

# THE HEROES WITH NO LEGS

What do Briton Douglas Bader and Russian Aleksei Maresyev have in common?  
The answer is simple: both were Second World War heroes who fought... without legs.



**Douglas Bader**

Douglas Bader is one of the best known war heroes in Britain. Douglas was born in England in 1910. His father was a major in the British Army in the First World War. In 1922, when Douglas was only 12, his father died. Traditionally, British Army officers were from the upper middle class families and educated their children in public schools. However, public schools are expensive and with the loss of his father's income, private education became impossible for Douglas. He 'saved' the day by winning a sports scholarship to St Edward's School in Oxford. When Douglas was 18, he won a cadetship to Cranwell Air Force Academy. The young man fell in love with flying almost immediately and started flying solo after only six and a half hours of training. He quickly became one of the best young pilots in the Academy.

By 1931, Bader's career as a pilot was going extremely well. Then the tragedy struck. Douglas crashed while performing a complex aerobatic display. Although he was lucky to

survive, he lost both legs. It seemed that his flying career was over. But Douglas insisted: 'They'll have to call me up.'

Douglas was right. When Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, the country quickly became short of fighter pilots (the lifespan of a pilot in the Second World War was very short). Bader was given a second chance. He learnt to fly with prosthetic legs. By 1941, he had shot down 23 German planes — the fifth highest hit record in the Royal Air Force at the time.

But fate tried Bader once again. In 1941, he was shot down and captured by the Nazis. He was sent from prison to prison before ending up in the Colditz prison in Germany. Douglas made several attempts to escape and in the end the Nazis had to take his tin legs away to stop him from escaping. So Bader had to wait until the end of the war to return to Britain.

After the war, Douglas dedicated his life to helping charities for the disabled. In 1976, he was knighted for his heroism and outstanding charity work.

Douglas Bader died in 1982, a British national hero. But his story lives on. As well as Bader's own autobiography, a number of books and a film have been produced in his honour.



major ['meɪdʒə] майор  
upper middle class крупная буржуазия,  
верхушка среднего класса  
public school частная школа  
loss потеря, лишение  
income ['ɪŋkʌm] доход, заработок  
to save the day  
спасти положение  
sports scholarship ['skɒləʃɪp] стипендия  
за успехи в спорте  
cadetship [kə'detʃɪp] прохождение службы  
в качестве курсанта

Air Force Academy военно-воздушная  
академия  
solo ['səʊlə] самостоятельно  
career [kə'riə] карьера  
to crash [kræʃ] потерпеть крушение,  
разбиться  
to perform [pə'fɔ:m] выполнять,  
исполнять  
complex ['kɒmpleks] сложный  
aerobatic display [eəə,bætɪk drɪspleɪ]  
фигура высшего пилотажа  
to call up призвать на военную службу

to declare [drɪ'kleə] war объявить войну  
to become short of smth испытывать  
недостаток, нехватку в чем-либо  
lifespan ['laɪfspan] продолжительность  
жизни  
prosthetic [prɒs'tetɪk] legs  
протезы ног  
the fifth highest hit record 5-й, пятый  
результат в таблице рекордов  
fate [feɪt] судьба, рок  
to capture ['kæptʃə] взять в плен  
Nazi ['nɑ:tsi] нацист, фашист





## Aleksei Maresyev

Aleksei Petrovich Maresyev was born in Russia in 1916. Although his three elder brothers were strong healthy boys, Aleksei's own health was not so good. He particularly suffered from pain in his joints. The nearest school was four kilometres away and sometimes Aleksei's brothers almost had to carry him back. Aleksei always wanted to become a pilot but with health problems like these, there was no chance.

Aleksei became an active Komsomol member and after finishing school he was sent to the Far East to build Komsomolsk-upon-Amur. Although Aleksei didn't particularly want to go so far away, he didn't have very much choice.

However, it all turned out for the best. Much to Aleksei's own surprise, after a few months of being in the Far East his health started to improve. Eventually, Maresyev joined an air club. After serving in the army in the Russian Air Force, Maresyev went on to study at a professional college for military pilots. He finished the college just in time to put his newly learnt skills into practice.

When the Nazis invaded Russia in 1941, Maresyev was sent to the front to serve as a fighter pilot. By April 1942, Maresyev had shot down 4 German planes. However, on the 4th of April Maresyev's luck ran out. He was shot down and had to make an emergency landing. He tried to land on a frozen lake but lost con-

trol of the plane and crashed over a forest. Badly injured, he crawled on his hands for eighteen days and nights to reach the Russian frontlines. By that time, his legs had become badly frostbitten and had to be amputated.

But Maresyev refused to give up. After a long and painful struggle he learnt how to fly with prosthetic legs. In 1943, he became a squadron leader. During one mission Maresyev shot down 3 enemy planes.

In August 1943, Aleksei Maresyev was awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union medal, the highest military award in the Soviet Union. When 'The Story of a Real Man' by Boris Polevoy came out after the war, Maresyev became a national hero. After the book, there was a film and an opera. For many years to come every generation of Soviet school children read Aleksei Maresyev's epic story.

But Maresyev didn't like the title of a living legend. "I'm a man, not a legend," he said. "There is nothing special in what I did."

Aleksei Petrovich died in 2001, just 2 days before his 85th birthday. In one of his last interviews he said: "I think young people can learn a lesson or two from what I went through in my life. First of all, never be scared, go for it and hold out whatever happens."

*M. Garibyan*



**Colditz** ['kəuldɪts] Колдиц (замок в Германии, где размещался лагерь военнопленных. Здесь немцы держали самых неуслаждаемых, «неисправимых» пленников.)  
**to escape** [r'skeɪp] совершить побег  
**to dedicate** ['dedɪkeɪt] посвящать  
**charity** ['tʃærɪti] благотворительное общество  
**the disabled** [dɪs'eɪbld] инвалиды  
**to be knighted** ['naɪtɪd] получить звание рыцаря  
**autobiography** [ˌɔːtəbaɪ'ɒɡrəfi] автобиография

**particularly** [pə'tɪkjʊləli] особенно  
**joint** [dʒɔɪnt] сустав  
**Far East** [fɑːr 'iːst] Дальний Восток  
**it all turned out for the best** Все оказалось к лучшему.  
**eventually** [ɪ'ventʃuəli] в конце концов  
**to join an air club** вступить в аэроклуб  
**to put into practice** применить на практике  
**fighter pilot** ['faɪtə 'paɪlət] летчик-истребитель  
**to shoot down** сбить (самолет)  
**emergency** [ɪ'mɜːdʒənsɪ] landing вынужденная посадка

**badly injured** ['ɪndʒəd] тяжело раненный  
**to crawl** [krɔːl] ползти  
**frontline** ['frʌntlɪn] линия фронта  
**frostbitten** ['frɒst.bɪtn] обмороженный  
**to amputate** ['æmpjuteɪt] ампутировать  
**to give up** сдаваться  
**squadron leader** ['skwɒdrən ,liːdə] командир эскадрильи  
**mission** ['mɪʃn] боевой вылет  
**to learn a lesson or two** кое-чему научиться  
**to go for it** стараться, добиваться цели  
**to hold out** держаться до конца