



UNDER A WAR-TORN SKY

by *L. M. Elliott*

About this book: Just nineteen years old, Henry Forester is the youngest pilot in his Air Force squadron. Still, he's one of their best fliers, facing Hitler's Luftwaffe in the war-torn skies above France. But when his plane is shot down on a mission behind enemy lines, Henry finds himself on a whole new battleground. Wounded, hungry, and afraid, he struggles toward freedom on foot, relying on the kindness of ordinary French citizens and the cunning of members of the French Resistance to reach the next town alive. Each day brings him nearer to home and closer to danger. Yet even as Henry struggles for his own survival in a hostile country, he quickly grows to realize the great peril that surrounds all the French people, and to admire the strength and determination of the freedom fighters who risk death to protect him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Henry travels hundreds of miles on foot to escape capture by Nazi troops. Using a map of France, trace his route from the scene of his bailing out to his final rescue.
2. During the course of the novel, Henry travels two "odysseys"- one is his physical escape and the other is a journey of personal discovery. How are the two odysseys linked? What does he discover about mankind and himself along the way? How does he change?
3. Henry's father, Clayton, is a harsh, never-ending voice in Henry's mind. How does this help Henry and how does it hurt him? Why do you think Clayton is the way he is? In the end, Henry realizes that his father had done the "wrong things for the right reasons." What does he mean by that?
4. Sometimes characters personify a theme or idea. What could Pierre symbolize? What could Billy or Madame Gaulloise represent?
5. To help a flier escape, the Resistance often needed many people to play-act a variety of roles in a sequence of carefully planned events. These exchanges had to happen quickly and fluidly. In chapter eight, Henry is rescued by a series of strangers. How many are there? Who are they and what roles do they perform? How do you think Henry felt when he realizes, "He'd been handled, just like a hot potato. He was a package no one wanted to be caught holding."
6. To survive, American fliers had to put their lives into the hands of complete strangers, many of whom spoke no English. Recall a time when you had to count on strangers to help you or your family. Write a short narrative about the experience.
7. The novel includes many passages of French dialogue. What does the author accomplish by doing this? How would it have been different if the dialogue were only in English?

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8. Aiding fliers was risky. If caught by Nazi troops or turned in by a collaborator, a French person would be executed. His or her family might be arrested, questioned, and killed. Why do you think the French took such terrible risks? How is this kind of courage different from the bravery needed in battle? How is it similar?

9. Compare Patsy and Claudette. How are they alike? How are they different? Do you think witnessing war first hand might make Patsy more like Claudette?

10. Why do you think the old German soldier releases Henry?

11. Think about your reactions to the novel as you read it. Do you think that there is an overall lesson or moral in the story?

12. Imagine that you have been asked to write a description with some commentary for the back cover. Create one paragraph that tells the reader what the story is about and gives him/her a reason to read it.

13. Henry has to leave behind those who have helped him, not knowing their fate. What do you think happens to Madame Gaulloise? To Pierre? To Claudette? Outline your own sequel. (*The author is currently writing hers!*)

ADDITIONAL GUIDES AND WEB PAGES

The Fairfax Network interviewed L.M. Elliott for their program "Meet the Author"

This excellent activity guide accompanied the program:

<http://www.fcps.k12.va.us/fairfaxnetwork/MTA/activityguides/elliott.pdf>

For the British edition of *Under a War-torn Sky*, Usborne Publishing produced a webpage with film clips and personal stories of Resistance fighters. Go to <http://www.usborne-quicklinks.com/>; click on United Kingdom; enter the keyword *war-torn* in the search prompt. Or type in: http://usborne-quicklinks.com/uk/uk_entity_pages/uk_all_links_no_text.asp?lvl=1&id=1943

Finally, visit the author's website <http://www.lmelliott.com> for a list of WWII books. One of the best catalogues of WWII websites is compiled by PBS: <http://www.besthistorysites.net/WWII.shtml>

HISTORIC FIGURES AND ITEMS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. President Franklin D. Roosevelt
2. Prime Minister Winston Churchill
3. General Charles de Gaulle (and the Free French)
4. Jean Moulin (and the Resistance)
5. Philippe Petain (and Vichy France)
6. Hitler (and the Third Reich)
7. American B-24 and B-17 bombers, Mustang and Thunderbolt fighters; Junkers and Messerschmitts of the Luftwaffe
8. D-Day
9. The home front: black-outs, rationing, scrap drives, war bonds, propaganda slogans



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

L.M. Elliott wrote for the *Washingtonian* magazine, in the nation's capital, for two decades before devoting her time to fiction for young adults and children. *Under a War-torn Sky* is a NCSS/CBC Notable Children's Social Studies book, a Jefferson Cup Honor Book, and winner of the 2001 Borders' Original Voices Award for Young Adult Literature. Her Civil War novel, *Annie, Between the States*, is an IRA Teachers' Choice, a New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age, and a finalist in the Virginia Readers Choice 2006-2007. *Flying South*, set in 1968, won the Joan G. Sugarman Award for Children's Literature. Her next novel, *Give Me Liberty*, will be published September 2006. Elliott lives in Virginia with her family and can be visited on-line at www.lmelliott.com.