

Protection of the Commonwealth

As she admired the view of the ocean off the coast of Westport, a sputtering noise disrupted the peace. *Boom!* Catherine looked up to see a comet like object plummeting through the sky, smoke billowing from every surface. Before an ear piercing screech broke the sudden silence, forcing Catherine to cover her ears. When the noise came to a halt, Catherine looked up to see smoke pouring from what she assumed was a crashed plane. Running over to where the smoke was originating from, she gasped at what she saw. A large fiery object had crashed in the neighbouring paddock, and looked ready to explode.

The plane was dark green in colour with a bright red circle on the right hand side. Catherine gasped at the thought. Surely, it couldn't be an enemy plane. With smoke still coming out of the plane, she crept closer to examine. Through the smoke, she saw something moving inside of the cockpit. With the colour draining from her face at the thought of someone being stuck in there, she realised she had to help save whoever it was.

Running into the house, she nearly bowled into her Mother, who had been fretting about where she had been.

"Well, young lady, where have you been?" she said in a disapproving tone.

"Sorry Mother, I'll tell you later, but at the moment I need your help. A plane has crashed in a nearby field and someone is still inside!" she replied in one breath, anxious to get back.

"Tell me everything." Her Mother (who had been a nurse in World War One) frowned as Catherine explained what had happened. As Catherine told the story, she noticed her Mother collecting her medical equipment. When Catherine had finished, her Mother nodded at her and promptly walked out the door, with Catherine right on her heels.

When they arrived at the paddock, Catherine watched as her Mother surveyed the scene. Bits of the plane were spread out over the whole field, crushing the remainder of crops. As they moved closer, Catherine found that the body of the plane was not as damaged as she had originally thought. She saw her Mother's frown deepen as she examined the plane. The windshield had been broken and there was a trail of blood running down the remaining glass. When her Mother saw this, she began to follow the trail that had been left when the pilot escaped. He hadn't gotten far, as they soon found an unconscious man slumped underneath a tree. They approached him carefully and her mother placed her hand around his wrist to check his pulse.

"We have to get him back to the house" she told Catherine in a firm voice. Pulling the man to his feet, they carried him back to their house.

Placing him gently on the spare bed, Catherine's Mother started assessing the pilot's wounds. Ordering Catherine to get a washcloth to wash the blood off his head, she began to check for any serious injuries he might have obtained when he climbed out of the plane. As she began to dress his wounds, the man began to stir. Catherine looked up at her Mother, who was busy making a medicinal paste. Looking back at the man, she noticed his eyelids begin to move. Motioning for her to come have a look, Catherine lent further over the man. He began to moan and struggled to open his eyes. "Where am I?" he asked wincing as he

struggled to sit up. "My name is Catherine, your plane crashed in a nearby field. What's your name?" She asked before realising that he had fainted again. Looking up at her Mother for guidance, she gently sponged his forehead, attempting to bring him back round.

When he eventually gained conscious, he attempted to sit up. Catherine, who was sitting beside him, gently pushed him back so he was lying down once again. "He's awake!" Catherine called from the side of the bed. As soon as her Mother heard this, she walked in from the kitchen, where she had been making dinner. Instructing Catherine to go make a cup of tea, she placed a hand on the man's forehead and began taking his temperature.

While Catherine was making the tea, she heard muttering coming from the lounge. Moving closer to the door, she saw her Mother trying to communicate with the man. Just as Catherine began to enter the lounge, she heard the pot bubbling. Cursing her luck, she re-entered the kitchen and made the tea. When she reached the doorway to the lounge, she noticed her Mother's eyebrows draw together with frustration. Placing the tea on the bedside table, Catherine tried to communicate with her Mother without disturbing the injured man. Noticing her Mother yawning, Catherine told her to go to bed and that she would look after the pilot. "Good luck getting any answers out of him" she said with a yawn, before heading to bed.

Rolling her eyes, Catherine sat down and studied the man as he slept. He had curly black hair that rested slightly on his brow, pale lips that were positioned in a slight smile with freckles dotted across his cheeks. Leaning in closer, Catherine gasped when she noticed a pair of pale blue eyes staring up at her. Her cheeks staining a vivid shade of red, she moved back so she was sitting on the stool once again. As Catherine did all this, the man continued to stare at her, a smile playing on his lips. Apologising profusely, she began to introduce herself.

"I'm Catherine, your plane crashed in a nearby field." she told the man. Nodding as she spoke, he smiled "I remember. I think you've told me this before." Catherine blushed an even deeper colour of red. Then all of a sudden Catherine burst into laughter, soon after the man began to chuckle. When they had finished, they were both out of breath. "Where was I?" she asked herself out loud, before blushing again.

"You were telling me that your name was Catherine and that my plane crashed in a nearby field. I'm not exactly sure where I am though, would you care to fill me in?" he asked. "Okay, You are in New Zealand, near a town called Westport." She tried to think of anything else he might need to know. "How about you tell me something about you?" she asked in a teasing tone.

"Ok. Where to start? My name is Robert Smith and I am part of a group called the British Commonwealth Aviation Protection Force. B.C.A.P.F for short. It is a group of English pilots that are training for protection of the countries of the commonwealth." He smiled as he said this. Beginning to become intrigued, Catherine leant in closer before asking. "How did you get into the B.C.A.P.F?" When Robert saw that she was interested, he began to smile. "I was chosen when I was young. My Dad was an Army Pilot and a good one too. He was killed in a German attack, trying to save civilians. I was eleven at the time. So, I suppose the Army took me in, hoping I would be like my Father." He smiled sadly. Catherine felt for him.

“You can stay here until you are well again. I will help you fix your plane, although I’ll admit, I don’t know much, so you can go off once more and protect the countries of the Commonwealth once again.” she said in a determined voice.

Months passed and the bond between Robert and Catherine began to grow. Eventually, when Robert was well again, they decided to try fixing his plane. When Robert initially saw his plane, he was heartbroken. His pride and joy was in pieces around the scorched field. Moving closer to the aircraft, Robert and Catherine discovered the plane wasn’t as badly damaged as they originally thought. The body of the plane was still intact, and only had minor paint damage and scorch marks. Robert nodded when he saw this, obviously pleased the damage was not too major. “We can fix this. Right?” Catherine asked. Robert nodded again, before walking off to examine another piece of plane that had broken off in the rough landing. Beginning to feel excited, Catherine ran over to Robert, who was bent over an object he had found. Tossing it to the ground in frustration, he put his head in his hands. “We can fix this.” Catherine said, certain they would.

Bit by bit they began to fix the plane, though the limited resources made it difficult to accomplish their goal. When the machine was complete, Catherine was shocked when Robert told her that he would have to fly back to the port in Auckland before flying to Samoa, where he had been stationed. The date was scheduled for the 1st of March, meaning they only had two more weeks together.

When the date eventually came, Catherine and her Mother said their final goodbyes as Robert climbed in the cockpit, preparing to take off. With a loud roar, the plane lifted into the sky. As if to show off, Robert circled the plane over the fields, before disappearing into the clouds. Turning to her Mother, Catherine began to sob. Although she would miss him and was sad at the thought of him leaving, she was proud that she had gotten to know someone so special.

By Sophie Monk 8WH



A British plane in 1943.