



The Spitfire Fund

Chapter 1

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Written for children aged 7+

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Yusra, Lily and Danny had been studying the Spitfire in the RAF Museum, London for 10 minutes – and from all angles – when it happened.

Work in threes and create a school project about something important you can find from history, Mrs Trenchard had told them.

They all wanted to do the Spitfire. It was such an obvious choice for their Year 7 history project. Was there any more famous object in the history of Britain?

No.

Yusra saw the lady first. She pointed her out to Lily and Danny and the trio considered her as she came towards them.

Medium height. Light hair. A hat with a brim. A kind smile. And – in front of her – a collecting tin and a small board of pin badges.

'Care to support the Spitfire Fund?' the lady asked. Her voice sounded clipped, like the Queen's on Christmas Day.



Lily squinted at the pin badges. Four rows of tiny brass Spitfires. 'Do you get a badge if you donate?' Lily asked, her hand already in her pocket.

'Yes, my dear,' the lady replied.

Each of the three friends put a pound coin in the lady's tin. They saw it had the words:

OUR LOCAL FIGHTER PLANE FUND

written on it, along with a simple line drawing of a Spitfire.

Now they looked at their pin badges, which felt cold and metallic. They were two centimetres wide and had the word SPITFIRE engraved across the wings.



Each of the trio carefully pinned the badge onto their school jumpers.

Immediately everything changed.

Dramatically.

Frighteningly.

For Lily it was the smell of petrol or some sort of fuel burning and crowds of faces around her. For Yusra it was loud buzzing and vibrations running straight through her. Danny could see a huge sky above him, tiny planes weaving their trails in corkscrews and spirals. Instinctively, they grabbed each other.

It was Lily who acted first, tearing off her pin badge, then easing the tiny Spitfires off the tops of Danny and Yusra too. They staggered to sit on a row of three chairs away from the aircraft.

'What was that?'

'Did you?'

'I don't understand ...'

Now each of them turned over their Spitfire badge in their hands.

'Mine's warm,' Yusra said. 'Really warm. It was cold before.'

Lily nodded. 'Mine too.'

'When I had this on ...' Lily said, holding up her pin badge to the light.

'... you were somewhere else,' Danny finished her sentence.

'Yes.'

'Me too,' Yusra agreed. 'Do you think ...' her voice trailed off.

Danny was glancing nervously around the RAF Museum, under the roofs of the old hangar, between the Lancaster and the Lightning aeroplanes, searching for the lady.

'She's vanished,' he told the two girls.

'We should have asked her more about what the Spitfire Fund is,' Lily frowned. 'We need to ask someone. So that we can understand.'

Together the three children approached two members of staff in red uniforms, Museum Ground Crew written across their backs. One woman. One man.

'Excuse me,' Lily began. 'Can you tell us any information about the Spitfire Fund, please?'

They had all concealed their pin badges in their pockets or hands.

'Of course. That's a great question,' the woman said, her eyes excited. It was clear she loved the Museum and the stories the planes had to tell its visitors.

'In 1940 the Nazis were planning to attack and occupy Britain,' she began, 'like they had occupied most of the rest of Europe. And we needed Spitfire aircraft to defend ourselves. But there wasn't enough money to pay for them, so hundreds of people volunteered to collect money from the public and gave them little badges as a way of saying thank you. A bit like poppies or red noses now. There's a real example on display in Hangar One.'

Danny was desperate to show the woman his badge, but, after a sharp look from Lily, he kept it in his pocket.

The woman carried on explaining. 'People would donate a penny. 6d would pay for a sparkplug. And some people donated more. £40 for a petrol tank. Or £2,000 for a Merlin engine. Towns used to compete against each other to see who could raise money for a whole Spitfire. There was a famous case in Wolverhampton, near where our other RAF Museum is in Cosford: a whole Spitfire aircraft was paid for by the people who lived there. The city was presented with a plaque. You can see the plaque in the Museum.'

'I've been there with my dad,' Yusra interrupted.

'Then,' the man went on, 'soon after that, the Battle of Britain took place. Exactly 80 years ago. Right here. Over London. The battle that saved us from being taken over by the Germans, like this country was once taken over by the Romans, then the Normans.'

After hearing all the fascinating facts from the Museum ground crew the children walked to the café. They bought drinks and cake, then went to sit down outside on one of the benches in the

sunshine.

It was a lovely day. But none of the children had their minds on the weather: they were thinking about what had happened when they had put on their Spitfire Fund badges. As they ate, they discussed all they'd seen and heard and smelled when things had become so weird.

'I saw aeroplanes flying in circles, diving, even crashing into each other,' Danny started. 'And bombs falling on a big city.'

'I saw a mob of people, surrounding us,' Lily pulled a face. 'It was frightening. And ... I smelled petrol.'

'Yeah,' Yusra added, 'And the sound of dozens of planes flying around.'

Yusra, Lily and Danny stared at the skies above them. 'Do you think we were seeing it? The actual Battle of Britain?'

Now a silence. None of them saying anything. But they were all thinking. Lily looked hard at her two friends until they returned her gaze and their faces all changed at the same time. From frowns to smiles.

'The things we saw ...' Yusra started.

'The planes and the bombs and the danger?' Danny asked.

Lily paused before she spoke, just to be sure they were all thinking the same thing. She held up her Spitfire Fund badge and grinned.

'Shall we see what happens if we put them on again?'

As one, the trio began to pin their badges onto their clothes for a second time.

Yusra, Lily and Danny are about to put on their Spitfire Fund pin badges to find out if what happened to them the first time happens again. What will they see, smell, hear or feel? Who actually was the lady with the collecting tin? Are they about to have the ultimate history lesson, or be dragged into a frightening war that was raging in the skies above London just 80 years ago?

Find out more in chapter two of *The Spitfire Fund* ...

Tom Palmer is proud to be the RAF Museum's Children's Author in Residence. He has written several First and Second World War children's books, including the Wings series that he wrote with the help of the RAF Museum, featuring stories about the Sopwith Camel, Spitfire and Typhoon.