

OZO

There were three people living in the little cottage near the airfield. Once there had been four, but Peter's daddy had joined the RAF as a pilot and was missing. Peter wasn't sure what that word 'missing' meant, but his mummy had told him that his daddy had landed by parachute when his aircraft was hit over Germany. She was sure he was alive somewhere, hiding from the Germans. Peter's little brother, Kevin, was only two-and-a-half. He thought "missing" meant that he missed his daddy.

There was someone else in the cottage almost like a person. This was Binky, their little dog. He was a bundle of grey fur with untidy hair hanging over his eyes. Through his hair you could see a small, very wet, black nose. Peter thought Binky missed daddy, because whenever someone came to the door, he barked as though expecting that his master had come home. It was usually the postman or Mrs. Ramsbotham, who lived at the end of Airfield Lane. Binky barked angrily at the postman as he went off on his bicycle, as though it was his fault there was no news of their daddy.

Peter went to the village school. It had closed for the summer holidays. From the nearby airfield there came a rumble of engine noise from the airplanes. Sometimes they saw the Beaufighters circling overhead like a flock of heavy blackbirds. They would gather into a formation the shape of the letter V and then head over the sea. His mother told him their job was to sink German warships. She used to count them when they returned and shake her head when the numbers were smaller than when they went out. Sometimes, though, a straggler would arrive late and then her face would brighten up.

Near the cottage was a small lake, where Peter's daddy used to go fishing before he had joined the Royal Air Force. It was called Three-Cornered lake. Right beside the cottage there was a small wood where Peter and Kevin were allowed to wander. It was so close it was almost part of their garden. There, they found acorns from the oak trees and early in the summer blue bells. Once Peter found a piece of grey metal, which his mother said had fallen from shells fired by the anti-aircraft guns at enemy aircraft when they flew overhead. What Peter liked most of all was going right to the edge of the wood and looking at the airplanes in the nearby airfield. He would have liked to get even closer, but it was surrounded by a tall wire fence.

Kevin was good company even though he didn't talk very well. There was one word he used very often, which Peter didn't understand. It was OZO. Kevin *thought* he was saying EASY, but it came out as

OZO. He would point at a rabbit and say Ozo. What he meant was that he could catch it easily if he tried. But Peter just thought it was a kind of magic word that made wishes come true. Peter, Kevin and Binky were wandering in the wood one day when the sound of aircraft engines was particularly loud. Peter wished he could see what was going on at the airfield. Reaching the edge of the wood, he decided to climb up a tree to gain a better view of the airfield. He managed to gain a foothold on some branches and as he was climbing, he heard little Kevin say Ozo. He knew immediately something magic was going to happen.

He could see the control tower buildings and the windsock blowing in the breeze. And he had a marvellous view of the Beaufighters. This is really Ozo! he said to himself. Then he down below He saw Binky running after a rabbit. The rabbit found a hole in the fence surrounding the airfield. Binky quick as a flash followed him through the hole onto the airfield.

Quickly, Peter scrambled down the tree, and told Kevin to go home. Then he ran to where he had seen Binky disappear and just managed to wriggle through the hole. He was now standing on the airfield and could see dozens of huge aircraft standing on their concrete parking spaces. Oh, boy! this is Ozo! Peter said to himself. Binky had lost the rabbit he had been chasing and was standing with his tail between his legs right underneath one of the Beaufighters. Just as Peter got near him, he heard voices and saw some RAF men pushing a trolley. On it was an enormous torpedo they were about to load on onto a rack beneath one of the airplanes. Peter looked all around, Frightened of being caught. There was nowhere to hide, but immediately above him was metal ladder which led into the airplane. Gathering Binky under one arm, he climbed in. There was smell of smelt of oil and metal. It was very cramped inside. Looking behind him, he could see where the navigator sat with a machine gun behind him pointing through a kind of clear glass bubble. In front of him was a table with a map showing where the aircraft was going. Standing on tiptoe, clutching Binky tightly, and looking forward, Peter could see the pilot's instruments and the joy stick and pedals with which he controlled the aircraft. It was all very confusing and exciting. he wondered how he was going to get out and escape back to his home without being seen.

He heard the sound of voices coming nearer. 'Good luck, sir. Have a good prang!' He knew the men were coming into the airplane and he must find somewhere to hide. He looked around wildly and said the words Ozo- Ozo-Ozo. The magic worked, because he saw a little cupboard door. Inside the little cupboard were lots of electrical switches, but there was just room inside for a small boy and a dog. Holding the little dog's mouth so that he wouldn't bark, he closed the door behind him and waited, hoping the men would go away, so that he could escape unseen.

Suddenly, he heard the engines cough into life. He felt the aircraft begin to move. He remained silent, hoping that they were just going to taxi over to the other side of the airfield. But then the noise in-

creased to a thundering roar and soon afterwards he felt the aircraft lift off the ground. He and Binky were teapped.

He kept very quiet and hoped they would land somewhere soon. He kept saying OZO- OZO-OZO. Hours passed and he must have dozed off, because he woke suddenly feeling very cramped. Binky was barking madly. Just then the door of the cupboard opened and the navigator, a man with a big moustache looked in. He seemed very surprised.

He shouted to the pilot: 'We've got a stowaway with a dog on board. What are we going to do, sir?'

The pilot looked round and said: 'There is nothing we can do. This is an important operation. We have just go to hit those German warships, He'll just have to take his chance.'

The navigator said to Peter: 'Well, young man, you've really got yourself into a scrape. You'll just have to sit there and hope for the best. This is the wing-commander's airplane and he has to lead the attack, so we can't take you home until we've done the job.'

He handed Peter a bar of chocolate and told him to sit down and be very quiet. Chocolate were very hard to get in wartime, so Peter was delighted. But he gave two squares to Binky, who was also very hungry.

When he had eaten the chocolate, he stood on tiptoe and was just able to see through the pilot's wind-screen. All around were Beaufighters in close formation, each one tucking its wing close to the other. Below them the wave tops were whipping past at enormous speed.

Suddenly, he felt the navigator strapping a parachute around him and tying him to kind of square cushion. Inside it he said was a little rubber dinghy in case they came down into the water. 'Now you just be a good boy,' said the navigator, 'and be very quiet, because we are going to be very busy and we won't have time to talk to you.' Then he got back into his seat and looked into a kind of small green box with a television screen. He said he was hoping to see enemy ships come into view on his radar screen.

Very soon Peter felt the aircraft climb. Looking over the pilot's shoulders he could see in the distance a kind of big hump sticking out of the water. It was a German island called Heligoland. Nearby were some small grey objects in the water and as they drew nearer he could see that they were enemy warships, Brown puffs of smoke appeared to be bursting all around the Beaufighters. Occasionally the explosions were so close they made the aircraft shake. 'Don't worry,' said the wing commander.

Then he spoke into his microphone to all the other aircraft, calling: 'Attack- attack-attack.'

The nose of the aircraft went down towards the ships He pressed a button on the control column which fired eight machine guns and four cannons inside the Beaufighter's wings. The warships seemed to grow larger and larger as they dived towards them. The red, green and yellow lights of the enemy floated towards them and zipped past like so many coloured butterflies. They looked very pretty but Peter realised

that if they hit the aircraft they would tear great holes in it. All around the Beaufighters were diving and weaving their way towards the warships. Some of them were dropping torpedoes which entered the water and then ran under the sea, causing huge explosions

Peter saw yellow flames coming from the wing of the Beaufighter nearest to them. It turned on its side and slid into the sea. Then they were passing over the masts of the ships and the pilot threw the aircraft from side to side to avoid the shells and bullets coming up at them. Peter looked behind the aircraft and could see smoke and flames coming from the ships.

As they were headed for home there was a noise. It was just as if someone had thrown stones against the side of the airplane. He heard a groan. Then he looked round and saw the navigator was lying slumped in his seat with blood pouring from a wound in his head. There was a gaping hole in the glass canopy above the navigator. It had had been hit by a shell For the first time Peter felt very frightened. He wondered if they would ever get home.

'Sir,' he shouted to the pilot. 'The navigator has been hit.'

The pilot didn't seem to hear him. But then Peter noticed a small box with a red cross on it. He opened it up and found that it contained bandages. He dabbed at the ugly wound in the navigator's forehead, but he didn't wake up.

The reason the pilot hadn't heard him was that one of the two engines had stopped and he was busy nursing the other engine so that it could carry them home.

Binky didn't seem to mind all the excitement. He had found a square of chocolate on the floor and was busy licking it.

Now they were in cloud flying back towards England. The pilot would have to guess which direction they would fly, because the navigator was unconscious. When they came out of cloud, Peter could see they were over the land. 'I don't know where we are,' the wing commander said and we are fast running out of petrol.'

Looking over the pilot's shoulder,' Peter suddenly recognised the lake down below and shouted: 'There it is, sir. That's the Three-cornered lake near the airfield.'

'Great!' the pilot shouted. 'You're a very clever boy.'

Peter heard a clunking noise as the undercarriage came down. They banked towards the airfield. Two minutes later they were safe and sound on the ground. An ambulance rushed towards them to take the navigator to the hospital. He wasn't badly hurt and soon recovered.

The wing commander thanked Peter for spotting the lake and helping him find his way home. He drove him in his own car to the cottage and told his mother what had happened. She was very surprised and relieved he had come home safely. So relieved she didn't tell him off.

In the middle of all this Binky barked furiously. He was very hungry after their adventure.

The next morning Peter saw the postman wobbling his bicycle as he came towards the cottage. Binky, as usual, was jumping up and barking at him. Something told Peter that the message the postman was delivering was important and he said the magic words OZO-OZO-OZO, to make it good news.

When he came down his mother was smiling and holding a telegram. 'Daddy is safe and well,' she said. 'He'll be home soon.'

-480 Some months later Peter's daddy was called to the Palace to receive a medal from the King. Peter went with him. His daddy told the King about Peter's adventure and he said he deserved a medal as well.

'What about Binky?' Peter said.

'The King answered with a smile: 'I can't give medals to dogs.'

'Why not.' Peter replied. Binky's just as brave as a human being.'