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# I SURVIVED

THE BATTLE OF  
D-DAY, 1944

by LAUREN TARSHIS

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D-DAY, 1944



by Lauren Tarshis  
illustrated by Scott Dawson

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# CHAPTER 1



TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 1944  
THE CLIFFS ABOVE OMAHA BEACH  
NORMANDY, FRANCE  
AROUND 1:00 A.M.

Eleven-year-old Paul Colbert was running for his life.

It was D-Day, one of the bloodiest days of World War II. More than 150,000 soldiers from

America, England, and Canada were invading France.

They had sailed across the sea on seven thousand ships, creeping through the dark of night.

Their mission: to free France from the brutal grip of Nazi Germany. It was time to crush the Nazis, and end the war.

In the minutes before the ships arrived, Paul was crouched on a cliff above the beach. He was trying to escape before the battle began. But now warplanes were zooming through the sky. And suddenly there was a shattering blast.

*Kaboom!*

Paul looked up in horror and saw that a plane was now in flames. And it was in a fiery death spiral, heading right for him.

Paul ran wildly as the burning plane fell from the sky. The air filled with the gagging stench of burning metal and melting rubber. The engine screamed and moaned. It sounded like a giant beast bellowing in pain.

No matter where Paul went, the dying plane seemed to be following him, like it wanted Paul to die, too.

And then, *smack!* Something hit Paul on the head. His skull seemed to explode in pain. Paul fell to the ground as the burning wreckage came crashing down.

For four long years, Paul had been praying for this day — for the war to end, for France to be finally free from the Nazis.

But now, it seemed, this day would be his last.



# CHAPTER 2



THE DAY BEFORE  
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 1944  
THE TOWN OF LE ROC  
NORMANDY, FRANCE  
AROUND 11:00 A.M.

Paul kicked his soccer ball along the winding dirt road. For the first time in months, he wasn't worrying about the miserable war. He wasn't wondering whether he'd ever see Papa again. He wasn't thinking about Adolf Hitler,

the evil German Nazi leader, or his soldiers who'd invaded Paul's country, his town, and his life.

*This is going to be a good day*, he told himself. It was his mother's birthday. Paul was going to buy her some cookies.

How long had it been since he or his mother — Maman — had eaten a cookie or a cake or a bar of chocolate? He had no idea. With the war in its fifth year, all the best foods had disappeared. Poor Maman made her coffee out of ground acorns mixed with hot water.

Paul's mouth watered as he remembered biting into a chocolate éclair, with the sweet, velvety cream that slid down his throat. Or a crepe filled with strawberry jam that made his fingers sticky all day.

Maman's favorites were madeleines, little buttery cookies that melted in your mouth. So that's what Paul would get for her.

Paul pictured Maman now — her gentle eyes, her warm smile. She worked all the time, sewing and mending clothing to support them. Some

mornings she was gone making deliveries before he climbed out of bed.

Making Maman happy was worth anything to Paul.

Even his soccer ball.

He gave the brown leather ball a gentle tap with his toe.

That's how he was going to get Maman her cookies. He would sell the ball. Right now he was heading to the dingy little market down by the river. That's where desperate people from Le Roc went to sell things — their wedding rings, their prized books, their last pair of shoes.

Nobody played much soccer these days. Practically every young man in Europe was either fighting in the war or was a prisoner of the Germans. But Paul's soccer ball was leather, which was scarce. Someone could cut it up and turn it into a pair of shoes or gloves.

Paul flinched as he imagined his ball getting butchered. He kicked it even more gently.

Maman and Papa had given it to him for his seventh birthday. He'd rushed over to show it to

his best friend, Gerard. They were both soccer fanatics.

“Now we’re going to the World Cup for sure!” Gerard had said, pushing his curls out of his eyes and cracking that bright, lopsided smile of his.

Over the next few years, this ball had gone everywhere with them.

They’d chased it thousands of times across their schoolyard. They’d dribbled it through the wheat fields and orchards and down every cobblestoned street of their town. They’d practiced penalty kicks on the beach as the waves crashed, diving into the sand to stop the ball from rolling into the ocean.

“Race you!” Paul would shout, and he and Guy would go charging after the ball.

Paul still loved the game. But he hadn’t touched the soccer ball in months.

Not since Gerard had disappeared.

The Nazis had taken Gerard and his family away.

Paul’s stomach twisted as he thought about it. One cold night in March, the Nazis had arrested

every Jewish person in town and shoved them into trucks. Nobody knew for sure where the Nazis had taken them, but there were rumors too horrifying to believe. About children torn away from their parents. About train cars where people were packed so tightly they couldn't breathe. About huge prisons where people were starved and worked to death.

Some nights Paul lay in his bed, praying that what he'd heard wasn't true.

Paul gave his ball a furious kick. Then he closed his eyes and took a breath. *No*, he told himself. He wasn't going to think about the Nazis today. It was Maman's birthday.

This was going to be a good day.



# CHAPTER 3



ONE HOUR LATER

Paul brushed off his soccer ball one last time, then slapped it on the table at the market.

“I’m not taking that,” the man behind the table said gruffly. Paul knew his name was Boris. He was the only leatherworker left in town. “Nobody wants one of those,” Boris said.

Paul scrunched up his face, trying to think of what to say to Boris next.

“But it’s good leather,” Paul said.

Boris shook his head. "Don't want it."

Paul sighed. He hadn't thought of what would happen if he couldn't sell the ball. He grabbed it back and found a quiet spot in the dirt to sit down and think.

This park near the river used to be a place filled with flowers, where families sat on blankets and ate crunchy bread and soft cheese. Where kids threw their bread crusts to the ducks and floated toy sailboats in the river.

There were no flowers anymore, no food for picnics. The Nazis had chopped down the trees and sent the wood to Germany. Nobody came here for fun. Even the ducks were gone; people had eaten them out of desperation.

But Paul had an extra reason for hating it down here. It was something that had happened last fall. Paul picked up a stick and stabbed it into the dirt as the memory flashed through his mind like a jagged piece of glass.

He'd come here with Maman that day, to sell the last of the silver cups she'd inherited from her grandmother. They had to sell the cup to buy coal

for the winter so they wouldn't freeze. Paul was waiting for Maman as she bargained with the merchant who bought silver. And then suddenly Paul saw a man walking very quickly across the park.

Paul instantly recognized him: It was his teacher, Mr. Leon.

Paul and Gerard loved Mr. Leon. He never yelled at them when they kicked their ball through the hall. He told the best stories about the Castle Le Roc, the crumbling old castle at the edge of town. He told them that many believed there was a dragon that still lived in the tower. It was a huge winged beast with a snake's head, a falcon beak, and fiery breath.

"Its glowing eyes peer through the cracks of the tower," he would say, in that low, smooth voice of his. "Its wings go *whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!*"

Most people in town were too scared to go to the castle. But sometimes Paul and Gerard would sneak up there.

But even better than his stories, Mr. Leon made Paul feel safe. No matter what was happening outside their school.

That day in the park, Paul was about to call out to Mr. Leon. But suddenly Mr. Leon broke into a run. And two Nazi soldiers came chasing after him.

Paul closed his eyes, trying to stop the nightmare memory — the three gunshots, the sight of Mr. Leon falling to the ground and then rolling into the river. Paul had watched as his teacher's body sank down. Even now, he couldn't believe that Mr. Leon was gone.

Paul stabbed the dirt with the stick again. He remembered how the Nazis closed down the school after that. They said Mr. Leon was a traitor, a criminal, and a spy.

But as it turned out, Mr. Leon was a hero.

What nobody had known before Mr. Leon's murder was that he belonged to a secret group called the resistance.

It was like a small army, but not with soldiers. Its members were regular people — writers, shopkeepers, farmers, doctors . . . and teachers. They stole Nazi secrets for the Allies. They blew up Nazi trains loaded with weapons and tanks.

It still shocked Paul that Mr. Leon had been in the resistance.

It didn't matter now, though. The resistance had been crushed, in Le Roc and all over France. That's what Paul had heard. The Nazis had hunted the members down, killed thousands of them. And usually the Nazis didn't just shoot them. They tortured them first so they would spill the names of others in their group.

Mr. Leon, people said, had been lucky he died quickly.

Paul closed his eyes. Mr. Leon had risked his life fighting for something important. Couldn't Paul at least try a little harder to get a present for Maman? He couldn't give up so easily.

Back at Boris's table, Paul set the ball down once again.

"I told you," Boris said, his lips closing in a tight line. "Nobody wants that ball. Take it home."

Paul felt a lump forming in his throat.

"Please . . . it's my mother's birthday," he said, struggling to keep his voice steady. "I need the money so I can get her a gift."



Without a word, Boris snatched the ball. He reached into his pocket and handed Paul ten coins.

Paul's heart leaped. He smiled at Boris, then took the coins and ran to the bakery, the one all the Nazi officers went to.

Paul slapped his coins on the counter. The pretty, young shopgirl, Marie, looked at him with surprise.

"One dozen madeleines please," he said.

Five minutes later, Paul had one dozen cookies warm from the oven, tucked into a little white box.

He walked home along the dirt road. He breathed in the sweet, buttery smell.

Maman had said she wouldn't be home until late tonight, after Paul went to bed. But the cookies would stay fresh until then. Paul pictured Maman's smiling face when she took her first bite.

Suddenly the air filled with the ferocious roar of engines.

*Vroom! Vroom!*

Paul whipped around just as a swarm of Nazi soldiers on motorcycles came zooming around the corner.



They were heading right for him.



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