

Alfred Henriquez was a descendant of Sephardic Jews who fled persecution in Portugal and Spain. His ancestors settled down in Jamaica, which was initially a Spanish colony, and from 1655 – a British one. Alfred was born in 1915 and had many great rabbis amongst his ancestors, including Aboab da Fonseca, Jacob da Aaron Sasportas, and Daniel Toledano.

In December 1937, he married Adeline (Essie) Vera Silvera in a Kingston synagogue. The young couple had two children: daughter Kathleen and son Richard. Hearing reports on the persecution of Jews in Europe, in 1941 Alfred decided to join the airmen fighting against the Germans.

After training, he took part as a pilot in bombing missions over Pomerania, among others, (Szczecin's industrial facilities were an important target for the British Bomber Command). He died on August 17, 1944 near Rzystnowo, a village now situated in Poland's Goleniów County. He was 28.

Flight Lieutenant John F Wilkinson joined the RAF in 1941. He spent four years flying Spitfires with 41 Squadron and shot down five enemy aircraft.

Wilkinson during his early training was sent to the Riddle McKay Aero College, Clewiston, in Florida. While there, he became great friends with another student pilot, Alfred George 'Bunny' Henriquez from Jamaica (then a British colony). Bunny had volunteered to join the RAF Volunteer Reserve in 1941, receiving his initial training at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and at Clewiston, Florida, after that. At twenty-two, he had married Essie Silvera and they had gone on to have two children. Kathleen in 1939 and Richard two years later.

The friendship struck up by the two pilots was a strong one: back in England, the pair managed to keep up the friendship, even though both were flying in different parts of the country. In spring of 1944, Bunny was flying Avro Lancaster bombers with 630 Squadron, based at East Kirby in Lincolnshire. Wilkinson was then flying with 41 squadron on the south coast of England. It was there that Wilkinson developed 'a strong desire' to meet up with Bunny. Fortunately, he learned that there was a repaired Spitfire Mark IX that needed testing – and he was lucky enough to be given permission to test it and fly up to see Bunny.

'I had a good visit with him,' Wilkinson remembers. 'When I took off, he was standing by his Lancaster bomber.' Wilkinson circled once in his Spitfire as he made his farewell to Bunny. 'And as I did so, I somehow knew he would be killed.'

A few months later, on 17 August 1944, Flight Lieutenant Bunny Henriquez flew an Avro Lancaster on a night bombing raid of the Baltic port of Stettin in Poland. The plane was intercepted by a German night fighter, broke up in the air and crashed in pieces near Ryznow, on the German-Polish border. At first, it was recorded that the plane had been missing in action without a trace. But later the Red Cross learned from the German authorities that the plane had crashed.

Wilkinson only discovered what had happened to his friend when Bunny's family wrote to him with the sad news. 'They told me his small daughter, Kathleen, had woken in the night screaming 'Pray for Daddy!' Sometime later, Wilkinson discovered that this had happened on the same night that Bunny was killed.

Disaster struck Bunny's family again, just three days after Bunny's wife Essie, had received a telegram telling her that her husband was missing in action. On 20 August, one of the strongest hurricanes of the twentieth century hit Port Maria, on the north coast of Jamaica, where Essie, her mother and children were living. Bunny's son Richard, recounted, 'When the hurricane hit, large

sections of the roof of their house were gone. It was a terrifying experience; the metal roofing was torn off. Crockery was blown out of cupboards and crashed onto the floor. When the winds finally died down there were dead fish everywhere and hundreds of trees flattened.'

Essie was devastated, her husband lost, her home destroyed. Yet she had to carry on somehow. 'At the end of 1944, soon after it had been confirmed that Bunny was dead, Essie received a life-changing letter from Frank Henriquez, Bunny's first cousin who was offering her a new life.' They married two years later and emigrated to Vancouver, Canada.

Grateful thanks go to Richard Henriquez and to author Jacky Hyams who has given permission for the above extract to be included in Alfred's story. Jacky's book Spitfire Stories: True Tales from Those Who Designed, Maintained and Flew the Iconic Plane published in association with the Imperial War Museum. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Spitfire-Stories-Designed-Maintained-Iconic/dp/1782438165>