

Amorce A-

'Abandon aircraft! Jump! Jump!

It was 12:20 a.m. On 29 July 1944 when Flight-Lieutenant Noel Stokes of RAF 75 (NZ) Squadron shouted his final order above the raucous engines of his stricken Lancaster bomber. He had tried everything he knew to save the aircraft but nothing had worked. He knew he could hold on a little longer, but he was nearly exhausted and it was not worth risking the lives of his crew (...)

This possibility prompted George Sander's question on the intercom:

"What about you, Noel?"

"I'm just going to make sure I don't hit the village up ahead" Replied Stokes.

George stayed there, watching his friends and then said:

"So, I'm staying with you too!

"You can live! Don't sacrifice yourself!" he insisted.

"If you think I'm going to leave you here, you are wrong! If you stay, I stay!" George replied.

Noel thought about it and then didn't insist any more.

"You can stay with me..."

George took place next to Noel.

"We must do something otherwise we are going to crash on this village." exclaimed Noel.

"Turn the handle" advised George.

"This is what I am trying to do!"

George and Noel succeeded in diverting the aircraft's course. None of them dared to say something knowing that, in a few minutes, they were going to die. Suddenly George remembered their meeting.

"Hey, Noel... Do you remember when we first met?"

Noel didn't say anything but he smiled because he thought back.

The day they met was on Recruitment Day for young soldiers. Noel had been in the army for one year. They were in the same room. Their first discussion, if we can call that a discussion, had been a cold exchange. Noel took his role of lieutenant very seriously.

Annoyed by his behaviour, George didn't refrain from telling him. Noel recognized he had exaggerated but he told him, he wanted to test his limits. Since that day, they had been inseparable. George became the little brother Noel never had. They fought side by side, supported and reassured each other and they lived everyday with the fear of losing the other.

"You were really uncommunicative" remembered George.

"If you hadn't been here, I would still be like that."

The soil approached rapidly. To forget their fear, Noel and George chatted. They remembered this vigils they had experienced. Like when, they got drunk, they partied, they danced... Or, when they helped each other while fighting. So they laughed, they had almost forgotten the crash.

"In your opinion, George, is there anything after death?" Noel asked

"I don't know." replied George

"Why? Are you afraid?" he continued.

"Who would not? But it's not death itself which scares me!" Stated Noel.

"So, what scares you?"

"What scares me is what is after death. I am afraid not to see the people I love again, to lose them forever!" He confessed

"Did you know my wife gave birth to our first child yesterday?" He continued. "It's a boy!"

Noel had a smile from ear to ear, thinking about his little boy. He tried to imagine his face and all the things they could live together.

"I can't wait to see him! But I'm afraid this day will never happen!"

The aircraft was just a few meters from the ground.

"So live, live out your dream to see your boy and to see your wife! Fight like never before!" bellowed George before jumping on Noel and thus protecting him from the impact. The aircraft crashed...

George's body had protected Lieutenant Stokes. The latter opened his eyes and pushed the burnt body of his dear dead friend. The aircraft was in a thousand pieces. Flames were present all around and gasoline flowed. Noel felt tears invade his soft blue ocean eyes at the sight of his best friend's burned body. He had saved his life, he had sacrificed his life for him. He couldn't believe he was dead. Him. His best friend, his fighting brother, the most nicest and helpful man he knew. "He didn't deserve to die, I should have die! Not him!" thought Noel. Suddenly the smell of gasoline invaded his nostrils, he realized that the gasoline was too close to the flames, he had to get away but he was too weak. Several of his bones were broken. He hadn't the strength, he wanted to stay there and die to join his brother.

Then he remembered George's last words "Fight like never before". He couldn't refuse him his last will. He then found a sudden superhuman strength, he crawled away with difficulty, because of his broken leg. Twenty yards away, he collapsed on to the ground. The last image he saw was the aircraft, which exploded and then complete darkness...

"George" was the last word he whispered.

«Noel, Noel my love! Wake up!»

This voice, was so familiar to him. He could recognize it among a thousand. But was it a dream? No, It wasn't a dream, he knew very well. He wanted to wake but something prevented. Like if something horrible waited it but this voice gave him the will to wake up to see the face which was so dear to him

When he was awake, he saw his dead friend, the aircraft exploding into pieces, gasoline and flames.

"Leslie, is that you?"

"Oh my god, you are awake! Yes, my love, it's me! I feared I wouldn't see you again, hear you voice..."

"Don't worry, I'm fine!" reassured Noel.

He smiled to her and she returned the smile.

"Leslie?"

"Yes, my sweetheart"

"Where is George?"

Suddenly Leslie's face changed, her smile disappeared and her gaze broke, her eyes shone with sadness. She lowered her head with a sad air.

"I'm so sorry Darling..."

She raised her head and Noel found that tears were running down her beautiful face

Then he understood that none of it had been a dream: the flames, the gasoline, the aircraft, George's burnt body, all was true.

Noel felt tears well up in his eyes but he swallowed then. George wouldn't have wanted them mourning his death.

"His funeral is in a week....and Mrs Sander wanted you say the farewell speech." Leslie explained.

"But if you don't feel able to do it, she continued, I can tell her nicely and..."

"No! He interrupted, I want to do it! I owe him after what he did to me..."

"I understand but what happened?"

Noel answered nothing and he looked at the floor.

"Darling if you don't want to talk, I understand of course." Assured Leslie

"No, I will tell you."

Noel explained what happened . She didn't interrupt. While he told her the whole story she admired to her husband.

A week passed and the doctors let Noel exit for the burial. He was accompanied by doctors because of his physical condition.

Noel put on his uniform and Leslie a pretty dark dress.

The burial took place in the village's church where George was born. As. Just in front of the altar was George's coffin occupied George. It was surrounded by really beautiful flowers of all imaginable colours. The wide aisles , bordered by many rows of benches ,led to the altar the church. Noel and his wife went to sit next to George's mother, MRS. Sander.

After several people, it was Noel's turn to speak. His wife accompanied him to the altar and returned sit down after she had helped her husband. Noel cast a look circular. He felt tears in his eyes. He took a deep breath and began his speech carefully prepared.

"Every man is master of his destiny George chose his. But I was hoping for him a less tragic destiny."At these words tears streaming down his face.

"Every man was born, grows up and finally dies, that's life..."

Death, is hard, brutal and scaring. It's like the flames we swallow which cut all our hopes. She is here to await us, to bury us, separate us from our life forever. Some deaths are more brutal than others .

Now George is in a peaceful place.

That person with that incredible and unique sense of humor was my best friend, my fighting brother, my confident. He was the most courageous, generous and emotionally strong person I knew. I remember the day we met, he was so happy and remained communicative while I was inexpressive, serious and solitary. He taught me to appreciate life because life is short and cruel but it can also be wonderful if we decide it.

When the war's clouds hid life's bright sunshine, he was always there for me. I didn't stop repeating that we were not going to get out, but he ... remained optimistic. I admired him for his courage and self-control. Even if he didn't show it, I knew that, inside, he was afraid, terribly afraid. War is something appalling, inhuman. When a war ends, winners rejoice in their victory. But victory is worth many men's life. They don't know the harm they are doing: destroyed families, deaths, traumas... The day of the crash, if he hadn't jumped over me when the plane crashed, I would be dead. But when I look back, I tell myself that it should have been me who should have died. A man so beautiful inside shouldn't have died!

George was part of those exceptional people who leave this world too soon. The pain will always be present in each of us, George ... I am going to terribly miss you. Life will never be the same without you and your, not always very tasteful, jokes will always make me laugh. I will always love you, no matter what happens and I will think of you every day of my life. Goodbye George, rest in peace!"

Noel went and leaned over the coffin's lid and laid a flower

-I will never forget you....

Never.