

# **War and Faith**

**Short Biographies  
from the Second World War**

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Author of War and Grace**



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# Preface

**T**he Second World War was the most destructive conflict in human history. In the 2,174 days between Germany's attack on Poland in September 1939 and the surrender of Japan in August 1945 well over forty million people died. Some say that sixty million would be a more accurate figure. Nobody will ever know for certain. And who can calculate the millions who suffered wounds, pain, mental scars and all kinds of loss?

This book tells the stories of eight people and their experiences before, during, and in the years following World War II. Several of them were caught up in the cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazis. Others were actively involved in the fight to defeat the evil ideology which led to such atrocities. All of these people came to a living faith in Christ, and from then on their faith was the driving force behind their lives. Whether the reader is a Christian believer or not, I hope that these true accounts will prove interesting and challenging, perhaps even life-changing.

The book is also intended as a sequel to one which I wrote in 2005 called *War and Grace*. The same approach is adopted in the narration, and the motivation behind the writing is the same for both books. However, interested readers and reviewers need to be reminded that though there are similarities, there are enforced differences. One such difference is the limited amount of suitable material which is available about this horrendous war. I could find no unused Japanese, French, Russian or other writings which were relevant to my theme. The scope of the narratives is, therefore, necessarily governed by the sources now available. Most readers will know of someone who in their opinion could be included in a book of this type. I

am in the same position, but many such people are either very well known, or the reverse is true—there is not enough information about them to write a full biography.

My ambition is the same as that of the apostle John. At the end of the Gospel bearing his name we read these words: ‘... these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31).

**DON STEPHENS**

# 1



**Steve Stevens:**

## **War hero and pioneer missionary pilot**

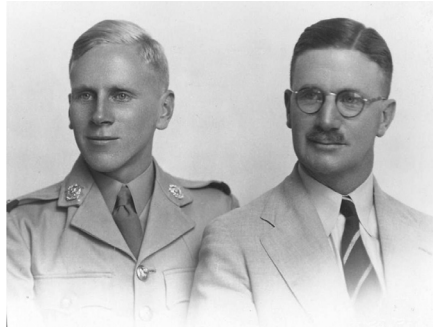
**A**s the end of the Second World War approached, the Allied war effort reached a crescendo. The Nazis were on the run. Defeat stared them in the face. The Allied Air Forces had played a crucial role in bringing about this state of affairs and, with the cessation of hostilities in the not-too-distant future, the thoughts of a number of airmen began to turn to the possibility of a new application for the flying skills which they had learned. Instead of spreading death and destruction, why not use aircraft to bring life and hope?

These airmen came from various countries, including Britain, the United States, Australia and South Africa. They had arrived at this conclusion independently of one another, but they shared the same desire, and in most cases the same Christian faith. All of them knew that some organization would have to take place. Embryonic plans emerged in different ways in the countries involved. The unifying factor among them all was the basic idea: instead of being weapons of war, aircraft could be used for peaceful humanitarian purposes.

One such airman was Lieutenant Steve J. Stevens, DFC, of the South African Air Force (SAAF). He had been thinking along these lines for some years before he finally made the decision in 1950 to resign his SAAF commission in order to become a pilot on the staff of a newly formed organization called Mission Aviation Fellowship (UK).

## Early Life

Steve Stevens was born in August 1919, the only son of a regular British army officer. His father, Captain George Stevens, who had served in the First World War, had been gassed while in Salonika. As a regular soldier Steve's father remained in the army. During his first ten years, Steve's family lived the typical life of the military. One short posting followed another, punctuated by periods of official sick leave caused by mustard gas. Steve's education in those years was a casualty. There were some short spells in school. Occasionally some inadequate home-schooling took place. The left-handed boy even became victim to the theory that he should be forced to use his right hand for written work. His father did his best to help him, but by the time he was ten, he had lived in five countries. No consecutive education was possible.



*Steve with his father*

In 1929 George Stevens received news of his next posting. The family was scheduled to move to India. The army medical officer intervened. His opinion was that George Stevens should be invalided out of the army, and advised a move to a more congenial climate. As a result, he emigrated to South Africa with his wife and son, where he bought a farm. The professional soldier had become a farmer.

In 1934 the family suffered a heavy blow. Steve's mother, Dora, died after an unsuccessful operation for a brain tumour. It was especially hard for a fourteen-year-old boy to accept. His mother's long illness was to have unforeseen and life-changing consequences for the whole family. Steve's father had no time for Christians, whom he referred to disparagingly as 'Bible Thumpers'. However, when his wife needed medical care, the only

doctor nearby was a Christian, Dr Barton, a Scottish medical missionary working in the area, mainly among the Zulus.

Up to that time, George Stevens knew almost nothing about the Bible or Christianity. The attitude was that, if God existed at all, so long as he led a 'good' life that would be enough to please him. What else could he expect? However, through regular contact with Dr Barton and other missionaries, who supported the family through Dora Stevens' illness, George began to see his need for a personal faith in a personal God.

Eventually, Steve's father decided to attend a church service. The preacher was an Australian Congregational minister named Lionel Fletcher who explained clearly the basis of real faith: how Christ had died to save the ungodly, and how the Holy Spirit gave new life and hope. George Stevens came to God in God's way—by prayer which admitted his own sinfulness, and by putting his faith in Christ alone for salvation. From that point on, his life was totally changed.

Something else was also to change. In 1937 George married one of the Scottish missionaries. Margaret Stevens became Steve's stepmother. She was the mother of Steve's two half sisters and a half brother.

## **The Call of God**

Although the observable changes in his father's life-style made a small impression on Steve, it did not persuade him of the truth of the Christian faith. He captures his thoughts in the period after the change in his father with these words, 'At that time in my life, I had never been to a church service or attended a Sunday school. Nor had I ever been taught anything about Christianity—or any other religion for that matter.' He felt distinctly uneasy whenever the missionaries visited the farmhouse. They were still 'Bible Thumpers' as far as he was concerned. Surely their primary reason for being there was to help the Zulus, not him?

Then his father invited some of the missionaries to stay in the farmhouse while they conducted a series of meetings explaining their work. During the course of his stay, one of them, Adam Ferguson, asked Steve to show him