



# **The Few: The American "Knights of the Air" Who Risked Everything to Fight in the Battle of Britain**

*Alex Kershaw*

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By the summer of 1940 World War II had been under way for nearly a year. Hitler was triumphant and planning an invasion of England. But the United States was still a neutral country and, as Winston Churchill later observed, "the British people held the fort alone." A few Americans, however, did not remain neutral. They joined Britain's Royal Air Force to fight Hitler's air aces and help save Britain in its darkest hour. The Few is the never-before-told story of these thrill-seeking Americans who defied their country's neutrality laws to fly side-by-side with England's finest pilots. They flew the lethal and elegant Spitfire, and became "knights of the air." With minimal training and plenty of guts they dueled the skilled pilots of Germany's Luftwaffe in the blue skies over England. They shot down several of Germany's fearsome aces, and were feted as national heroes in Britain. By October 1940, they had helped England win the greatest air battle in the history of aviation. At war's end, just one of the "Few" would be alive. The others died flying, wearing the RAF's dark blue uniform-each with a shoulder patch depicting an American eagle. As Winston Churchill said, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

## **The Few: The American ""Knights of the Air"" Who Risked Everything to Fight in the Battle of Britain Details**

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## **From Reader Review *The Few: The American "Knights of the Air" Who Risked Everything to Fight in the Battle of Britain* for online ebook**

### **'Aussie Rick' says**

I picked up a copy of this book at the airport in Singapore a few years back and read it cover to cover by the time my plane had landed at Sydney airport in Australia. A pretty good book covering the exploits of a number of American pilots who joined the Royal Air Force and its fighter squadrons during the Battle of Britain. The story is well told and the book was a joy to read, covering an aspect not normally found in many history books, again, highly recommended reading!

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### **Alisa says**

I really think highly of Alex Kershaw's ability to blend the horrors and excitement of war with thorough research and a recognition that these are young men (in this case) risking their lives for philosophical commitments like freedom and patriotism, as well as acknowledging that they were also high-flying dare devils who really wanted to fly. The 7 Americans and one American under Canadian passport who are the center of this book risked prison to fly for the British in 1940 because of America's commitment to neutrality. A very fast read, even though I have limited knowledge of WWII battles and less about fighter pilots and airplanes, I recommend it without reservation.

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### **Michael says**

There are three groups of Americans who went to World War II long before the U.S. entered the war. First there was a group of Chinese American pilots from Eugene, Oregon who travelled to China and flew against the Japanese. Almost nothing has been written about these brave Americans. Then there was the American Volunteer Group, the Flying Tigers, whose exploits are almost mythic. Then there were those Americans who, in violation of American neutrality, travelled to England and flew for England against Germany. "The Few" is about some of the pilots in this latter group who, seven in number, flew during the Battle of Britain, in effect the few of the few. Only one of the seven would survive the war. "The Few" follows the exploits of these brave men, where they came, why they fought, how they lived and how they died. It was a time when just a few men could make a big difference and Alex Kershaw did a first rate job of telling thier story. Now if someone would just write a book about those Chinese pilots from Oregon, now that would be something.

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### **Fred Shaw says**

"Never have so many owed so much to so few." Winston Churchill, 1940, during the Battle of Britain. There were many great leaders in WWII, but in my mind, there were 2 who were the greatest: Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Churchill for his vision, compassion and determination, and Roosevelt for his humanity, foresight, and conscience to fight with his countrymen to come to the aid of England and the world.

This is the second book I've read by Alex Kershaw, and I was not disappointed. "The Few" is the story about American pilots who went to the aid of England when the German war machine was zeroing in to destroy her. The Americans had to give up their rights as US citizens, due to US neutrality laws, to fly RAF Spitfires and fight the "Hun". It is also a story of a nation that even when faced with overwhelming odds, stood courageously to face the Nazis. Finally Kershaw gives us a view into the enemy and how even with their advantage of numbers in pilots and war aircraft were humiliated and repeatedly turned back by the Royal Air Force, aided by the few American Eagle Squadron.

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### **Eddie says**

Besides being a very clear account of England's WW2 struggles when they fought alone. The story of the seven Americans who joined the battle was just wonderfully told. As someone smarter than me once said "England did not win the war but they did not lose the war."

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### **Bear says**

If you are into WWII aviation, this book will capture your attention. The author tells the personal stories of the first Americans to fight in WWII on the side of the British; they broke many laws to do so, but knew the coming storm of war would not abate once Europe fell to Adolph Hitler and his military; Britain was in a time of dire need, and unlike many Americans and their comfortable, isolationist lives, these young men risked everything (and in most cases, ultimately paid with their lives) to fly in the RAF, fighting the Luftwaffe. Without the dedication and sacrifice of men like these, (and many other men from other countries as well), Britain might not have survived the "Battle of Britain". I am in awe of people with such convictions; I thought mine were strong, but compared to these guys I'm an amateur.

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### **Mike Thomas says**

This is a very good book about American pilots that fought with the British during WWII and in so doing defied the American Neutrality Act prior to the US getting into the war. They were effectively breaking the law to fight against Hitler's air power and defend Great Britain. The battles are described by some of the remaining veterans so you get first hand knowledge that's really very descriptive. What is very interesting besides the battles is the lengths these men went to just to fight for Great Britain, sneaking out of the US to fight in France, the red tape they had to go through eventually slowed them down so much that France had surrendered before they could even fight for them which is how they ended up fighting for Great Britain. And that was just as slow a process due to the Neutrality Act and actually happened due to a chance meeting on a ship while crossing the Atlantic months earlier. In the end they all become hero's in their own right, as they should. Overall it makes you appreciate the type of people that Americans were during WWII.

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## **Mike Lanski says**

An amazing and sad story of the brave Americans who went to Britain despite their country being neutral at that time and flew with the RAF.

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## **Mike says**

Everyone knows Churchill's famous quote from the Battle of Britain. But of the "few", 20% were not British but were from other nations. And within that small group was an even smaller group, a **Few** Americans, officially 7 but actually 8 (you'll just have to read the book to find out). These few pilots were breaking the law, the Neutrality Act, and had to sneak out of the US and into the UK. There are some amazing adventures just getting there. Mr Kershaw seems to bring the skills of a novelist to telling the history of small groups. The book grabs you and never lets go. These pilots sacrifice a lot to help defend Britain. The hectic pace of battle, the excitement and terror of flying, the appalling losses on both sides, the famous aces of both sides are all here. The US ambassador to the UK, Joseph Kennedy, does not come off well here. He along with many others, thought the Brits would be defeated. Instead, the battle was turned barely in time and these Americans were there to help. Read *The Few: The American "Knights of the Air" Who Risked Everything to Fight in the Battle of Britain* and you will come to see it easily get **5 Stars**

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## **David Bennett says**

Excellent very well researched, engaging book covering a lesser known corner of WWII history. Highly recommended!

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## **Pat says**

Really fun book focusing on the few Americans to join the British air force as Germany attempted to invade. Most of my reading on WWII has focused on the US involvement so my knowledge of the war in 1940 wasn't the best but the author paints the big picture really well even while focusing on individual pilots. There are even some snippets looking at the more famous German pilots of the time. Dogfights, tragedy, triumph, and courage at individual and national levels. This had everything I want in the war stories I read.

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## **Paul Pessolano says**

"The Few: The American "Knights of the Air" Who Risked Everything to Fight in the Battle of Britain" by Alex Kershaw, Published by Da Capo Press.

Category – World War II Publication Date – October 24, 2006.

Every once in awhile you come across a very unique and interesting story that very few people know about, so is the case with this book. It is the story of a few brave Americans who joined the fight to save England. These young men were flight enthusiasts who had a great desire to fly. They made their way to England to join the Royal Air Force, even though they could lose their American Citizenship by defying the United States neutrality at the beginning of World War II. These young men had to fight to get accepted into the RAF, even when England was hurting for pilots. Part of the problem was that these men had very little flight time and none in a combat situation.

The first "Few", eight to be exact, all were killed in combat except one who survived the war.

The book gives a vivid description of the exploits of these men and the air battle over Great Britain. Very few people, to this day, are aware of the sacrifices made by these young men both in the United States and Great Britain.

A wonderful read especially for those World War II buffs, but also one that should interest those looking for something different to read.

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### **Wes says**

This is an excellent study of the Few Americans that initially risked their citizenship to fight for Great Britain against the Luftwaffe onslaught.

Mr. Kershaw writes a quick moving narrative where you the reader become attached to the pilots that served.

I'm not an expert on the Battle of Britain, so learned some new facts about the air battle and what odds these dedicated pilots were up against.

These pilots of the RAF had guts to go on multiple sorties a day not knowing in the next minute whether they will be dead or alive.

I liked how Kershaw incorporated the Luftwaffe pilots as well and put a human face to them and did not paint them as just a typical diabolical enemy.

Great Book!

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### **Jill Hutchinson says**

The title of this book really has two meanings.....first, the Few refers to the RAF in the Battle of Britain as mentioned in one of Churchill's most famous speeches; second, it also refers to the "few" Americans who came to England while the United States was still neutral, to fly and fight with their English brother airmen in the RAF. We seldom hear of those original seven Americans who risked their citizenship to join the fight against the Nazis. And what a group they were, a two-time Olympic gold medalist in bob sledding; a 4'10" fellow who needed a pillow to reach the Spitfire instruments; the son of White Russian immigrants; and just

plain Joes. (Only one of these pilots survived the war.) The author uses excerpts from logbooks, diaries, and letters to flesh out the characters of these men. He also provides the stories of the German Luftwaffe aces, especially Galland and Molder who ruled the skies over the Channel, at least for a while. It is a wonderful book which tells of the heroics of those men who felt that they must come to the aid of England in her darkest hour.

The final sentence in the book pretty much tells it all. In Sussex, on the gravestone of RAF Pilot Officer Billy Fiske, the first American pilot to die in the Battle of Britain, the following words are inscribed for all to see.

AN AMERICAN CITIZEN WHO DIED THAT ENGLAND MIGHT LIVE.

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### **Patrick Belair says**

This is a very good read. If you are interested in The Battle of Britain you should check this out. 7 brave American's choose to ignore America's neutrality and face arrest to help Britain in her hour of need. True hero's.

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