shouted in unison, “Wynona!” Ben ran down the length of the fuselage to let her in.

“Why didn’t you let me in?” she yelled at Ben. “I’ve been knocking out there forever!”

“Gee, Winnie,” Ben said innocently, “I guess we didn’t hear you.”

“Don’t gimme that, you overgrown sack of pork rinds!”

Ben stepped back and looked to his pilot friend for help. “Honest. Huh, Mike? We thought you were enemy flack or somethin’, didn’t we, Mike?”

“Nope,” Mike said, and Ben sank into a chair when his alibi disappeared. “But you were late, Winnie, so we started without you.”

Winnie accepted Mike’s explanation with a shrug.

“You didn’t think we’d open the hatch at fifteen thousand feet, did you?” Ben asked.

“Mind your own business, Ben.” Winnie stomped her foot down.

Ben thought she was going to hit him, and he jumped, almost knocking over the chair.

Just then there was another knock on the outside of the plane. The Navajo girl turned and opened the hatch. “Hey, Spence. Come on in!”

Spencer Martin entered the plane and headed straight for the radio operator’s table and started tinkering. He’d been set on fixing the old radio ever since the first time he’d been aboard the *Lady Liberty*. It was proving to be a difficult task.

Mike’s grandfather, Pop Fowler, had flown the Flying Fortress bomber in World War II. In the fifties, Pop had bought the old plane. It had been Mike’s dad’s clubhouse

when he was a kid, but in recent years, Pop had restored the *Lady Liberty* from nose to tail. When Pop wasn't working on the plane or flying it, Mike, Ben, Winnie, and Spence used it as the headquarters for their detective agency. They called themselves the Last Chance Detectives.

"Any good cases today?" Mike asked, taking his usual place in the cockpit.

Winnie, very businesslike, opened her leather-bound notebook and reviewed her notes.

Mike glanced outside just in time to see the sheriff's patrol truck pull up on the airfield. It stopped next to the twin-engine Beechcraft, which Mike's grandfather had just finished fueling.

Sheriff Smitty had lived in Ambrosia all his life. Everyone in the town knew him. He was a big man, middle-aged and graying. Though he had no children, he thought of the Last Chance Detectives as his own and was very close to the Fowler family. This closeness explained why he felt he could ask Pop Fowler for a big favor.

Smitty shut off the engine of his truck. He straightened his uniform, brushing off some flecks of dark red dust, and headed for the door of the hangar.

Pop Fowler met him halfway. "How are you, Smitty?" Pop asked with a smile in his voice. Mike could hear Pop's voice drifting up through the open window of the B-17.

"Oh, I'm doin' okay," Smitty replied, chewing his gum.

Long before, Pop and others had figured out that Smitty always chewed gum when he was thinking, and the harder

he chewed, the deeper were the thoughts. Right now the sheriff's jaw was working rapidly.

"Well, come on over to the diner," Pop invited, "and I'll get you something."

Smitty declined the suggestion. "I'm sorry, Pop. Strictly business today. Come to ask you a favor."

"Anything . . . except loan you money." Pop chuckled at his own humor. The lines on Pop's wrinkled forehead crinkled beneath his white hair.

"Naw, nothing like that. I need you to run me up in the *Liberty*. I've come into some business that I can't take care of on the ground."

"That's no problem," Pop said eagerly. "You know I'm always lookin' for an excuse to fly 'er."

"All right then," Smitty said, "I'd like to get crackin' ASAP, but I can't explain more now—sorry."



Mike heard Pop call him.

"Hey, guys," Pop said as he appeared standing in the hatch, visible from the waist up, "I've got to take Smitty up in the plane, but we'll be back in about an hour. You can have the clubhouse back then."

"Aw, Pop, can't we go?" Mike asked.

"Hold on," Pop said. "I'll ask Smitty."

Mike listened intently as Smitty gave his answer from the outside.

“No problem,” Smitty said. “Be glad to have them along.”

“You heard him,” Pop said with a smile. “So buckle up and get ready.”

The gang cheered when they heard, and Smitty climbed aboard.

“All right, guys,” Pop cautioned, “remember this is a business trip, so keep the noise down.”

Smitty took his seat and clicked his gum as Pop started the engines. A cloud of pale blue smoke belched from one after another of the four exhausts as the B-17 roared to life.

“Now about this business trip,” Smitty explained as they taxied onto the runway.

Pop handed him a pair of earphones with a microphone attached. “These’ll make it easier to talk over the engine noise,” Pop yelled.

Mike listened with interest on his own headset as Smitty slipped on the equipment and began talking. “I can’t give you details, but I’ve been asked to keep an eye on anything suspicious in my area. Ambrosia’s too small to keep something secret for very long, and outside of town there’s so much desert, the only way to keep an eye on it is from the air.”

Pop nodded, happy to help out.

The surge of excitement Mike felt when he heard about the suspicious activity mixed with the drop of his stomach as the *Lady Liberty* pulled off the runway and lifted into the air. Pop began turning when he was at five hundred feet, and the plane swung back over Ambrosia.

Mike could see everything. Along the main street was

the Last Chance Diner on one side, the hangar on the other. Farther up was one of the two little motels in town, with the tepee-shaped Navajo souvenir shop right next to it. Dirt roads peeled off from the highway and led to houses scattered throughout and behind the town.

They were gaining altitude, and it was getting harder to see details on the ground. In the distance, just north of the town, he could see his house, located close to Smitty's and the sheriff's office.

"So where to, Smitty?" Pop asked.

"Well, how about the northwest mesa area to start? Then we can work our way south from there."

"Roger," Pop replied, and they banked left. Mike's stomach jumped again.

"Better than a Disneyland ride, eh, Smitty?" Pop asked.

"Wouldn't know," Smitty said. "I've never been to Disneyland."

Pop swung low again once the plane was clear of the town, and they sped over the hot desert on the way to the northwest mesas. Mike had never been there himself, but he had heard they were amazing. And now possibly even mysterious!

Leaning forward to look out of the window, Mike saw the mesas in the distance ahead grow larger every second. The mesas were large orange-red mountains that loomed up out of the desert. Their level summits looked as though the tall peaks had gotten flattop haircuts.

"Okay," Pop said, slowing the plane with the flaps, "I assume that you want to look them over a little slower than

this baby's top speed, huh?" Mike noticed a smile on Pop's face when he said this to Smitty.

"Sure are proud of her, aren't you, Pop?" Mike asked over his headset.

"Just a little," Pop replied, setting the bomber into a gentle circle around the tabletop mountains. Soon they swung south as Smitty scanned the ground for anything unusual. The sun was already sinking, and soon it would be too dark to see.

"We're not quite going to get to the southwest quadrant today before our light runs out," Pop said.

"That's all right," Smitty agreed. "We'll finish up here and maybe get to the southwest next week. Doesn't look like there's anything going on anyway."

Mike studied the desert floor too. *There is a mystery here yet*, he thought. *And I'm going to find it someday.*