



BATTLE FOR THE SKIES

1 The day dawned bright, the occasional white cloud spotting the sky. Many of us wondered if we would have time to finish breakfast before the first blitz of attackers. We were lucky.

It just ticked nine-thirty when the sirens started wailing. A huge fleet of enemy bombers were winging their way towards our position. We

sprinted to our fighters, brought the jets up to a ferocious burn and launched into the air. After a while you get used to the violent force that pushes you into your seat during take-off. It's the closest thing to a hug when you're battling up in the air.

2 We had been trained to keep in formation, advancing on our enemy in a tight V. But this

wasn't training. Enemy fire crackled the sky with oily black puffs of smoke. Call it intuition, I don't know, but I mindlessly flicked a quick glance over my shoulder. An enemy fighter was on my tail! This was serious. Bullets *badda-badda-ed* in the air around me as I twisted my fighter in tight circles. I needed to find some cover otherwise I was toast. Quickly faking a left turn, I startled my tail long enough to pull up and escape into a cloud. My entire cabin shook with the force of this tricky manoeuvre. A calculated second was all I needed, and I plunged back into sight — this time behind the enemy fighter. I sprayed machine-gun fire across its fuselage. Smoke billowed out of the plane as it corkscrewed down to the ground. I saw the pilot eject just in time.

3 My radio sparked into life: "We've got a bogie at 12 o'clock!"

I sighted my next target, a big bomber that was trying to hide by flying through the clouds right above me. That was a big mistake, because the clouds also blocked me from its vision. My jets burnt red and I thrust my fighter up through the clouds. Wispy white fingers fluttered across my window when I punched out of the cloud. I popped a few shots into the belly of the bomber. It veered sharply to the right and fell into a deadly spin straight for the ground.

4 It was my turn to be surprised. An enemy jet must have been shadowing the bomber, flying above it, hidden by the glare of the sun. My heart drum-rolled against my chest as I heard the horrible sound of "ping, ping, ping". Hot bullets punctured through both of



my wings. I was sailing through the sky in a chunk of metal Swiss cheese. Angry lights flashed in the cockpit, reflecting off the black smoke that was filling my vision rapidly. It was as if I was staring into the eyes of a demon. Years of training kicked in and my hand, acting by itself, yanked up the ejector switch beside my seat.

5 My head was flung forward as my window launched up into the sky. A second later a strong force grabbed me in powerful hands, ripping me out of my cockpit and into the swirling heavens. My face felt like it was being pulled down to my feet. I looked down past my shoes, my head spinning at the sight of my fighter. It was already a black and red ball, spiralling towards the ground. I pulled my ripcord and my parachute opened, tugging me up into the air again. Blood rushed through my head, making me dizzy, and I could feel my stomach try to crawl up my throat.

6 I managed to land safely in a soft field. All I could see was the sky boiling above me, fighters firing at other fighters. Strange, from down here everyone looked the same. I lay here for the next few hours, watching the battle. Finally, the last of the enemy fighters pulled away, burning their jets bright white as they shot away to safety. We had won the battle for the skies.

7 That night I slept in a nearby farmhouse. The family there treated me like a hero, but I hadn't done anything special. I just did what I had been trained to do — what everyone else in the sky had done.

In the morning an air force truck came to pick me up. No one was smiling. I waved goodbye to the farmhouse and turned to my mates.

8 They told me that two of my best friends had died in yesterday's battle. For years we'd trained and worked together. The only difference between them, and me was that they were now buried in the sky. I tried not to cry as the truck rattled along the country road. There really are no winners in war.

Rewritten from original "Wards" story by courtesy of the Department of Education and Training Western Australia

Questions

1 What time of day did the first attack occur?

- a dawn
- b 9:30 a.m
- c 12 o'clock

2 What "badda-badda-ed" through the air?

- a bullets
- b fighters
- c bombers

3 What direction is "12 o'clock"?

- a in the sun's glare
- b in front of a fighter
- c above a fighter

4 What combined to look like a demon?

- a flashing lights and black smoke
- b sunlight and clouds
- c bullets and oily smoke

5 In what order did these events happen?

- a pulled ripcord, pulled ejector switch, window launched into the air
- b window launched into the air, pulled ejector switch, pulled ripcord
- c pulled ejector switch, window launched into the air, pulled ripcord

6 Why does the narrator say: "there really are no winners in war"?

- a The enemy will be back to attack again.
- b They won the battle, but his friends died.
- c He was shot down, so he didn't feel like a winner.

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- 7 A sudden and intense attack (1)
- 8 A natural instinct or insight (2)
- 9 The ability to see (3)
- 10 Pierced a hole into something (4)
- 11 Accelerating downwards in a curve (5)

Grammar

Find an **adjective** (a word to describe a noun) in these sentences.

- 12 Angry lights flashed in the cockpit.
- 13 I landed in a soft field.
- 14 It was a bright dawn.
- 15 He brought the jets to a ferocious burn.

Back To The Text...

- 16 In section 4 the word *shadowing* means
 - a staying very close to something.
 - b casting a shadow over something.
- 17 What would be a good sub-heading for section 6?
 - a Safe Landing
 - b A Safe Night
- 18 The purpose of this text is
 - a to explain.
 - b to recount.

Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19 a The sirens started wailing.
b They finished breakfast.
- 20 a His wings started to look like Swiss cheese.
b He faked a left turn.
- 21 a He saw a bomber trying to hide in the clouds.
b He fired his machine-gun at the fighter's fuselage.

Think About This

22 The image on page 2 is described in section

- a four.
- b five.
- c six.
- d seven.

23 What does the writer imply when they say, "Angry lights flashed in the cockpit"?

- a The lights flashed brightly.
- b Bright lights lit up the cockpit.
- c The lights flashed a dangerous warning.

Challenge Option

Writing: Imagine you are a fighter pilot. Write a paragraph about a take-off.

