

Recently I read a story book without pictures in it. That may not seem a big deal to you but it certainly is for my non-fiction tastes. However, a decent novelist can occasionally provoke profound ideas in fiction, as happened to me when I read the line, “A dead hero was safe, and could be remembered without anxiety or inconvenience.” *

It brought to mind the 75th anniversary this month of the end of the Battle of Britain. I wrote of its commencement anniversary a couple of months ago: young men rising to the challenge, proving that the “unstoppable” Nazis could be beaten, potentially saving the Royal Navy from having to carry out an ignominious slaughter of the German invasion force (possibly a pyrrhic victory for the RN, too), so saving the lives of many Germans, as well.

Although my assessment of the historical facts won't be shared by absolutely everyone, I hope we can accept a converse of the “dead hero” idea, above. Albeit not undervaluing the lives lost, a *live* hero challenges any tendency to ignore or run away from that which is malignant, simply because he is there to show that he overcame the apparent power of sinister forces. A real presence is more efficacious in making us mindful of what we are doing.

Following the confidence boost they gave to the rest of the country - ie, all was not lost - some of those pilots died on further operations. The majority eventually returned to “civvy street” - but what then do you do when you've already changed history? Living all sorts of lives, they nonetheless bore a living witness to the God-given ability to make a difference for the good.

Curiously, it's the same for Christianity; in both cases people lived on to challenge the world simply by the evidence of their presence still in it. Yet, as the last WW2 pilots fade away, the Christian knows that the hope for the future is that Jesus will not. His real presence is the paradox of history and that presence challenges us to achieve the same.

* Ch 3, “*Second to None*” - Kent (Reeman)