

# SURVIVE THE NIGHT

## PROLOGUE

On the morning of July 18, 1944, what started as a decisive attack that would break the back of the German Luftwaffe, ended abruptly in the skies above Memmingen, Germany ... setting in motion a ten-month nightmarish odyssey for the pilot of *Addie's Armor*, Gus Bodine.

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Captain Bodine put *Addie's Armor* into a climb rate of 550 ft per minute on a heading that would bring them to the marshalling point 15,000 ft above the Italian countryside. He knew that things would get very busy ... very soon.

“Sergeant Richardson, I need to talk to the fellas. Put me on the intercom.”

If his crewmen were half as jittery as he was about their biggest combat mission to date, they needed his leadership and reassurance.

The radioman flipped the switch. “You’re on the air, Skipper.”

“Captain to crew: You guys are ready. We are only one plane among over two hundred. Your knowledge and commitment to excellence are as strong as any of the crews up here. Just remember, we’re more than just a crew. We are brothers. Things are going to get busy, and I want to give each of you a chance to speak whatever is on your mind to say. I’ll start. ...I made a promise to my wife that I would return to her. I intend to keep my word. The only way I know of to do that is to focus every thought on the job.

“Spud, how about you? Are you good to go?”

“Radios tuned in, and I’m anxious to get back to Sterparone, sir. ...Nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs, though. ...Over.”

“Copy that.” Gus chuckled at the time-worn joke by the Idaho potato farmer’s son turned B-17 radioman.

“Sergeant Clayton?”

The ball turret gunner (the ball turret is the plexiglass sphere attached to the belly of the airplane – arguably the most dangerous position on the plane) keyed his mic. “I’ll never get used to the idea that there is a man inside every plane I shoot at. I’ll do what I need to, though. I always have. I’m with you guys all the way. Oh, and be sure to lower the landing gear before we land so I don’t get road rash, Skipper.”

“Again with the jokes, eh, Clay?” Gus and his co-pilot, Hank Barenz, had a good laugh.

Every noncom and officer echoed the sentiments of commitment, duty, and brotherhood. They all wanted to be home again. Hank ended the round-robin conversation, “Lieutenant Barenz here. I’ve been flying next to Captain Bodine and you knuckleheads since our first wheels up as a crew. He is, without a doubt, a man I trust with my life to get me back to my bride, Linda.”

“Gentlemen, what we know, what we’ve trained for, and what we’ve put to use for our missions so far, is our best chance of getting back home. Bodine: Out.” Gus returned his mic to the mounting clip.

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The raid on the Memmingen aerodrome began with the largest armada of B-17 Fortresses ever assembled. Two hundred seventeen of the “Forts” of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF), started the mission from various bases in the area around Foggia, Italy. The newest addition to the group, three dozen B-17Gs, including *Addie’s Armor*, of the 483rd Bombardment Group, arrived in-theater at Sterparone Army Air Force Base in northern Italy in March 1944. Known for their excellence in bombing accuracy, the new B-17Gs were ordered to form up in the rear echelon as they flew to the intended targets.

*Bravo Flight Leader to flight: Watch your separation distances. Stay on my wing.*

*I'll guide us into position.*

Capt. Bodine flew his plane into her assigned position as his two wingmen tucked in close off either wingtip.

*Whang!* The ear-piercing metal against metal explosion, caused by a nearly direct hit of an exploding 88 mm shell burst, momentarily deafened the crew. First one engine burst into flames, then another. *Addie's Armor* nosed down in a death spiral as a squadron of German Me 109s and Fw 190s swarmed overhead witnessing the destruction.

# CHAPTER 1

## *Summer 1936 / Provo, Utah*

Gus Bodine charged through the mudroom door and into the kitchen where his mother was busy preparing the evening meal for the family. She slid a pan of dinner rolls into the oven and closed the oven door.

“Shhh. I don’t want the rolls to fall. What’s got you into such a tizzy, sweetie?”

“I got it! I passed my driver’s test mom! I can’t wait to tell Addie!”

Gerry Bodine entered through the same door and strode into the kitchen. “Mmmm ... smells good in here. Is that a pork roast I smell?”

“It is. Your son said he passed his driver’s test. I guess it’s time to let him start driving now.” Anna Bodine was not keen on the idea, but Gus had kept his word to keep his grades up, help around the house with chores, and help his father down at the car dealership on weekends and summer breaks. He was given a substantial allowance as a reward, but truth be known, he would have worked with the mechanics at *Bodine Chevrolet-Buick* for free. In two years, he had grown into a “fair to middlin’ apprentice mechanic,” to quote “Bo” (short for Beauregard) Taggart, the boss of the company’s repair and detail shop. Gus loved learning about the mechanical details of cars, and had grown to like listening to Bo’s thick Georgia accent as he taught him the inner workings of the internal combustion engine.

“Hey, Mom, I’m going to run down to the park for an hour or so. I’ll be back before nine, okay?” Gus was out the door before his mother could say anything.

Gerry walked into the living room and sat down on the sofa next to his wife. He had a conspiratorial look and a certain smile that Anna knew all too well, an expression that usually made itself known on birthdays, anniversaries, and Christmas.

“Is there something that you want to say, my husband?” Anna placed her crochet hook and yarn on the coffee table and smiled warmly. “What have you done, dear?”

“Bill Farley traded in his car for a new Buick Special that we just put in the showroom. I had Bo Taggart give Bill’s Ford a once over. The engine sounds like a bucket of bolts rattling around, and the clutch is shot. I offered him three hundred on trade for the Buick. He accepted the deal after the usual dickering. Anyway, Bill has his new Buick, and I have a Model B Ford with a near-death engine and clutch.”

“Hmm, dear. Do I sense an early Christmas present for Gus about to evolve in your story?”

“I suppose so. After all, you’ve known me for the better part of twenty-three years—over twenty of them living under the same roof. Sometimes I think you know what I’m going to say before I do! Anyway, I thought I’d sell the Ford to Gus for a hundred bucks.”

“Sell?” Anna looked at her husband with a raised eyebrow. “He’s your son, not a customer.”

“Of course, dear, but just hear me out. I’ll charge him one-hundred dollars for the car. Gus can do the repairs himself. I could probably have it fixed and sell it for a tidy profit, but I’d rather see the smile on Gus’ face when he hears he has a ‘new’ car! That’ll be worth the price of admission, right? Besides that, when he puts his own sweat and money into it, I think he’ll appreciate it much more than if I were to simply give him the Ford. In my own defense, it’s no different than what we did for Russ two years ago when we helped him buy his first car,” Gerry added.

Anna Bodine chuckled, as she recalled Russell’s 16th birthday. He and Gerry found a 1928 Plymouth Model Q Roadster (powered by a 4-cylinder, 170.3 cubic inch power plant that

produced a whopping 45 hp at 2800 rpm) owned by Keith Salisbury, apple farmer. The car was in pristine condition but was too small and under-powered for a family of four. So it was, that the Salisbury family became the proud owners of a year-old Oldsmobile Special 4-door Touring Sedan, and Russell Bodine came into possession of his dream car, a '28 Plymouth Model Q Roadster.

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Addie and Gus sat on a bench beneath the canopy of the gazebo in the center of Pioneer Park. Gus reached for Addie's hand and sighed deeply.

"These are the memories that warm my heart the most ... sitting here with you. Do you remember the first time, Addie? Our first dance?"

"May ... I think it was Friday the thirteenth. Yes ..." She let her head rest on Gus' shoulder. "We were in the seventh grade. We walked up Center Street from Dixon Junior High toward the park when I saw the Gazebo through the trees." She squeezed Gus' hand.

He picked up the story from there. "You asked me to carry you to the Gazebo. I remember feeling so ... so grown up. It was silly, I know, but I was twelve going on 'grown up' in my mind. I never wanted that night to end."

Gus and Addie reminisced, reliving the memories of the four years they had been best friends. Now, at 16 and much more than mere friends, they couldn't imagine being apart ... growing apart ... ever.