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PROLOGUE

Most Americans followed the events as they happened via movie newsreels and radio. My impression of the war, from the first Pacific offensive on Guadalcanal in 1942 until the end of the global conflict, was that we Americans were always victorious in almost bloodless battles. I believe it was a common conviction shared by many Americans. This public impression of perpetual victory in the largest war ever fought on this planet was greatly enhanced by Hollywood movies.

Recently I saw a fictional version of the Anzio invasion in which the hero discovers the construction of the German gun emplacements in the hills overlooking the Anzio beachhead. He carries the alarm to the allied commanders who promptly send in the bombers to destroy the artillery positions. One bombing mission seems to wipe out all of the defensive positions only a few days after the landing. In reality, the Germans bombarded the Allied beachhead from their hilltop positions for forty days.

In time of war, propaganda is a commonly used tool by political leaders of every country to sustain the wartime effort of its citizens. I now know that the morale of the American people was of paramount importance because

our war production was absolutely vital to all of our Allies fighting around the globe. Our country was far away from the horrors of war so it required a smooth running propaganda campaign to keep up our fighting spirit.

After reading a number of history books about World War II written by historians from other countries, I was compelled to revise my impression of the war. These other accounts, especially from the perspective of the English and French scholars, provided me with astonishing truths which, to my knowledge had never been revealed to the American public.

We could have lost the war in Europe if Hitler and the Nazis had enough time to put into action a number of super weapons actually in existence in 1944. At every stage of the war with Germany we were up against far superior weapons mass-produced by a country whose sole purpose was war. All of the top scientists in Germany were devoting their efforts to finding more efficient ways to kill people. It was an advantage the Nazis depended on to defeat the allied armies who outnumbered them. As a German general put it,

“This war is run on machines, oil and gasoline.”

War news as edited for consumption by the public can be likened to the bull fights in Spain. These fights are begun by picadors on horseback sticking lances into the bull's shoulders and neck to weaken the muscles of the animal so that it can no longer effectively defend itself by using its deadly horns. The picadors' horses have padded blankets over them giving the crowd the impression the horse is being protected from the bull's repeated charges and attempts at goring as the picadors are driving their lances into the beast's muscles. The truth of the matter is, the padded blanket conceals from the eyes of the crowd the terrible bloody wounds sustained by the horse.

As I read other accounts of the War I was surprised to learn the allies had discovered a squadron of jet-propelled bombers with pressurized cabins in Norway. These ultra-modern bombers were capable of flying at 60,000 feet and bombing New York City. V-3 intercontinental rockets were under construction to attack the East coast of America. Two super-class submarines were also a reality rather than on the drawing board. Had these super U-boats become operational they could have cut off the flow of American supplies to England. Churchill's greatest fear was losing the supply line from America.

Only America could provide the war materials so essential to the continuation of the war in Europe.

Lastly, the success of the invasion of France through Normandy hung on a weather forecast about a giant spring storm coming over the English Channel. A 36-hour window of calm weather was predicted as probable. There was no Doppler radar then to pinpoint precisely when a powerful storm might arrive nor where it could be expected to be at the height of its violence.

For the record the Normandy invasion began June 3. But the stormy conditions were so bad the 5,000-ship armada was ordered back to England. This decision was made when the ships were halfway across the Channel. Thus the invasion would have to wait for calmer weather. For four days, from June 3 until June 6 the 150,000 soldiers who were to land on the beaches lived on ships in over-crowded misery.

The enormity of the gamble on a possible 36 hour window of calmer weather which determined the decision to go on June 6 cannot be overstated. Nine days after the successful Normandy landing, 800 allied ships were sunk in the English Channel by a spring storm.

I am not a history scholar nor do I have any technical knowledge of weapons. My purpose in writing this novel is not sensationalism. It is written to entertain readers with a story set against a backdrop of extreme peril and to illustrate how close we came to losing the war with the Nazis.

On the Edge of Twilight

Aaron T Knight

PART I

GREAT TIDES OF WAR

Chapter One

SHAEF Headquarters, England. June 5, 1944.

The sole responsibility for deciding whether the allied invasion of France would commence the following day, June 6, 1944, was vested in the Supreme Commander of the European Theatre of Operations, General Eisenhower. At the moment, spring storms in the English Channel were a greater enemy than the armies of Nazi Germany. On June 3, the invasion had been launched and the weather had become so foul, the gigantic invasion force of 5,000 ships had to be ordered back from half way across the English Channel.

A large number of the soldiers making up the invading forces had been living in over-crowded misery aboard the transports and LSTs since June 3. For some, the tension of

waiting to hear whether the invasion would go forward or be aborted was almost unendurable.

A British meteorologist completed his weather report for the assembled top brass. His report wasn't what they wanted to hear. His best estimate of the weather for the next 36 hours was a possible window of calmer weather. However, everyone in the room was aware of the treacherously changing weather common in the English Channel.

This storm was a large one and it appeared there was definitely more to this storm front than they had experienced so far. There was a large element of risk to committing the invasion force again on June 6. Failure to launch would result in an uncertain future for the invasion force. Any further delay would mean a return of the troops for food, lodging and re-fuelling 5,000 ships. Such a result was almost unthinkable.

General Montgomery made a short argument for launching D-Day on the basis of the troops were ready and further delay could be disastrous. All eyes were now on General Eisenhower, who was the only man who could make the decision to begin the invasion of Normandy.

After a quiet moment General Eisenhower made his fateful decision. D-Day would be launched on June 6. Excitement rippled through the gathering.

Chapter Two

June 6 0300 Hours

Major Mike Canyon left the embarkation area in Portsmouth, England to return to his billet for a few hours' sleep. He would be back at 0630, haunting the communications center for any news about the Normandy invasion. Since June 3 Mike had only slept a few hours here and there. Now he was really walking on his heels, his head buzzed, and his eyesight blurred repeatedly. He fervently hoped the D-Day invasion would actually take place today for the troops' sake.

He was assigned to overseeing the loading of the LSTs, flat bottomed landing craft carrying soldiers, equipment and tanks. His group had been on duty continuously for three days. Mike felt his knees begin to weaken as he walked to his jeep. He sat down gratefully behind the steering wheel of the vehicle. After several deep breaths of the cool night air he looked up at the sky.

He said a short prayer asking for the weather to stay calm as it was now, to give the allied invasion of France a good chance of success. He put the jeep in gear and set off

for the large home in Portsmouth where he was billeted with three other officers.

As he pulled up in front of the three-story residence he became suddenly alert. He could feel the breeze freshening. Leaves started to rustle and treetops began to sway as a sudden gust of wind sprang up. He looked at the horizon anxiously peering into the predawn darkness for any sign of a storm front. Straining his eyes, he seemed to detect a black line just above the horizon.

Maybe I'm beginning to hallucinate from fatigue, he thought to himself. After all, army scuttlebutt had assured everyone the weather would be good for a day or two. He wearily got out of the jeep and walked into the house. In his room Mike removed only his service cap, boots and socks then collapsed on the bed. He was instantly asleep.

At 0500, Mike became aware he was being roughly shaken. He came out of his deep sleep abruptly and stared at his awakener. It was Sergeant Sigurd Severinsen, nicknamed (Sevvv) looking down at him anxiously waiting for Mike to wake up.

"What's up, Sergeant?"

"Major, everyone has been called back to duty. We have a full blown storm out there. Look outside."

Mike went to the window. In the early dawn light he was appalled to see the trees bending over in a stiff gale.

"I thought the calm weather was supposed to hold for at least a couple of days."

"I was told by some of the locals that this is the worst late spring weather they've seen in forty years," Sevvv explained. "This Channel weather is unpredictable. Actually the calm weather only lasted for twelve hours. We've been ordered to stand by at the embarkation center for assignments to help with radio communications until the picture becomes clearer."

Mike was hit hard by the implications of the storm. My God, he thought, it's too late to call off the invasion this time. Right now the first wave of troops would be getting ready to head for the beaches. How can they possibly get ashore safely in these conditions? He pulled his boots on and followed Sevvv out of the house.

Chapter Three

Lt. Col. Charlie Morgan, a supply officer, had maneuvered, wangled and bribed his way to his present position on the bridge of a Navy cruiser bound for the Normandy beaches. When they had set off the weather was just as the meteorologists had predicted: Lightly overcast skies and a gentle June breeze.

Charlie had taken a few days off because of his position on the SHAEF staff. He had been one of the original group who had started planning the Normandy invasion in 1942. When an enlarged staff had descended on SHAEF in late 1943, Charlie had been invaluable to them because of his experience. He had been somewhat bewildered when the planning group expanded from several hundred members to nearly five thousand.

Naturally enough he and the other original staff planners resented the newcomers at first. But as the urgency of the situation became clearer and a tight time schedule for completing the work was laid down, Charlie and the rest welcomed the help. There had been times of frustration as he fought to keep his planning from being thrown out in favor of a new approach. He usually prevailed because he

had the training and experience necessary for his military assignment in supply logistics.

He had been the traffic manager for a large manufacturing company in Ohio. He knew the ins and outs of moving massive amounts of materials to and from critical points. In the end most of the eager beavers and politically oriented officers had grudgingly left most of the planning in his section intact.

Charlie was excited to be aboard the cruiser. I'll really have something to tell everyone back in Ohio, he thought to himself, and I have a perfect place to see the whole show. He took a nip of bourbon and smiled at the Navy deck officer standing next to him on the bridge. He had brought along a generous supply of whiskey for the officers on board. It was a gesture of appreciation for being allowed on as a passenger. He was careful not to get in the way of the crew.

As Charlie lounged against the railing on the bridge, his sheer size was obvious. At 45 years old he was heavy set; the word "bear" was a rather apt description of him. He had steel gray hair and a ruddy face due to his heavy drinking and hard living ways. Growing up he had absorbed the working class motto of "Work hard, play hard."

Although he liked to party at every opportunity, chase girls and indulge in poker and other amusements, to his way of thinking he was a loyal family man. He would have been stunned to know his quiet, gentle wife was fully aware of his life style. She forgave him the lapses in their marriage vows simply because she had been raised to believe it was a man's world.

While he was standing by the rail the ship's exec came by to speak to him,

"How's the 'observer' doing?"

Charlie laughed and replied,

"Waiting for the big show. In another hour or so the rest of the convoy should be visible, I guess."

Then a gust of wind caused both of the men to turn sharply in the direction of the breeze. They scanned the horizon but it was still too dark to see much. As the exec moved off toward the wheel house he said,

"Only a single gust of wind I suppose."

By 0400, the wind was becoming steady. Charlie strained to see any indication of a storm. He finally gave up. It was just too black out there. He went inside to get out of the chill for a while. He found a place out of the way of the

busy crew. In a few minutes the captain of the cruiser came in with several other ship's officers. Frowning, he ordered his exec to check the latest weather reports. The captain's uneasiness of manner suggested he found the weather conditions disturbing. His behavior only served to reinforce Charlie's own hunch.

When the exec returned to the bridge he spoke to the captain privately leaving him guessing about the conversation. Lord, he thought, what if those weather guys have made a mistake in the forecast? The consequences to the fate of the invasion force were too overwhelming to contemplate. Yet there it was, a sense bred into man and animals signalling that the atmospheric pressure was changing. Neither Charlie nor the captain had to speculate for long.

At 0430, the wind hit the ship like a fist, slamming into her at better than 40 miles per hour. Growing swells in the ocean quickly followed. Cloud cover was coming in low.. It blocked out the previously lightly overcast skies in a matter of seconds. In the Channel waves became choppy and began to show white caps.

Charlie felt the ship begin to roll as the seas became heavier. Huge waves driving in from the North Sea hit the

Channel, turning it into a boiling chaos. Day became night in an instant as the waters became a dark slate gray against an equally gray sky of low clouds. Only shades of gray and black now existed in a white-out created by the accompanying wind-swept rain.

He went outside to take a closer look at the ocean. The wind pushed hard against him and took his breath away for a moment. He braced himself and made his way to the rail. All about him the dark shapes of the other ships were pitching in the turbulent sea.

How the hell will the soldiers get onto the beaches in this? he thought to himself. Maybe they'll call it off. Leaning his body against the railing he managed to take his field binoculars from their case. Raising them up to his eyes he brought the closest ships in the invasion armada into focus. Swirling rain and the low cloud cover made it difficult to see clearly except for glimpses between gusts of wind.

Chapter Four

But the invasion wasn't called off this time as Charlie had hoped. An operation of this magnitude is ponderous and incapable of reacting quickly to altered plans. Information coming into SHAEF about the weather conditions was confused and contradictory. The commanders of SHAEF were powerless to stop the invasion at this juncture. Unlike June 3 when the ships were halfway to France, but today based on the predetermined jump off time only minutes remained. Then the first soldiers would climb down the cargo nets to the landing craft waiting along side the ships to take them to the beaches. This invasion attempt was beyond the point of recall.

Vast forces were bearing down on the Normandy beaches. There were nearly five thousand vessels in this convoy and they were now within twelve miles of the French coast. All of the careful plans were already in motion. Everything was on a precise timetable which had started before midnight when the airborne troops had parachuted into France.

In addition the French underground had come out of hiding around midnight. They were busy working on the

crucial sabotage of German communications as well as blockading travel routes to the Normandy beaches. All of their activities had been planned to impede the German army's progress to Normandy to repel the Allied invaders.

So without any clear orders to call it off and no definite information on weather conditions, the wheels of the invasion continued to grind along. On the smaller ships keeping their feet under them became an effort for the penned up soldiers.

The worst beating from the storm was being taken by the flat bottomed LSTs. In the heavy sea they lurched badly in the waves and took on water at a rate the bilge pumps couldn't handle. But they awkwardly crabbed their way toward the beaches with the troops standing in water up to their knees. Keeping a semblance of a formation was nearly impossible for the pilots of the landing craft in the turbulent channel.

To Charlie, the hundreds of ships within his view appeared to be under the steering control of a bunch of drunks. He had to borrow a windbreaker to keep out the chill of the wind and the drizzle which appeared to be falling sideways. He began to pray this was only a sudden squall which would blow over shortly. However what had moved in over the English Channel was a giant storm front.

It would take days for it to pass through the area.

By 0530, the first wave of assault troops was being readied for the trip to the beaches. LSTs bearing amphibious tanks were already well on their way toward the beach allowing for their slowness in the water. Charlie had borrowed a pair of high powered binoculars from a ship's officer which had a much stronger magnification than his army field binoculars. He trained the glasses on a nearby transport ship. He saw the soldiers clambering down cargo nets trying to make leaps into the small landing craft rising and falling sharply against the side of the transport.

Some of the waves were cresting nearly twenty five feet high. The soldiers laden down with equipment were making almost suicidal drops into the landing craft. Charlie saw several soldiers crushed by the ship as the waves tossed the assault craft around like corks. He remembered hearing at one briefing how waves of twenty feet were considered optimum for a successful landing operation. These waves are higher than that, he thought to himself, and the seas are getting rougher all the time.

He was startled when the cruiser, along with all of the other Navy war ships in the line, suddenly opened fire on the beaches. The explosions of the guns made the cruiser

roll and tremble. He was temporarily dazed and deafened by the cannonade.

Charlie turned his attention to the landing craft headed toward Omaha Beach. What he saw looked like total insanity. The boats tried vainly to stay in formation. He was horrified to see two landing craft capsize and sink immediately, leaving the surviving soldiers bobbing in the rough seas. This is impossible he thought, no one can reach shore in this! Why doesn't somebody stop it?

Daylight was almost on them, and the panorama of the landing was coming into focus. On the bridge of the cruiser sailors and officers were bustling about as the guns continued to fire at the cliffs overlooking Omaha Beach. It was an effort to destroy the German shore batteries entrenched there. He could see distant flashes from the cliffs as the German artillery came to life.

His attention turned again to the transport ship nearest the cruiser, hardly visible now in the driving rain. Straining his eyes he watched in horror as nearly half of the small landing craft sank before they were five hundred yards away from the ship.

Everywhere smaller Navy ships would suddenly push through the grey veil near the cruise. They were scurrying

around the transports in an attempt to save the soldiers who were floundering in the towering waves. It was almost impossible to pick the men out of the rough seas. Charlie was in shock as he watched soldiers drown before his eyes. Suddenly the exec ran past him, his face tense and anxious.

"What's happening?" he yelled

"All hell is breaking loose. We're committed to this deal so now we have to do what we can to save the situation. We're moving closer to the beach to provide more accurate fire support," the exec yelled back to Charlie over the thunderous noise. Then the guns stopped firing as the cruiser got underway to move in closer to Omaha Beach.

On the bridge the captain and his officers were engrossed in changing their plans to take into account the stormy conditions. Radio communications in the convoy had been furious for the past hour as revised orders were formulated and broadcast to the invading force. Naval bombardment from twelve miles off the Normandy coast had little effect in storm conditions. They were now ordered to move within five miles of the beaches and fire almost point blank at the German fortifications in an effort to provide effective support for the assault troops.

Changing the war ships' positions was also necessary due to the poor visibility caused by the rain driven in sheets in the howling winds. Although closer proximity to the shore would improve the effectiveness of naval firepower, it meant the fleet would be more vulnerable to German artillery fire. But there was nothing else they could do to help the landing except close artillery support. The die was cast. Now all of the stops had to be pulled out in an effort to make the invasion successful.

German defenses on the cliffs above the beach had to be broken since the assault troops couldn't remain on the beach without being slaughtered by the fire power coming from well protected concrete bunkers. They had to break through and move inland so a solid position could be established. Should they fail to gain a firm foothold the Germans would have time to push them into the sea. General Rommel, now in command of the French coastal defenses, had this scenario in mind when he had installed his formidable array of obstacles. There were underwater mines, tank traps and banks of barbed wire across 800 miles of shore line. In some areas there were natural gas lines on the beaches ready to be ignited as giant flamethrowers to stop invading troops

So the fleet moved in, crashing through the storm-tossed ocean toward the beaches. Charlie held on grimly to the railing on the bridge rather than take shelter. He was fascinated by this gigantic show and horrified at the losses he was witnessing. Through his binoculars he could now make out some images as the cruiser moved rapidly toward shore. They sailed past huge numbers of wrecked boats and equipment near and around them. It was an appalling sight. There were black dots all over the ocean. They were soldiers who had escaped the sinking landing craft hit by artillery or swamped by the giant waves.

Charlie was shocked as great fountains of water began to form near the cruiser. Then he realized the water geysers were from German artillery shells fired by the shore batteries. Suddenly the ship turned and the engine stopped. Immediately the deafening roar of the cruiser's guns began as they pounded at the cliffs above the beach. Firing from all of the ships in the line made strange distorted flames of brilliant orange in the heavy mist created by the rain.

It reminded him of an artist's conception of Hades he had once seen in an art gallery. Bright flames were flashing in the mist from the Navy's big cannon and little figures of men were falling into the water in the hellish light or

bobbing on an ocean reflecting fire-light created by burning wreckage. He wondered how he could be thrilled at the terrible fire-power of the ships and, at the same time, repulsed by the tragedies in evidence all around him.

For nearly two hours the Naval barrage went on incessantly. Then it gradually changed to intermittent fire on specific targets. He was looking at Omaha Beach through the constantly shifting mist. As far as he could discern in this shadow world, it appeared to him from his limited view, only two amphibious tanks had made it to the shore. Both of them had been destroyed by German artillery fire. He could only assume the rest of the amphibious tanks had sunk in the heavy seas.

He had heard about the steel triangles fashioned from railroad tracks that General Rommel had personally designed to be placed just below the tide line. Each of the triangular barriers had a mine attached to it. In the high waves these devices had done their work well. Landing craft attempting to reach the beach were tossed onto the steel barriers in the surf and the mines attached to the devices did the rest of the job. Unfortunately the demolition teams trained to clear landing lanes for the boats hadn't been effective in the gigantic waves hitting the shore line.

Troops who had made it to shore were on the edge of the beach in clusters sheltering themselves behind wrecked boats and other equipment. The beach resembled an enormous junk yard. German defense positions were well manned by now. Charlie could see the mortar rounds kicking up sand and spurts of machine gun fire on the water's edge. He wondered how anyone could live through the pounding being delivered by the enemy. Certainly to his eyes, the Omaha Beach operation was a failure. He hoped the other landings were having some success in these horrendous weather conditions. By now he was soaking wet even though he was wearing a Navy weather coat.

A chief bosun's mate ran by. Charlie grabbed his arm and shouted over the storm and cannon fire,

“What’s going on now?”

“We’re going to lower our motor launches and try to save the soldiers floating around out there.”

“I want to help. Let me go with you.”

Charlie realized he was being keenly scrutinized. It was like looking at a copy of himself. Both men were big. Finally the bosun's mate said, “

“You look strong enough. Come on.”

It was one thing to be high up on the bridge of a large ship looking down at the waves, but quite another to be in a small motor launch on the surface of the sea. Charlie hung on grimly along with the sailors as mountainous waves bore down on them. The coxswain would frantically maneuver the boat to meet the wave. They would be carried up the wave only to find themselves looking down into a trough deep as a canyon below them. About fifty yards from the cruiser they came upon a cluster of soldiers holding on to one another and some floating wreckage.

Their first efforts to lean over and grab the men in the water failed. Movement of the boat in turbulent seas and the awkward stance of reaching over to reach the men didn't work. Then the chief grabbed a boat hook, motioning to Charlie to help him. The two big men used the boat hook like a fishing rod, grabbing the soldiers by their webbed belts. Then with sheer muscle power hauled them onto the launch. After an hour's work they headed back to the cruiser with twenty five soldiers.

For the next four hours the motor launch made trips back and forth with more survivors. Charlie was exhausted; his legs were trembling and his arm muscles were twitching with fatigue. Finally, over the roar of the storm the chief

yelled out to Charlie,

“This is the last trip. Our ship’s been ordered to return for fueling and ammo.”

Suddenly the German shore batteries began to concentrate their fire on their area of the fleet. A shell exploded near the launch almost flooding the boat. Charlie had never been this close to being shot at. He felt extremely vulnerable on the ocean without any place to take cover from the bombardment. As the launch approached the cruiser, a German artillery shell made a direct hit on the ship. Exploding metal sprayed the launch wounding five men. Charlie could see sailors running to the damaged area of the ship as a flash of fire flared up on the cruiser. Within minutes of the initial hit the Germans concentrated their fire on the crippled cruiser. Two more artillery shells found their mark as flames shot up from mid-ship.

Now the launch was forced to circle nearby waiting for the barrage to let up. Finally they were able to pull alongside the ship. They could hear explosions going off in the bowels of the cruiser. A signal man flashed a message to them ordering the launch to head for a Mulberry about six miles away. There were two Mulberrys towed into

position in the Channel. They were giant floating dry docks designed to be the unloading platforms for supplies and to provide a breakwater for the transfer of supplies from the large ships to smaller boats delivering materials to the beaches.

After figuring their bearings the chief ordered the coxswain to change direction and make for the nearest Mulberry at top speed. With the rough seas it seemed to take forever to make a mile's headway. When they were two miles away from the cruiser they heard a tremendous explosion.

All heads turned toward the ship. For a moment they all thought the explosion might have been near the ship. But then the cruiser bent upward in the middle and the forward and aft sections of the ship pointed downward like fragments of a stick snapped in half. It took approximately ten minutes for the cruiser to sink to the bottom. Lord, Charlie thought, this is like living in a nightmare except this is real.

It was late afternoon when the launch arrived at the area designated for the Mulberry dry dock. To their dismay they found only a section of the dry dock jutting out of the water

the rest of it had sunk in the storm. Quickly, the chief figured out their position in the Channel. Changing directions the boat headed for the English coast.

By early evening the launch ran out of gas. Without fuel the giant waves pounded the boat mercilessly. In the crowded conditions the men were constantly jostled into one another. Thinking about the situation, Charlie realized that soon they could all die. All it would take was a large wave breaking over them at the right angle to swamp the boat.

As the last feeble light of day was fading away a large dark shape loomed up on a wave directly in front of the bow. At first they thought it was a large rock. As it drew closer they could make out running lights on the bow of a barge. Within fifteen minutes they were alongside an oil barge towed by a tug boat. Sailors on the tug boat made the launch secure, and then began to transfer everyone off the naval boat.

They were given blankets and the wounded men were carried into the cabin of the barge. The tug boat turned and headed for England with over fifty survivors aboard.

Charlie found his flask of bourbon and took a long pull; then he handed it to the chief. He gratefully toasted him before he swallowed a healthy slug of the whiskey.

Chapter Five

Major Mike Canyon was trying to keep pace with the information relayed to him from a group of radio operators at the Ops center in Portsmouth. He was gathering reports, briefing the news and then bringing updates to the area where the Joint Chiefs of Staff were meeting. All of the staff members had been there since 0630. They had the monumental task of trying to gather an accurate picture of the military situation in Normandy. From the information coming in new strategies were being formulated to cope with the crisis the disastrous storm conditions had created. None of the news Mike was receiving was good.

Of all of the bad news the situation on Omaha Beach was the worst. Storm conditions there were affecting the landing to a greater degree. It was the most exposed stretch of beach of all of the landing areas. And probably of equal importance in the invasion picture was a German military surprise. At the time of the invasion the latest military intelligence had indicated the Omaha Beach section of the Normandy coast was being defended by a German division composed of Polish and Russian prisoners. These men had volunteered to serve in the German army rather than die in

a prison camp. Instead the allies had encountered a crack German division recently moved into the area. Consequently, the American troops who had managed to reach the beach were being slaughtered where they were pinned down by seasoned combat soldiers.

The Navy had moved perilously close to Omaha Beach in an effort to provide extra fire power. Their bombardment hadn't knocked out more than a fraction of the German coastal defenses. It was feared naval forces were taking heavy losses of warships by fighting within easy range of the German artillery on the cliffs behind the beach.

Weather conditions were so bad the air support considered to be so crucial to the success of the invasion had to be cancelled. Their role was to attack the German army divisions which would certainly be rushed to Normandy to repel the invaders. 11,000 aircraft were supposed to take off from all over England on June 6. No one had heard anything at this point about the fate of the airborne troops who had landed in France near midnight of June 5.

By late afternoon, Mike was in pain from wounds he had received at Anzio. An artillery shell had exploded behind

him and three other men. He was the sole survivor. He carried a great deal of shrapnel fragments near his spine. Unfortunately the fragments had been declared inoperable. It was determined at the time of the accident that any attempt by the surgeons to remove the shrapnel would kill him. As it was he now lived in constant danger that a large piece of the steel lodged close to his spinal cord might shift and sever his central nervous system. Death was now a close companion.

Mike could have gone home but instead he had volunteered to transfer to England to help instruct combat officers on amphibious landings. He taught them what to expect in amphibious operations and how to lead their troops in an assault situation. He was a veteran of the North African, Sicily and Italian campaigns.

When his division was pulled out of the Anzio operation to participate in the Normandy invasion he went along with them. They were an experienced combat outfit with valuable knowledge of how to establish a beachhead. Now his division was somewhere on Omaha Beach and Mike was in anguish over their fate. They are the best, he thought to himself. if anyone can survive these conditions they can.

He had been with the division from its formation in the States. He'd fought with them from their first combat

experience in North Africa right up to the Anzio beachhead where he had been so badly wounded. Anzio had become a death trap because the Allied troops had failed to move off the beaches when they reached land. For four months the German artillery had kept them from moving inland. The number of men and ships lost had been much higher than the military estimates for the landing. Among the casualties were many men who he had counted as friends.

And now it looked as if he would lose even more buddies who were caught in a combat situation quite similar to Anzio. Once again, the German army held the high ground. It allowed them to fire down on an enemy who was unable to maneuver to any position from which they could effectively fight back.

Mike's desk was now inundated with a constant flow of messages to the Ops center which had quickly turned into bedlam. As the evening wore on he was beginning to piece together the terrible disaster building up in France. Loss of landing craft was about sixty percent of the boats sent in to the beaches. They had either been sunk before reaching land or destroyed on the beaches by German artillery fire.

Without these boats it was impossible to supply the troops on shore. As it stood now, the forces which had

managed to get to the shore were cut off without supplies. Only some respite from the stormy conditions would allow vital supplies to be brought in to the stranded soldiers.

A brighter picture emerged during the morning hours. Fortunately, only about half of the total invasion force had been committed. Vessels holding the rest of the assault troops were being held out of German artillery range. They were biding their time waiting for an opportunity to join the soldiers on the beaches.

Mike saw with a sinking heart that Omaha was suffering the worst losses. When time permitted he checked with other sections of the ops center for news about the conditions on the beach. The latest news indicated the remaining survivors on Omaha would try to move under the cover of night to join with the forces on Utah Beach some twelve miles away.

Landings on Utah Beach hadn't gone well either but certainly somewhat better than the experience on Omaha. Utah Beach was more sheltered because it was closer to the Cherbourg Peninsula which jutted out into the channel like a finger from the mainland of France. Losses of landing craft had also been heavy here but German resistance had been weaker.

On Utah the landing force had been successful in getting off the beach and establishing a position inland. However, their position could become precarious if they weren't reinforced and supplied with heavy armaments to meet a German counterattack. So far there were no signs that the German units still in the area were being reinforced.

At SHAEF, plans were being rapidly revised. It was decided the best course of action was to conquer and control the Cherbourg Peninsula with the combined forces now on shore. They hoped to buy time until the weather cleared enough to allow reinforcement and air support.

Out on the Channel the Navy was staying on the job. During the night they worked frantically to replenish their armaments. In the morning they would move in again to pound the German coastal defenses. At this juncture it was not yet known for sure how many ships had been sunk or put out of commission. It was known overall losses had been much heavier than the estimates for the invasion.

British and Canadian landings hadn't fared well either. The storm also had an adverse effect on their efforts. They had fought for and now held a position inland from the beaches. Basically they were in the same circumstances as

the American forces. Reinforcements and supplies were vital in order for them to survive the German counterattacks which were certain to come eventually.

Members of the SHAEF staff knew their revised plans were tenuous at best. How quickly the Germans could move up their forces in response to the invasion was unknown. So far, the element of surprise was working in their favor although the weather certainly hadn't. Hitler and his general staff had been convinced for some time now the invasion would take place at the narrowest point between France and England. Calais was the nearest French port.

The savage storm hit the Channel sooner than expected and produced mixed results. Allied invasion plans were totally disorganized but so were the Germans. All of the generals of the Seventh Army Group defending Normandy with the exception of one general, were away from the area on D-Day at a war games conference. General Rommel who now had command of the French coastal defenses, was also out of the Normandy area on D Day. He was on his way to see Hitler on June 6.

Reports transmitted to the German generals on June 6 were confusing because they were not based on eyewitness

accounts. No one seemed to believe the lone general in the Normandy area who claimed, “thousands of ships were bearing right down on him.” Besides, Hitler was adamant that the main invasion would come at Calais. This offensive was only a diversionary raid of some kind.

Had this belief not existed within the German high command the Normandy invasion would have been snuffed out quickly given the stormy conditions. There were two Panzer divisions being held in reserve. Hitler refused to release them for reinforcement of the Normandy area. He made sure they stayed where they were to be ready to move into Calais as soon as the allied invasion began.

Mike left the ops center to get some rest. He was thoroughly drenched by the time he arrived at the house where he was billeted. He was greeted at the front door by his landlady Mrs. Willoughby, the plump little widow of a sea captain. He suspected she routinely spent most of her days drinking. Although she could be a little tipsy at times, she never appeared to be drunk. At the moment, she was looking at him anxiously.

“Well, how goes it for the lads?”

“Too early to tell Mrs. Willoughby, but it hasn’t started out well at all. The stormy weather is the problem”

“It’s a tricky thing, the English Channel. My husband had great respect for its whims.”

Mike could smell the whiskey she had been imbibing as she asked, “Could I offer you a drink, Major?”

He was torn between fatigue and the tempting idea of a belt before going to bed. He agreed to the drink, knowing it would be a stiff one. Mrs. Willoughby never stinted on the whiskey. He sat down in her parlor and she served him a generous amount of alcohol with a small amount of water. After pouring a drink for herself, she sat down opposite Mike. They silently toasted one another.

“You know,” she said, “this looks like another Dunkirk.”

He realized she was attempting get a little information with this leading remark. He was aware she had good reason for concern. Her daughters had husbands who were somewhere in the invasion force, one army, one navy. He worded his answer carefully,

“I don’t think this storm situation can be compared with Dunkirk. We have a much stronger armed force now than in 1939. There is plenty of military equipment to back up the invasion.”

Mrs. Willoughby watched him closely as he spoke, then she grinned.

“Let’s give the strutting little bugger what for. My husband was in the first war. We thrashed them then and we’ll do it again. But it won’t hurt to pray.”

Mike finished his drink and refused another one. He told her it was time for a much needed rest. She nodded.

"You’re the only one of the four officers I’m boarding who has shown up today. Have you heard from any of the others?"

“No, Mrs. Willoughby. I know Charlie—Lieutenant Colonel Morgan—hitched a ride on a Navy ship to see the invasion. I have no idea where Major Johnson or Captain Turner might be. They’re caught up in this emergency too. I’m sure they’ll be back when things settle down some. Good night.”

Mike went immediately to bed. He would be up again at 0500. He had a restless night caused by the strain and being over-fatigued. On several occasions during the night he sat upright in bed soaked in a cold sweat. He was having nightmares about his combat experiences. The pictures he was seeing in the dreams were uncomfortably real. The images came at him and ran together randomly.

He was getting bits of past battles overlaid with imagined scenes of the slaughter on Omaha Beach.

When he had joined the division in 1942 as a “ninety-day wonder” second lieutenant he had forged close friendships with three other “shave tails.” At thirty-two, Mike was the oldest of the group. The others were in their early twenties. One by one his three buddies had been killed along the way from North Africa to Italy. He paid the price of getting too attached to these men. As combat soldiers also learn, it hurts too much to get too close to the men fighting in combat with you.

Mike had his deceased buddies’ “short snorters.” These were souvenir autographs written on pieces of paper glued together to form a long sheet. Short snorters were very popular during the Second World War. Autographs on these snorters were of their army buddies, prominent people, generals, politicians. And famous movie stars overseas entertaining the troops in combat zones.

The friends had made a pact. If any one of them survived long enough to reach the end of the war in Europe, the short snorters would be brought to Berlin. They would be buried there as a memorial to the ones who had not made it.

Mike, was now the lone survivor of the group. He carefully guarded the scraps of paper, and wherever he moved he made sure they were safe in their steel container.

He sat up for a while at 0300 to have a cigarette. Then he remembered that in his duffel bag there was a bottle of fine brandy. Charlie had given it to him before he left to board the cruiser. Sitting on the edge of the bed he smoked and sipped the brandy. He was deep in thought which was the only way he knew how to pray.

This can't all be a waste, he thought to himself. Too much blood has already been spilled, too many valuable people dead, and too much anguish for this to be all for nothing. If you're there God, let this war mean something.

Chapter Six

D-Day plus one came in pretty much like June 6. There was still a gale force wind with fog and heavy rain. Clouds moved swiftly by at low levels. Mike looked at the sky as he hurried to his jeep. No air support again today, he thought. He was anxious to get to the operations center for the latest news on the invasion. When he entered his work area it was still as busy as when he had left it the night before. A captain gratefully gave up his seat to him. He was red-eyed and the strain of the work was evident by the lines on his face.

"Anything good?" Mike asked him.

"Not much change," he replied. "The latest weather update indicates the storm front is solid. They predict another two days of this weather, minimum. Right now I'm glad I'm only a peon. I wouldn't want to be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; those guys don't seem to be sleeping at all. We're running information to them as fast as it comes in.

"It looks like the Navy will try to supply the troops in France and pound the German shore batteries. Without air support again today they're going to catch hell over in France. Reports have come in that the British and Canadian

forces have been ordered to start moving to their right. They will fight their way to a position south of Caen and link up with the American troops on Utah Beach. From there they will combine forces to extend their foothold near the Cherbourg Peninsula. I sure hope it works. I've got to go now. I'm dead on my feet."

As he worked on the radio messages he learned that the British airborne troops had fared reasonably well in accomplishing their objectives. It now appeared, at least for the moment anyway, the highway leading to the Cherbourg Peninsula was under allied control. Hopes for a linkup of forces looked brighter. He rushed the information over to SHAEF. But there was bad news too. Heavy seas were making it impossible to land more troops to reinforce the survivors in Normandy. All of the troop-carrying vessels in the armada were ordered back to England to wait for a break in the weather. All available smaller Navy ships were trying to salvage the LSTs and landing craft. They would be needed for the next landing.

Naval war ships were firing blindly in the rain and fog. German coastal batteries weren't doing much damage in these conditions since they couldn't see their targets either. Small Navy boats which had come closer to shore had a

harder time of it from the German artillery. But for the most part, the naval struggle resembled nothing so much as two blind fighters trying to land a punch.

By the afternoon, word came in to the Ops center about a small element of the American airborne troops making contact with the forces on Utah Beach. Although the reports weren't complete it appeared the airborne troops had been badly scattered in the landing. Then the storm had hit them at dawn making things even more disorganized. Of the five causeways leading to the Cherbourg Peninsula, only one was under the control of the Americans. Control of the causeways was vital to prevent Wehrmacht reinforcements from attacking the Utah beachhead.

Only the elevated causeways provided entrance to the Cherbourg Peninsula. General Rommel had the land around the causeways completely flooded. It made the terrain impossible to traverse. A number of American paratroopers had landed in the flooded area and tragically drowned. If the causeways remained accessible to the German Panzer divisions they could quickly annihilate the American troops. At this moment the American forces on Utah had no armaments heavy enough to oppose German tanks.

Even with heavy artillery and tanks for support, the Allies would have great difficulty knocking out the new Panther and Tiger tanks. Their armor was so heavy an anti-tank cannon missile couldn't penetrate the outer shell of the tanks. Cannon mounted on a Panther tank was actually a modified 88 artillery piece capable of completely demolishing a building with one shell. 88s were the most feared cannon in the Nazi arsenal.

Allied high command was aware of the two Panzer divisions being held inland in reserve. As things stood at the moment, if the Panzer divisions were to move in they would win an easy victory. However, reports from the airborne commanders indicated that the Germans didn't seem to be organizing a counterattack. At least not yet.

He didn't know, nor did anyone else that the German Seventh Army generals were only now being alerted. New information about the invasion at Normandy was coming from sources other than the lone general at Omaha Beach. On D-Day the one German general remaining in Normandy had made frantic calls to headquarters trying to get someone to listen to him. He was always told everyone including Hitler knew the invasion would take place at Calais.

The German confusion had bought the Allies thirty-six hours of fairly light German resistance.

There was heartening news late in the day. Units from Omaha had linked up with the Utah command by moving all night on June 6. British and Canadian forces were moving quickly toward Cherbourg in captured German trucks. It was a desperate dash against time. The Allies held their breath, praying the Germans wouldn't counter-attack and cut them off from the American force on Utah Beach.

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Portsmouth was now teeming with returning troops and the wounded. Temporary tent cities were being erected as fast as possible to shelter the survivors against the cold rain and fierce winds. Other transport ships were landing troops at ports up and down the English coast. Most of these troops hadn't been released for the beaches. Now they were back in the bivouac areas they had left four days ago. Everything was an effort in the stormy conditions and the rain never let up. Civilians came forward to take soldiers into their homes for care as the conditions became public knowledge.

It wasn't necessary to have been wounded in combat to need care. Six days of cold rainy weather on the seas in gale force winds left most of the troops suffering from

exposure and a lack of food. Once again, the English people had done their part in a war which, for them, had dragged on almost five years now.

Toward evening Mike was relieved from duty. There were more staff personnel moving in. New sections were created to handle the rapidly changing military situation. It was a great challenge to keep up with the work of gathering vital reports coming in from France. SHAEF desperately needed up to date information about the military crisis. Decisions and subsequent orders depended on a proper feel for the enemy troop positions and US Naval operations.

Mike had accepted an invitation from Mrs. Willoughby to dine with her and her two daughters. They were living at home while their husbands were away in the war. He was looking forward to a respite from his duties. He decided to bring the bottle of fine brandy Charlie Morgan had given him as his contribution to the dinner. He luxuriated in a hot bath then shaved and put on a clean uniform.

Before he could start on his way downstairs there was a knock on his door. It was Charlie Morgan.

“It’s great to see you back in one piece Charlie!”

“I wasn’t sure I would make it back,” Charlie replied. “It was a nightmare out there in the Channel yesterday.

I got in late last night on an oil barge. They picked a bunch of us up from a Navy launch out of gas. We were lucky, the cruiser I was on was sunk by German shore batteries. We were cleared through medical this afternoon. I have to get to my supply section tomorrow morning. This storm has messed up everything. I expect to be staying there around the clock while I organize and ship out supplies badly needed in France.”

Then Charlie went on to fill Mike in on the invasion scene he had witnessed off Omaha Beach. Mike listened quietly to his friend's story and did not interrupt with questions. Finishing their drinks they went downstairs to have dinner with the Willoughbys. They had agreed beforehand to keep the mood light at dinner. There was no use in bringing up the grave situation in France. All of them had a stake in the welfare of the invasion force. Charlie had brought a bottle of whiskey along and he served drinks to the group.

While they were sitting in the parlor enjoying their cocktails before dinner, Captain Turner entered. He was also billeted there. Greg Turner was an Army Air Corp captain. He was young and handsome which seemed to conform to the glamorous image of the Air Corps.

His social life in England had been heavy. He played the field and his only problem seemed to be not how to attract girls. More often it was how to get rid of them once he had dated them. Greg had washed out of flight school due to an inner ear problem. He was the nephew of a US senator so he had important connections. Chances were he would probably be promoted up the ranks if the war lasted long enough

Mrs. Willoughby's daughters were opposites. Mary was thirty, tall and slender, with dark hair and vivid blue eyes. Her expression was usually solemn almost sad, she was stiff and formal with people. Her younger sister Kathy on the other hand, was vivacious and ready for a laugh. At twenty-six, she was a sandy haired, slightly plump woman. She already resembled her mother in looks as well as personality. Greg liked to tease her because she responded to the fun of it.

The women didn't attempt to pry into the military duties of the four officers billeted in the house. It would be a breach of etiquette and certainly embarrassing for the officers. Conversation during dinner was mainly focused on general talk about the war and the foul weather. Mrs. Willoughby's daughters were volunteers at the military hospital in Portsmouth. Kathy had them laughing about

some of the lighter moments she shared with the patients. Greg turned to Kathy and remarked,

“I’m sure with you around the sick ones are ready to leave the hospital a few days ahead of time. You’re definitely a tonic for depression Kathy.”

His compliment made her blush and giggle.

Mrs. Willoughby, who by this time had drunk a liberal amount of Charlie’s whiskey commented,

“This bleeding weather is thick enough to eat. I hope it shifts to the Jerries' side and drowns them.”

Everyone laughed as she grimaced and rolled her eyes.

Charlie wasn't feeling any pain. He remarked,

“It’s too bad we can’t find a way to push the rain and fog ahead of us from England. We could walk all the way to Berlin and the Krauts would never see us.”

Mrs. Willoughby whooped with laughter at the wild idea.

Everyone felt a little better being in each other’s company. It relieved some of the worry and tension, at least temporarily. Greg got into the act too.

“We’re considering putting pontoons on our bombers and floating them across to France on the clouds.”

Kathy giggled and punched his arm.

Mrs. Willoughby asked the three officers,
“Where is Major Johnson? I haven’t seen him for nearly four days.”

Each officer was waiting for one of the others to volunteer to answer her question. They knew and Mrs. Willoughby didn’t, that Fred Johnson was cleared for top secret. He worked in the highly secret decoding section of Army intelligence. His “cover” was “weather observation”.

"With this weather I’m sure his group is working twenty-four hours a day,” Mike finally replied. “They probably have cots set up to sleep on at their headquarters.”

“I suppose,” she murmured.
Actually none of the three officers was supposed to know what Fred Johnson did but Greg had used his connections to find out about him.

After dinner the officers convened in Charlie’s room. Alone in the room, they shared the information they knew about the invasion situation. Greg said,

“We can’t even get a reconnaissance flight off the ground in this soup. We’re hoping the ceiling will lift by tomorrow morning. If not, I don’t see how the forces in France can survive without air support. We have to hold German

reinforcements away from the beachhead.”

Mike told them what he knew from his information gathering at the Ops center. What he said didn’t make Charlie and Greg feel any better. He told them about the position of each element on the beaches and the efforts to consolidate the forces on the narrow peninsula leading to Cherbourg. He concluded by saying that if they were unable to do it, then the cause was already lost. The troops on Utah Beach would be caught in a dragnet consisting of the strong German army defending the city at their backs and attacking reinforcements on the land side in front of them.

Charlie added reinforcing the troops in France and supplying them with adequate armaments was crucial to their survival. It would be impossible if the weather didn’t change. He told them about the loss of the Mulberry dry docks in the D-Day storm. Without them he said delivering supplies to the beaches would be very difficult. From what he had seen on D-Day, he estimated at least forty percent of the invasion fleet had been lost.

Chapter Seven

At SHAEF a battle of wills was being fought over the change in military strategy rendered imperative by the unexpected storm conditions. British army commanders had been lukewarm about a Normandy invasion from the start. Churchill had been vehemently opposed to it. Now the old arguments for a Balkan invasion or perhaps a landing in Norway were raised again.

The British commanders contended their losses should be cut in Normandy and the forces there be rescued as best they could. Then a new approach could be taken to expand the fighting front in Europe in order to force the Germans to thin their defenses. This would provide needed relief for the Russian army.

Opposing groups were adamant about completing what had been started, pointing out they had lost fifty percent of their landing craft on D-Day. These boats were hard to come by. The Italian campaign had been stripped of landing craft so that the Normandy invasion would be possible. Demand for landing craft was heavy in the Pacific as well. Many assaults were required to fight the Japanese on the numerous islands they now occupied.

So they argued the Normandy invasion had to be salvaged because attention to the Pacific operation would be intensified in light of the poor result so far in France. Failure in Normandy meant a demand for more landing craft wouldn't find a sympathetic ear in Washington DC. Eventually a compromise was worked out. Initially every effort would be made to establish an Allied fortress on the Cherbourg Peninsula. It would be used as an area to build up supplies and to move in more troops for a break out to the French mainland. Hopefully by the end of summer.

First, the embattled troops on the beaches had to be reinforced. So there would be another amphibious landing on Utah Beach which was firmly in allied hands. A second and simultaneous landing would be attempted near the city of Cherbourg in an effort to encircle the city; If successful, it would prevent the German army in the city from attacking the troops on the Peninsula from the rear. Cherbourg harbor and the surrounding area were heavily fortified, casualties from a Cherbourg landing were estimated to be high.

D-Day plus two began with a continuation of the storm. However, the winds were beginning to moderate coming in gusts rather than the previous constant high velocity.

But the rain and foggy conditions persisted. For another day allied air power was immobilized by the storm. Left without air support, forces in France were extremely vulnerable.

Mike met the new colonel who was now in charge of his section at the ops center. They would be gathering information from radio operators who were in touch with the French underground. This information would be combined into a military situation report. French information was vital to estimating enemy troop strengths and trying to interpret German intentions.

There was unrelenting pressure to feed the information to SHAEF as quickly as possible. They needed to identify specific German divisions and the estimated enemy strength hour by hour. This was a grave responsibility for the Ops center. Information they were gathering might ward off a defeat in Normandy.

Around 1:00 PM, excitement spread through the center as news came in about a forward element of the English and Canadian troops linking up with the Americans on Utah Beach. This was followed by more good news concerning the airborne forces. They had fought their way along one of the Cherbourg causeways and moved to Utah Beach to join

the forces on the Cherbourg Peninsula.

At about 1600 there was bad news. French Resistance sources reported General Rommel's arrival in Caen near the landing area of the British and Canadian forces. He had immediately issued orders for the two reserve Panzer divisions to move on the allied army in Normandy. A little later word came in reporting four veteran German army divisions were arriving in Caen ahead of the Panzers.

It was obvious the Nazis had finally taken their eyes off of Calais and turned their full attention on Normandy. Mike's section consolidated the French Resistance reports of the Germany army movements. It was estimated the Wehrmacht would be in place to engage the Allied forces on the Cherbourg Peninsula by early evening.

US Naval forces were taking advantage of the small break in the weather to make almost suicidal runs to Utah Beach with heavy armaments. They were badly needed in order to mount any kind of effective defense against the German army now moving toward Cherbourg. Many incoming boats were smashed against rock formations. Gradually the needed supplies were reaching the troops in Normandy. Air support was still impossible.

Toward evening the winds began to slack off and the rain changed to a fine drizzle. Incoming weather reports indicated the worst of the storm had passed through the area. Greg stopped by Mike's desk.

"They'll probably begin flying around 2200" he said. "Now we can show the Nazis what the largest concentration of air power in history can do."

Mike tried to respond with enthusiasm but he was far short of Greg's optimism. He murmured in reply,

"I sure hope you're right."

"Count on it," Greg said confidently.

Air forces had adopted the same optimism all military explosives units have had since the first cannon went off in a battle. They were all sure their bombs or artillery shells would completely destroy their opponents.

In the American Civil War at the Battle of Fredericksburg, a Confederate artillery officer assured General Robert E. Lee, "not even a chicken" could survive on the battlefield in front of their defensive line. It seems the flaw in such bold statements is the fact that human beings know how to take shelter from danger.

It was nearly 2100 PM before Mike was relieved from duty. By then the battle was underway on the Cherbourg

Peninsula and there were 25,000 British troops still trying to reach Utah Beach. Allied chiefs of staff were anxiously watching the progress of the British troops, because at the moment there was a gap of ten miles between the two Allied armies. Reports began to come in from the Cherbourg forces stating the first German attack had been a probing maneuver. The enemy had drawn off their forward units. They were expected to launch a full-scale attack in the morning.

Mike ate in the officers' mess, then went to his quarters to sleep for the night. He was planning to get up around 0400 in order to be back on duty by 0500. However, around 2300 that night a rumbling noise interrupted his sleep. As the sound became louder his bed began to vibrate. After a few moments he became alert and identified the sound as a vast wave of aircraft bound for France.

It took over an hour for the sound to subside. When the last of the planes had passed overhead and the sound finally began to fade into silence, he lay back down again. His last thought before he drifted back to sleep was, he hoped Greg was right about the power of the air forces.

Chapter Eight

D-Day plus three dawned with a partly cloudy sky. Winds were now about half their former velocity. There were a few sprinkles of rain. It appeared to be tapering off. At the ops center Mike learned as predicted, the Germans had launched a full scale attack at dawn. So far the assault was infantry with no Panzer units in sight.

Since D-Day the troops had been busy digging defensive positions on the Peninsula. It added up to four days of preparation to defend their beachhead. Navy war ships had moved in to augment the land troop's artillery which was still weak. More troops were scheduled to be brought in the following day by the transport ships recalled to England on D-Day. There was a constant roar over Portsmouth as the air forces flew to France and returned. At last we're starting to get somewhere, Mike thought to himself.

Later in the day French Resistance sources reported there were now ten German divisions in the Normandy area. Now it was crucial for the British forces to reach Cherbourg by the following day to avoid being cut off and surrounded. These British troops and added troops landed on Utah Beach were critical to the success of the Allies'

plan to capture the city of Cherbourg. The city would become an Allied stronghold with an open port to supply the armies and a solid place to launch a breakout when they were ready.

It was estimated the next forty-eight hours would decide the outcome of the story: success or failure. The Allied position was precarious at the moment. They were surrounded by the Germans with all five causeways on the Peninsula now under Nazi control. In addition there was a sizable garrison at their backs waiting to attack them from the city of Cherbourg.

From Sword Beach reports came in from the British forces fighting a rear guard action. They were now being attacked by reinforcements in their front as well. All progress was virtually halted while they fought off the German attacks. Mike's section then received news about a German army division moving in to intercede on the British right flank. This move could block the British troops from crossing the ten mile gap between the American forces and their present position.

Air support was being concentrated on the Germans engaged with the British forces in an effort to break them out of the bind in which they now found themselves.

Suddenly German fighters began to appear over Normandy to challenge the Allied bombers supporting the British land forces. Gradually a full-scale air war developed over France. It was estimated that the Germans had put up approximately two hundred fifty fighter aircraft.

Included in this airborne armada were the hundred fighter pilots of the Nazi Suicide Squadron. It had been recently created as an extreme air defense plan against the allies continuous day and night bombing. These Luftwaffe pilots were trained to ram into allied bombers' tail assemblies, then bail out of their crippled fighter plane.

Although they couldn't prevent all of the allied bombers from supporting the British army, Luftwaffe attacks seriously hindered allied efforts to stop the advance of German troops. To add to this new threat, word came in about a Panzer division moving into position to attack the British in the morning.

D-Day plus four was a calm, partly cloudy day and much warmer. At 0600 more troops were landed on Utah Beach to beef up the needed fighting strength. A smaller landing of troops was made nearer the city of Cherbourg. Their mission was to protect the rear of the main force in the Utah Beach area. Landings at Utah Beach were progressing smoothly since the Germans defending the Utah Beach area had been cleared out..

It was a different story for the troops landed nearer to Cherbourg. Coastal defenses were heavy and the German Army was well entrenched. Their positions were close enough to the landing to administer concentrated fire on the beaches below Cherbourg. The Navy was duelling with the German coastal defenses to little effect. The German big guns firing at the warships in the harbor below were amply protected. They were strategically placed in fortifications constructed of reinforced concrete eight feet thick.

By the time this offensive operation was ended, fifty percent of the landing craft had been put out of commission. Assault troops at Cherbourg were ordered to retreat to the main defensive position further down the Peninsula. German forces in the city of Cherbourg were still intact to attack the allied forces from the rear.

Tactical plans were changed because of the failure of the landing. There were no other areas along the Cherbourg Peninsula where troops could be landed without being slaughtered. Plans were altered to put Cherbourg under constant bombardment by the Navy and continual bombing raids by allied bombers.. SHAEF commanders hoped this combined fire power would impede a German advance from the city into the rear of the allied defense position.

By early morning German fighter aircraft returned over Normandy in large numbers. They attacked the troops still being landed on Utah Beach. Allied fighter planes arrived over the Normandy Beach to protect the landing. Artillery on the ground and allied fighter aircraft became engaged in a grim battle with the Luftwaffe.

On this day naval forces faced a new threat. German submarines began to appear in the English Channel. Two supply ships on the perimeter of the convoy had suddenly exploded and sank. On the opposite side three more ships were torpedoed and went down. A frenzied search began by anti sub ships to seek and destroy the attacking U boats. The allies were unaware that a new Nazi super submarine was making its debut into the war at sea. This was the Mark XXI designed specifically for attacking ships in harbors

and narrow passageways. It was faster than any allied anti sub vessel and more maneuverable underwater than ships on the ocean's surface. Here was a new Nazi threat that could sink ships and disappear unscathed.

Within hours of the Mark XXI attacks came further word to SHAEF about allied ships being sunk on the periphery of the fleet. At this time sinkings of ships further out at sea were the work of another Nazi super submarine, the new Mark XXII which was larger and nearly as fast as the Mark XXI. It was built for action against allied convoys sailing across the North Atlantic from America to England. Efforts to find and destroy the German U boats were unsuccessful in sinking any of the U boats operating in the Channel.

The Mark XXII had an additional technological feature which greatly enhanced its invincibility to allied efforts to seek and destroy them. A Mark XXII submarine could travel underwater from Germany to Japan without surfacing. This U boat could attack a ship sink it and speed far away before anti sub measures could be used against them. In addition it could stay submerged for days if necessary. Allied forces were now fully engaged with the Nazis in the air, as well as on land and sea.

At the ops center there was an eruption of messages coming in from all military sectors at the same time. Mike's section was hard pressed to keep abreast of the rapid changes in the a battle. This engagement was fast growing into an engagement of all of the allied forces in France.and in the English Channel.

General Rommel, who was famous for his swift, hard hitting style had apparently convinced Hitler that Normandy was the real thing. It was clear Rommel was moving to attack the allied armies in a huge sweep from left to right.

As they were hard at work in the ops center they heard a loud but low-pitched buzzing sound. Startled by the sudden strange noise they all instinctively looked up at the ceiling. It was a sound they couldn't identify. It was foreign and new to them. Actually it was the first time it had been heard by anyone in England. What had passed overhead were the first V-1 rockets headed for London.

An hour later, a colonel came into the center and called for everyone's attention. When they were all gathered together and silent he announced,

"We have received a message from London. The buzzing sound you heard a while ago was coming from German

rockets. London was the target for these pilotless missiles. They reported that when the buzzing suddenly stops it means the bomb is gliding to its target. These bombs are larger than conventional bombs. London was hit by the rockets and one crater left from the detonation measured forty feet across and nine feet deep.

“They estimate the power of the bombs is capable of leveling a city block. When rockets are sighted sirens will alert you to go to the bomb shelters. We don’t know where the Germans intend to attack with these devices, so when an alarm is sounded you are ordered to go to the shelters. That is all.”

There was silence in the center while everyone tried to comprehend this new Nazi threat. Not since the Blitz had ended in 1940 had the population of England been put at such grave risk of indiscriminate destruction by the Nazis. Air raids by the Luftwaffe on London had been going on continuously since 1940, but they had not occurred daily. Now people were confronted once again with all the day-to-day anxiety about families and friends. Those children who had been evacuated from London and allowed to return recently were ordered back to the relative safety of the rural areas.

A short time later, word came in from the allied command on the Cherbourg Peninsula confirming they were being attacked by the rockets. So far the damage from the V-1's had not been severe. But the rocket attacks had a demoralizing effect on the soldiers pinned down in Normandy.

As the day wore on, the news from the naval forces became increasingly serious. German submarines were appearing in large numbers around the convoy. By late afternoon so many ships had been sunk that the fleet was ordered to scatter for survival. Once again, the transport ships had been ordered back to England. These ships were slow and they made easy targets for the submarines.

Enemy U-boats had now interceded between the troop ships and Utah Beach. The maneuver cut off any further landing of reinforcements for the allied forces in France. An equally distressing result of this move by the German submarines was the cutting off of supplies to the troops in Normandy. They would be forced to try to supply the forces on the Peninsula by air drops. Hour by hour the military situation was becoming grimmer.

Chapter Nine

Greg came by Mike's desk with a suggestion.

"Let's stop by the officers' club on the way back to the house. I could sure use a drink. I have to be back on duty at midnight."

Mike agreed to join him. What was called the officers' club was a makeshift affair composed of a couple of Quonset huts joined together. It was usually densely packed. Tonight the noisy group included WAC officers, nurses and Red Cross Volunteers. There were no tables available so the two friends edged their way to the bar.

Before his arrival in England Mike hadn't run into the social phenomenon during wartime. His army life up until then had been in combat zones in North Africa, Sicily and Anzio Beach in Italy. In the early times of the American involvement in combat there had only been short rest breaks in African towns. Mike had wondered if any of the people he met in the clubs were even aware that there was a war on. These people were lively and always ready to party.

He tried to be fair in his attitude toward the many military people he met in England. He knew most of them had never been in the combat zones. Sometimes the tolerant

attitude deserted him. At these times he would leave the scene rather than say something he might regret later.

Charlie Morgan grabbed his shoulder as he and Greg were being served their drinks.

“Come on over here you guys,” he said. “We have a table in the corner. Come on!”

They followed in Charlie’s substantial wake. The big man shouldered his way through the crowd to the table. There were two officers from Charlie’s supply section, two WAC officers and two Red Cross volunteers. The volunteers belonged to a group of young women often labeled with the popular but derogatory term of, "donut girls". Many of them came from wealthy families and volunteered to go to England to experience for themselves the excitement of the war.

Charlie introduced everyone. They had been talking about the Normandy invasion crisis. Mike was seated next to a Red Cross girl while Charlie expatiated at length on his heroic D-Day. Mike was familiar with this story from frequent exposure to it so he studied the people at the table.

He knew the two supply officers who assisted Charlie, as well as the two WAC officers. He turned his attention to the Red Cross girls. One was a short plump girl in her mid-twenties, Mike guessed, She was engrossed in Charlie’s D-

Day adventures. On the other side was a pretty girl named Barbara Randolph. She turned to Mike with a warm smile and commented,

“From your expression I would guess you've heard Charlie's story before.”

“We're billeted at the same house. So you're right, Charlie did fill me in a while ago. If you will excuse me, it's time for me to leave.”

He stood up to go because it was one of those times when the social atmosphere in the officers' club was irritating him. Besides, he had to get some sleep before returning to the Ops center later in the evening. Then Barbara said the wrong thing.

“Don't rush off. The war can wait a few minutes.”

“Thank God not all of us share your attitude,” Mike snapped. “This is a war, lady, not a side show created for the benefit of bored little rich girls!”

He left the club quickly before she had a chance to answer.

When Mike reached the street he felt someone grab his arm from behind. It was Barbara and she had a teasing smile on her face.

“You're either a serious guy or a socialist who thinks wealth is immoral. Which is it?”

The smile and the spunky attitude disarmed him.

“I’m sorry. I was rude. These clubs get on my nerves sometimes. It’s all new to me. My introduction to the war was combat in North Africa. I’ve only been here in England three months. A social center is new to me.”

“I’m sure your combat experiences have given you a different perspective on what war is all about. People can only react to what they’ve experienced. Give us sheltered types a break, Mike.”

"But ... right, I'll try. I do have to get some sleep. Good night.”

He left Barbara looking after him. Mike liked her directness but he wasn’t in the market for a romance. Although he had to admit with her athletic build, light brown hair and blue eyes, she was by far the prettiest girl he had seen lately. He shrugged off the incident and went home to rest.

D-Day plus six marked the Normandy invasion as one week old. Based on the information they knew about the crisis in France, the Ops center staff wondered if this was the crucial day for the allies. In the last twelve hours German forces had consolidated for a planned offensive.

On the Cherbourg Peninsula the German army had

advanced unopposed down the five causeways leading to Cherbourg. Stormy weather conditions had worked well in the Nazis' favor. All of the disasters of the first day of the invasion gave them time to consolidate their forces for a counter attack. Mike was familiar with German tanks and the power they packed. He could imagine what the combat would be like. He said a silent prayer for the soldiers in France and a special one for his own division fighting there.

At 0500 V-1 rockets began to buzz over the Ops center. Sirens wailed and everyone went to the bomb shelters. Several rockets landed in the harbor near Portsmouth, it felt like a prelude to larger attacks. After an hour the all-clear sounded. Allied aircraft began to rumble overhead, the battle had begun. Reports started coming in from Normandy within an hour about an attack on the Cherbourg Peninsula spearheaded by the Panzer divisions.

In another hour they received reports about German troops from the city of Cherbourg advancing on the allied rear area. Now the main force was under siege from the front and behind, while overhead, allied aircraft fought to keep the Luftwaffe from bombing and strafing the troops

fighting below.

British troops trying to reach the Cherbourg Peninsula were now cut off. They had been successfully encircled by German infantry and a Panzer division. Their backs were to the sea. The intelligence SHAEF had gathered confirmed their conclusion, the British forces were surrounded by the Nazis. All they could do now was to fight a delaying action as naval vessels worked desperately to rescue the troops from Sword Beach. There wouldn't be any rescue efforts for the Cherbourg force because the Germans now controlled the area around Utah Beach.

By early afternoon the final radio message came in from the British army. It had been impossible to resist the powerful forces moving in so quickly to surround them on the beach. Approximately 10,000 soldiers had been evacuated. The remainder of the force, around 15,000 men, had surrendered to avoid annihilation at the water's edge.

All day there were air raid alerts in England as more "buzz bombs" (as they were now called) arrived from France. Aircraft continued to come and go. There was a constant roar of aircraft engines over the Ops center. Portsmouth harbor was receiving returning troops in all manner of boats, these survivors were led away to bivouac

areas inland. Naval forces were fighting submarines and providing escort for the ships bringing troops home from France. By nightfall, the only ships left in the Channel were the war ships.

Early in the evening word came in from the Peninsula forces about their critical situation. After an all-day attack from two sides the casualties were heavy. Mike overheard the colonel in charge of the Ops center say the general commanding the troops on the Peninsula had requested orders from SHAEF to decide their course of action. Should they fight on or surrender?

Slowly activity at the Ops center slacked off. No one in France needed to report anything about the location of the German army as they were all engaged in the battle. Mike was restless. He didn't want to go to his billet for rest when he was keyed up like he was now.

So when several of the officers he worked with invited him to join them at the officers' club, he decided to take them up on it. It was crowded as always but the atmosphere was more subdued now. Most of the officers in the club had been at the ops center night and day relaying information to the joint chiefs of staff. And among the officers who had

worked together during the crisis a feeling of fellowship had sprung up.

Mike sat with the other officers making small talk. No one was in the mood to start speculating about the fate of the troops in France. It was as though the conversation of a few people would somehow influence the outcome. He was grateful for the whiskey. He had been in considerable pain all day from his wounds and liquor helped relax his muscles.

He didn't say much, being content to listen to the other officers discuss the prospects for the major league baseball season. There were some harmless arguments between them about their favorite teams and laments about the most talented baseball players serving in the military service. After a few more rounds, everyone at the table was telling jokes.

When he left the club Mike was half drunk. At the house he fumbled around in the dark trying to get the door unlocked. Mrs. Willoughby heard the noise at the front door and peered out at him through the curtains. When she recognized him she opened the door.

"Good evening, Major. Are you having trouble with the door?"

"Yeah, I was having trouble finding the lock,"

Mike replied with a grin.

Mrs. Willoughby, who had been imbibing as well, asked.

“Are those buzz bombs bothering you, Major? They don’t bother me,” she went on, “except for the damned noise. They fly in so low. Now the little corporal is ruining my sleep. I wish somebody would shoot the bastard and put him out of his misery.”

Mike thought the remark was very funny and he whooped with laughter. Mrs. Willoughby laughed too.

“Come on, Major,” she cajoled. “Let’s have a drink.”

“Good idea, Mrs. Willoughby, good idea.”

They sat in the kitchen telling jokes, trying to forget the daily misery which had to be endured in close proximity to a war zone. In a few more minutes Charlie came back to the kitchen with the plump Red Cross girl on his arm,

“Having a party Mrs. Willoughby? Meet Frances Barr, a friend of mine from the Red Cross.”

“Glad to make your acquaintance,” Mrs. Willoughby said carefully so as not to slur her words. “Have a drink Frances. And you too Charlie.”

“Here, have some of mine,” Charlie replied, pulling a bottle out of his coat. So they all had a drink. Frances was obviously impressed with Charlie and clung to him.

After an hour he excused himself to go to his room taking the girl with him.

Mike was suddenly tired and fuzzy-minded, so he said good night to Mrs. Willoughby. She called after him,

“Why don’t you get yourself some company too Major? Lord knows there are plenty of girls around.”

“I have enough troubles. I don’t need any more.”

The remark struck them both as hilarious, and they cackled as Mike left the kitchen.

Chapter Ten

Patriotism wasn't Mike's only reason for staying when he had what the GIs called a "million dollar wound." This was a wound serious enough to render one unfit for further combat. Disturbing a large piece of the shrapnel lodged near his spine could kill Mike on the operating table or most certainly make him into a paraplegic. It had been his decision to leave the shrapnel alone knowing full well there was a risk of the metal migrating into his spinal cord. He was told any radical movement of the shrapnel would most likely kill him..

During his time in England Mike hadn't followed the precautions and daily physical therapy prescribed for him. He hadn't even bothered to see a surgeon in England for a check up. His other reason for staying overseas was personal. He was not ready to face the break-up of his marriage. His wife of seven years had sent him a "Dear John" letter a year ago while he was still fighting in North Africa. In truth the letter hadn't been completely unexpected. The couple had been having marital problems for several years prior to his entering the army.

Before the war Mike had been an investment banker in New York City. His wife Diana had been a gifted illustrator in the advertising business. Her career had suddenly undergone a breathtaking rise when a large advertising firm on Madison Avenue discovered her talent. It had caused a radical change in their married life. Their interests, friends and goals had become more and more divergent over the years. This revolutionary change had wrought its effects on their day-to-day living.

Madison Avenue had its deadlines to meet. Diana had begun to come and go as the job demanded. But a larger threat to their marriage was Mike's political and union clients. Most of his financial business had consisted of directing large sums of money into investments for Tammany Hall politicians in New York City government and some questionable trade unions. It had been a constant sticking point between them.

Diana at the start of their marriage, had been confident she could persuade him to change his business relationships. They had argued mildly at first about his associates and his connections with them. Over the years Diana's high moral stand had made him defensive at first, then gradually defiant. The schism between them had

widened. Mike, although somewhat uneasy about his involvement with the politicians had reasoned it was his friends in political circles who had made him successful. He continued to do business as he'd always done.

At the present time he wasn't sure whether Diana was having an affair or not. Her devastating letter had mentioned nothing about another man. But he suspected her of it anyway. Why else would she have felt compelled to write such a letter when he was away fighting in a war? The hurt went deep, for he loved his wife. His feelings of betrayal kept coming back to trouble him.

His letters to Diana after receiving the "Dear John" had gone unanswered. Mike wrote to her about reconciliation. He mentioned his willingness to discuss a change in his career after the war. He clung to a faint hope it was only their differences of opinion about his political clients threatening their marriage.

Diana's letter had been extremely vague merely stating there was no basis for their marriage any longer. He was free to see anyone he wanted she would start divorce proceedings as soon as practicable. Her tone had made it abundantly clear there was no room for reconciliation. Mike was fairly confident she would probably wait until he was home to divorce him.

Patriotism was running high in the States so she would be a fool to risk being socially ostracized. Even her own family would disapprove of Diana starting divorce proceedings before he got home from a combat zone.

But there were some lurking doubts. Mike was deeply disturbed about the imminent breakup for additional reasons having to do with his past. His mother had left his father when he was ten. She disappeared to places unknown without taking him with her. John Canyon was an electrical engineer specializing in the construction of power plants. Such a job had mandated travelling to anywhere he was needed. Mike had spent his earlier years moving around the globe with his mother and father.

After his mother had left, Mike was taken care of by his father's two sisters and their families until he was fourteen. John Canyon had then decided he must make a permanent home for his son, so he took a position with a power company in New York. Although John had never been a cruel man he'd always been very tough-minded. He expected his son to make a determined effort in everything he tried. Mike had never objected to this because he respected his father.

When they had moved to Queens, New York Mike had to meet the challenge in school which confronts all outsiders anywhere. The New York kids had considered him a hick from the sticks at first. Actually Mike was much more worldly than any of them. He had learned a good deal from travelling, especially the role of an outsider. He had been forced to play it cool frequently during his travels with his parents.

Mike picked a fight with a boy who was the leader of the bunch he wanted to belong to. It had done the trick. He could have beaten his opponent. Boxing had been his passion from an early age but he had been wise enough to lose the fight. Pat, the boy he'd fought in order to break the ice had become his closest friend. This bond had the added benefit of making him instantly popular at school. Both boys were keenly interested in boxing and Mike's friend had invited him to join a neighborhood athletic club. The club association would prove to be an important factor in molding his future.

Mike had become a club fighter. First as an amateur and then in his late teens he'd appeared in club fights as a pro to earn money for college. Now six feet tall and on the wiry side Mike had fought mostly in the welter weight division.

He was fast enough to avoid acquiring too many of a boxer's typical scars. Scar tissue over his eyes couldn't be avoided and his nose had a crook in it from several fractures. There was probably some Indian blood in his ancestry. He had the high cheek bones, chiselled face and black hair usually associated with Native Americans.

The New York athletic club Mike had belonged to was a prominent one in New York City. Its members of long standing represented considerable political leadership. Mike was likeable and a good fighter so he had quickly developed a wide acquaintance among these men. One man in particular Joe Stanton an attorney, had taken an interest in Mike. Stanton was high up in the Tammany Hall political machine. He had counselled Mike on his future and lent him money when he was attending CCNY. Joe had ultimately been responsible for Mike's next move into investment banking.

After attending college for two years, Mike had dropped out to join the investment firm recommended by Stanton. He'd trained at the firm learned his craft well. At the age of twenty five, he was bankrolled by Joe to open his own office. In the beginning he had been entrusted with small amounts of political funds to invest, but even so, it had been enough to make a living.

Then, over the years his reputation grew and his circle of contacts expanded with Joe Stanton's help. He had become well known in New York political circles and his business had blossomed into a profitable firm.

His career had caused a bitter quarrel between Mike and his father. John Canyon had been greatly disturbed over his son's decision to use his club contacts to go into business.; .Mike was dependent on the political patronage of people he didn't know or trust. He'd warned Mike the favors he was given by the Tammany Hall bunch would be called in one day. And was he prepared to do whatever he was told? Mike had waved aside his father's arguments and proceeded on his own course of action.

His decision had sadly caused a strain in his relationship with his father whom he loved and respected. Although he had continued to have dinner with his father once a week a wall had grown up between them.

Mike had first met Diana, a pretty brunette, at a political dinner. She had attended the dinner as a favor to her escort a long time friend of the family. There had been many reasons for his attraction to her. Aside from the fact he'd fallen in love with her at their first meeting, she was part of a warm, closely knit family. He'd had little experience with

family relationships of this kind. Het sensed that here was something he had missed in his childhood. He yearned to become part of a stable family in order to satisfy a deeply felt need to belong.

Now his marriage was on the verge of breaking up. He didn't want to go back to the States right now for the inevitable confrontation with Diana. He fervently hoped with time, she might reconsider. Deep down he knew the chances were slim.

There was another reason for staying in Europe. Mike wanted to continue to serve in the army because of a strong conviction his contribution was important and valuable. He had been surprised when this feeling came over him for the first time in North Africa. He felt worthwhile doing his part in the war; this sense of a higher purpose was something his business had never given him.

The alarm went off at 5:00 AM. Mike opened his eyes and immediately felt his hangover. Oh Lord, I'm going to pay for last night, he thought to himself as he held his hand to his throbbing head. Steeling himself to face the day he dressed himself quickly, and managed to arrive at the Ops center by 0530. There had been no news from Cherbourg so far.

A report came from London announcing 144 V-1 rockets had fallen around the city the day before. Within the hour there was an air raid alert. At the Ops center, everyone dutifully filed into the shelters. This is getting really irritating Mike thought to himself. After an hour or so, the all clear sounded. At the center messages were coming in from many sources except from the armed forces on the Cherbourg Peninsula.

General Eisenhower the supreme commander of the Allies sat alone in his office. He opened the center drawer of his desk and withdrew two sheets of paper. Each contained an official announcement for release to the press. One release announced the successful invasion of France. The other was a letter announcing the invasion of France had failed and he alone was responsible. With the greatest of effort he tore up the release proclaiming victory. Then he stood up and took the other one to the outer office for release to the world.

The announcement of the failure to establish a beachhead in Normandy reverberated around the world. At the Ops center it was read to the personnel there, along with a message to the commander of the allied forces

surrounded by the German army. It was an order to surrender to avoid a slaughter of the allied troops trapped on the beach.

It was a heavy blow to the allies. Mike tried to comprehend what this terrible setback meant in terms of lengthening the war. How long? Two more years? Five? Where would the next offensive be attempted? Or would they be defeated by the Nazis? The last question had been unthinkable a short time ago.

He decided to leave the Ops center and take a walk along the Portsmouth harbor docks. As he roamed around the dock area he watched workers repairing the landing craft and a number of damaged boats that had managed to return to England. It occurred to him as he watched the workers here was clear evidence the allies would never surrender to the Nazis.. These men weren't working at half steam they were pushing hard to repair the damages so these boats would be ready for the next offensive.

Watching the work gave Mike's morale a much-needed boost. His determination to do all he could to help the war effort was renewed. There was an added motivation now since his division had ceased to exist on the beaches of Cherbourg.

He thought about the men who were now prisoners of war.

In Washington DC the story was different. Some politicians were demanding Eisenhower's immediate dismissal from command of the European theatre. Some of them hinted that General of the Army General Marshall should be removed as well. It was the right atmosphere for some politicians to make a bid for power. Pressure was immediately put on President Roosevelt to take action.

Within a week General Eisenhower was in Washington to confer with the president and General Marshall. President Roosevelt refused to accept Eisenhower's resignation. Eisenhower made public appearances in the company of General Marshall and on several occasions with the President. Roosevelt wasn't going to allow his opponents to undermine his presidential authority. These public appearances gave the nation a clear message from the President about his solid support for the two generals. He was not about to be stampeded by anyone.

As the American public recovered from the shock of the defeat their mood in general turned to outrage. They were looking for someone's head to roll. Eisenhower's was the most logical one to demand. Roosevelt's refusal to accept

his resignation fueled the fires of discontent.

Protest grew in America. As the mood hardened the public demonstrated its opinions by deliberately slowing down war production. Here was a real crisis threatening the war effort. Without the prodigious outpouring of the needed supplies and armaments to conduct the war, it could be extended for a long time or even lost to the Axis nations.

President Roosevelt had to act quickly to head off the growing public protest. He was a master at molding public opinion and he met this challenge. Roosevelt relied on General Marshall completely in military matters. In fact, he was so in awe of Marshall that he could never bring himself to call him by his first name. Earlier in the war he had stood firmly behind Marshall's selection of Eisenhower to take command of the European operations. This decision made despite everyone demanding General Marshall take personal command in Europe.

Now with these changed circumstances, Roosevelt had to make a major move to satisfy the American people. He announced that General Marshall was going to Europe to take supreme command. However, Roosevelt refused to demote General Eisenhower. He would assume the position of Marshall's second in command.

Marshall left immediately for England with Eisenhower. They would start over.

General Marshall was burdened with two commands: the Pacific operations and the European operations. In Washington his staff was expanded to include three generals who were to take up his routine work and report directly to him in England. This situation was equally awkward for Roosevelt and Marshall, but the President couldn't visualize anyone else as General of the Army. With these changes the president managed to hold at bay both the wolf pack of politicians who were after his power and the public who were so infuriated.

Upon their arrival in England the two generals began a series of conferences that went on seven days a week and long into the night. Summer would be over before long and if any further offensive efforts were to be made they had to begin soon. All aspects of the European military operation had to be re-evaluated.

Hitler and the Nazis were triumphantly blitzing the world with news of their victory in France. Der Führer was strutting again like the dictator of old. His threats to obliterate England spewed forth with renewed vigor.

Every day England was being inundated with buzz bombs. Most of the V-1 rockets—the “V” stood for Vergeltungswaffe or “vengeance weapon”—were aimed at London in retaliation for the bombing of Berlin.

Approximately sixty-five percent of the 190 V-1 rockets aimed at London daily actually landed and exploded. Civil defense in England was well organized due to the people's experiences with the Blitz of 1940. The first line of defense was the RAF. Their fighters could easily pursue the slow moving rockets and shoot them down. Next, were the anti-aircraft gun crews who did their share. Lastly were the barrage balloons all over the London sky, armed with steel cables to stop the flight of the V-1's.

However, the fear of the Blitz had returned to the people of London. Every day a hundred or more of the rockets were exploding around the city. Each one carried a ton of explosives causing major damage and producing tremendous noise when they exploded around the city on detonation. A new anxiety came with the V-1. It was the loud buzzing noise it made. Equally frightening was the silence as the rocket engine cut off and the missile began its glide to earth. No one felt safe until they heard the explosion. Londoners hated this terror weapon.

The V-1 rocket was a simple weapon. It was really a bomb with a warhead containing 2000 pounds of explosives attached to a ram jet engine and wings for flight. Without any guidance system it was merely pointed at England to travel until it ran out of fuel. Then it would descend to earth to detonate on contact. The random nature of these occurrences was another source of dread for the English. One couldn't predict where a rocket might land. They were unlike Luftwaffe bombers which had continued to fly in formation over London since 1940.

Over half of the French Resistance members had been lost when they came out of hiding to perform sabotage on D-Day. When the invasion had failed they were left in vulnerable positions.. Many were captured in groups by the Gestapo. It would take some time to reorganize the spy system so invaluable to the Allies for information on the Nazis' intentions.

Two weeks after the invasion, reports came in from France about large movements of German troops taking place around Normandy. Information was sketchy so the Allies were unable to get a clear picture of Hitler's plans. SHAEF speculated enemy troops now defending Normandy were to be moved to the Eastern front.

All eyes now turned to the Russian front for the start of their spring offensive. In actual fact the Russian offensive had been expected to start much earlier. The failure at Normandy now left the Russians facing a much larger Nazi army to fight. Only the Italian front now held part of the Wehrmacht out of the war on the Eastern front.

No one was quite sure why Stalin waited so long. Speculations about the cause of the delay mainly centered on the failed Normandy invasion. Perhaps he was hoping a successful invasion in France would force a withdrawal of German forces from the Russian front. There were an estimated two hundred German divisions totalling one million soldiers in place along the Russian front. The Nazis were waiting for the anticipated Russian spring offensive.

Ground troops would now face a new threat to their lives in the form of the V-1 rockets. Launching platforms for the rockets had been made into mobile units which could be easily erected and quickly moved if they were discovered by the allies.

Chapter Eleven

Mike was restless. He was still temporarily assigned to an information desk in the op center. Now only a trickle of information was passed to him for analysis. The colonel in charge told him to sit tight for he would be reassigned shortly. For the first time in weeks the four officers billeted at Mrs. Willoughby's house were together. In the evening they met in Charlie's room for a social hour.

Charlie asked Major Johnson,

"Where have you been staying the last few weeks? We thought you might have joined the invasion force."

Major Johnson, a small man with a calm demeanor, replied,

"Our group never left our offices. They had cots brought in and meals delivered to us from the mess because of the emergency situation created by the weather."

Greg was not one for subtlety when he was drinking said,

"Weather, my eye! I know you're with Army Intelligence. In the decoding section, I believe."

Johnson flushed with irritation, but recovered.

"Yes, I forgot about your connections in high places Greg. It would be silly of me to continue to deny a known fact. Decoding has slowed down some since the invasion.

It's why I was allowed to take a few days off duty. But we had our hands full during the invasion crisis and no one could leave their post."

In fact Johnson was privy to much more information than this. But he couldn't reveal it to the other three officers. As a member of the section working on the highly secret "Ultra Project," he was sworn to secrecy. Only the men working in the section and the highest military people knew about Ultra. Even General George Patton and others of his rank knew nothing about this decoding section.

"Ultra" was the code name given to the German military code used universally for their communications. During the days of the early German offensives in Europe, a British secret agent was handed a German military decoding machine by a Polish underground agent. It happened while they were on a train travelling in Poland. It was an incredible piece of good luck.

With this machine, used by all branches of the Nazi military forces, British Intelligence was able to translate any coded messages relayed by radio. This penetration into the message system even gave them access to Hitler's own military headquarters. This open communications link into the Third Reich gave the Allies a tremendous advantage in

military affairs. It included knowledge of the whereabouts of the generals commanding the Seventh German Army Group on D-Day. Incredibly, whether it was because of a great deal of complacency or stupidity, the Germans didn't bother to change the military codes until two days after D-Day.

Army Intelligence officers operating in the Ultra section were in turmoil when a curtain was suddenly drawn over the exposed communications codes. They were so critical to Allied military planning. Loss of this source was a major setback. The Allies would now have much more difficulty obtaining timely and accurate information on the placement of German armies and Hitler's future plans.

They suspected some important espionage figure such as Admiral Canaris had persuaded the army to change the code system as a precaution. Or perhaps the Germans had somehow found out about the information leak or learned of the Ultra Project. American and British intelligence units were conducting a thorough investigation to determine whether their own people had been responsible for compromising Ultra.

Johnson had been a teaching professor of mathematics at MIT when the war broke out. Army Intelligence was

particularly interested in him because he was not only a brilliant theoretical mathematician but he also had the faculty of total memory recall or “photographic memory.” In and of itself total recall is not so valuable; however its importance increases greatly if the person possessing the ability also has the high intelligence to comprehend the meaning of the information taken in.

Ultra was a perfect fit for Johnson. No information escaped him and he had the mathematical ability to reach conclusions quickly. Working on his own he was able in a matter of a few hours to perform work equal to the output of a team of people in the same amount of time..The Ultra decoders now had a new assignment break the new German military code.

Johnson had returned to the house only to collect his belongings. The Ultra team was being transferred to a self-contained underground facility in London providing living quarters for the personnel stationed there. All of the people consolidated there would be working on the new German military code. It was imperative for the Allies to break it. Nazi Germany shrouded in complete secrecy could be devastating.

All of the military operations in London were being moved to underground quarters. General Eisenhower and his staff were already housed in an underground bunker when the D-Day decision had been made.

V-1 rocket attacks were now a daily occurrence in London. Many citizens who chose to stay in the city decided they would be safer sleeping in underground subway stations. During the Blitz in 1940 they used subway stations. Now there were newly constructed underground facilities as well. It was estimated over 300,000 people had chosen to leave London for places away from the city. In the current chaotic conditions the military had been forced to provide food supplies to civilians. This op would last until things were organized again.

Chapter Twelve

As they sat together, the four officers knew this temporary social circle was about to end. Greg said.

“I’m moving back to London next week to work with the combined air command. With those buzz bombs dropping on London every day I’m sure it won’t be as lively as it was. Those V-1’s won’t stop coming either. I talked to a friend of mine in London who got a chance to inspect one of those buzz bombs up close. He told me the flying bombs are simple and cheap to make. A V-1 is somewhat like a skyrocket you ignite it and it goes until it runs out of propellant. Without power it then glides down to its target. They figure a buzz bomb costs about six hundred dollars.”

Charlie said thoughtfully,

“German technology is scary. It sure is frustrating to know you have an enemy who is two steps ahead of you in weapons development. They were working on rocket research twenty years ago, and we weren’t even interested in the field at the time. Look at their rockets and super tanks! They are nearly indestructible! I guess we’re going to have to wipe them off the map to win this war.”

“You hit the nail on the head Charlie,” said Mike. “I learned in Africa not to underestimate the German army. If

Hitler would let his high command take care of the strategy things would be a lot worse right now. Let me tell you! It was lucky for us Hitler abandoned Rommel to shift for himself and decided to invade Russia instead. It was a gift to us when Hitler stopped sending armaments and troops to North Africa. If he'd kept backing Rommel we'd probably still be fighting the Germans in Africa.”

Johnson got up from his chair.

“Well you guys I have to be moving along. A driver is due to pick me up in a few minutes. Nice knowing you.”

He shook hands with the three officers and left.

Charlie looked at Mike.

“You know the Red Cross girl I introduced you to, Barbara?” Mike nodded and Charlie continued. “And do you remember the little one Frances, who was here the other night for, uh, a nightcap? She told me Barbara liked you.”

“It's flattering to hear, but I'm married. And I have enough complications in my life already. Those women give me a pain! They come over here and act as if this war was one big party!”

“You're being a little harsh, Mike. Those girls do a lot for morale and they spend long hours trying to help out.”

“Yeah, like the way little Frances helped you out.”
Charlie wasn’t sensitive and he laughed as he replied,

“They need a little recreation too. I’d like to think Frances wasn’t just performing her duty.”

Mike had to laugh at Charlie’s remark. It was hard to be too serious around him. Greg chimed in.

“I’d hate to be working this hard without any incentive. Some of those girls are real beauties and they are definitely good for my morale.”

“Not to mention your libido,” Charlie quipped. “The WACs get a bum rap too. Mainly the bad talk comes from some of the top brass, especially the West Pointers. I heard one general say they were soldiers with built in fox holes. He wants them out of the army. For myself it’s live and let live. There’s enough war to be fought we don’t need to fight among ourselves. Hell, I have a WAC secretary myself. She does more work than I do. She’s more efficient than any secretary I ever had back in Ohio. For less money too.”

Mike asked Charlie,

“Are you being moved out of Portsmouth too?”

“Not for the moment. There’s a lot of work to do here assessing what the Normandy invasion cost us in supplies. I’ll have to travel up to London for some conferences but

most likely I'll be here for a while. What about you?"

"Nothing definite yet. Where they put me will probably depend on any further invasion attempts this summer. If they try somewhere else I'll be in the planning section again."

There were almost two million soldiers in England. Until the next offensive began they were put to work. Military training continued but they were also constructing underground hospitals and housing all over England. Buzz bombs were now beginning to fall on other cities without halting the destruction of London.

Assessment of the losses sustained by the Allies in the Normandy invasion attempt revealed a grim picture. Killed, wounded and captured military forces totalled eighty thousand. Of this number roughly sixty thousand were now prisoners of war. Around sixty percent of the landing craft marshaled for the attempt were lost. Thirty-five percent of the non fighting ships had been sunk or put out of commission. Naval fighting ship losses were close to forty percent because of their daring maneuvers near the Normandy coast to support the land forces.

These losses in men and material couldn't be made up quickly. Difficulties in replacing the essential ships had a major bearing on where the Allies would attempt the next invasion of Europe. At SHAEF headquarters there had been heated discussions on the subject. It was finally agreed that it was too late in the summer to invade Norway. It was too far north. Cold weather would have become a factor in a few short months after the troop landings. Supplying an invasion force under winter conditions would be nearly impossible.

An invasion of Greece appeared to be the best alternative. Churchill heartily approved this course of action. He had pushed hard for it all along. Many of the British high command were in full agreement. There were sound military reasons for a Greek invasion. Primarily it would assist the Italian campaign by opening up a broader front in this sector of Europe.

A major factor in making this choice was the amount of working equipment available to make the landing. An invasion of Greece could be accomplished with the landing craft presently on hand. Once the course of action had been agreed upon, the wheels were set in motion rapidly. As time was short, the target date for the invasion was set for

the last day of July—only six weeks away!

Mike was called up to London a few days after SHAEF had made the decision to invade Greece. He was pleased to receive the orders after the recent lull. During his leisure time he had written to his wife Diana every day. Anxiously he awaited mail call hoping for some response from her. He only heard from his father and a few friends. And his business manager at his investment firm who sent him monthly reports. Mike was amazed to learn he was making more money than ever before. I guess it is some solace, he thought to himself. I'm becoming wealthy without being in New York.

At times he was particularly vulnerable. Then he yearned to be lying beside Diana watching her sleep and feeling deep love for her. It seemed a long time since he had been close to his wife. He remembered how happy he had once been with her. Thoughts of those moments when she looked at him with shining eyes, radiant with love.

Now Mike always tried to escape those feelings since they evoked great pain. His inquiries about her to his father had not helped. John Canyon had been cut out of Diana's life too. During their marriage Diana had become quite fond of his father so he had asked John to contact Diana,

He told his father he needed to know why his wife was adamant about a divorce. He needed know the reason she refused to answer his letters to her. John had agreed to contact her but she had politely blocked his offer to see her. She turned down John's invitations to have dinner with him. So the black out on her life continued.

Mrs. Willoughby caught Mike as he entered the house to put a few belongings together for his trip to London.

She said to him,

“You’re not leaving too! I just got used to you men and now you go flying off.”

Mike smiled.

“I’m only going to London for a few days. I’ll be back. You have Charlie around to keep you laughing.”

She persuaded him to have a drink with her while he waited for his transportation to show up. Mrs. Willoughby poured him a stiff drink as usual.

“My girls aren’t here right now,” she told him. “They were both lucky. Their husbands came back in one piece so they’re off on holiday. Now I’m rattling around here by myself. I suppose they’ll have another go at it.”

“We have to get all of these soldiers and equipment off this island so it doesn’t sink,” Mike replied.

Mrs. Willoughby chuckled.

“We’ll keep nipping the little bugger til’ we get him. Bastard is ruining my sleep. Noise all of the time coming from Fritz. Charlie, bless his soul brought me a case of good whiskey yesterday. Said it was liberated from one of the damaged ships he was inspecting for salvageable supplies. I suppose the whiskey was declared to be undrinkable if I know Charlie.”

Mike spent an hour with Mrs. Willoughby. It occurred to him his own drinking had become heavier lately. He shrugged it off; it didn’t seem to matter much at the moment. As he was leaving the house with his small traveling bag Mrs. Willoughby stepped up to the front door to say goodbye.

“There are two lieutenants moving in tomorrow,” she told him. “I’m glad you and Charlie are staying. Those two young officers who are moving in don’t seem to have much sense.”

His trip to London was longer and more difficult than the time before because of the daily rocket bombings. Driving became more and more of a challenge the closer they were to London. Roads being used to detour traffic around unsafe areas were almost as badly damaged.

Mike's traveling problems weren't over when he arrived in the city. Transportation was so badly disrupted he chose to walk nearly five miles to his destination. Surveying the scene he noted Buckingham Palace, the Parliament building, Westminster Cathedral and the Tower of London appeared to be undamaged so far.

Most of the building where he was to report in for duty had been destroyed. He spotted a small sign on the basement entrance located on the side of the building stating it was a military office. He proceeded downstairs. At the entrance an Army MP directed him to another flight of stairs leading to a lower level.

As he descended to the second level of the basement he estimated he was at least thirty feet underground. At the second level another MP checked his orders. He guided him to his destination down the hallway. Inside of the next door was a large open room with rows of desks. There were about one hundred people working there. It was buzzing with activity a combined sound of clacking typewriters and talking.

He was escorted to the rear of the work area where there was yet another door. The MP opened it and motioned for Mike to enter. Inside the smaller room was a desk with a name plate reading "Lt. Col. Kenneth Smith." Mike knew

Smith from his time in Africa. He was a West Pointer. His demeanor was cold. But he was a brilliant military strategist. Mike didn't like him but he did respect him.

Colonel Smith looked up from his desk as Mike saluted and announced,

"Major Canyon reporting as ordered, sir."

Smith returned the salute.

"At ease. Please sit down," he continued. "I sent for you major because of your combat experience. This entire command has been selected by me. All of us here are combat veterans and experienced at amphibious landings. Several of the men on this staff are combat veterans from the Pacific Theatre shipped here to add their know how."

"The Pacific has more amphibious landings under their belts than we have. We can learn some valuable tactics from them. You will be breaking down in detail the work assignments for training combat officers. I understand you did this kind of training for the Normandy landings."

"Yes sir." Mike replied.

Smith, looking directly at him said,

"We're getting ready as fast as possible to make another landing in Europe. We have topographical maps of the terrain at the landing sites. You will find the territory is quite different from the topography of the Normandy

beaches. We have prepared mock-ups of every inch of the shoreline to be used for the landing.”

“You will be assigned a section of the beach. It is your job to know every rock on the strip of land. Also the yardages to the mainland and the German defense sites in the area. You will work with the officers of the battalion assigned to land on your small section of the beach. All personnel down to the last rifleman is to be thoroughly trained for their mission.”

“The terrain where your battalion will land is particularly rugged and rocky. Careful preparation is the key to success in this difficult area. You will have two weeks to prepare your training program and three weeks to train the battalion. Any questions?”

"No sir."

Smith dismissed Mike by saying,

"My orderly will show you to your work area and fill you in on living quarters. That is all."

Mike saluted and left the office.

Chapter Thirteen

Toward evening Mike left the underground center for his living quarters which he was to share with several other officers. They entered a stately mansion. A bar had been set up in the living area and it was crowded now before the dinner hour. There were a number of women in uniform in the room. Probably at the invitation of some of the men quartered in the mansion. Mike knew a few of the officers from his combat days in North Africa. He spent some time talking to two of them over a drink.

After having his second drink he excused himself to go upstairs to locate his room. Someone grabbed his arm and a woman's voice greeted him.

"Good evening Major. I always meet you in bars."

Mike turned his head. It was the Red Cross girl, Barbara. She gave him a teasing smile which he found unsettling for some reason.

He said to her, "Well you do get around Barbara! Things get boring in Portsmouth?"

"No, Major. I volunteered to work here in London in one of the military hospitals. It is overflowing with Normandy casualties. Everyone's shorthanded now."

She said this without rancor. Barbara always appeared to be in control whenever they met.

Mike replied,

“Please excuse me. I just arrived here today and I want to go to my room now.”

“Next time we meet you can buy me a drink!” she called after him. Her comment irritated Mike. Why does she get under my skin so badly? he asked himself.

After dinner Mike had a nightcap with the two officers he had talked to earlier. Then he excused himself to get some sleep. As he left the room he noticed Barbara and several other women at the bar. They were surrounded by a cadre of officers. Then he turned and went upstairs.

It was becoming obvious the Nazis were using the buzz bombs as much for their psychological effect as for the destruction they were causing to the city. There was no set pattern to the rocket attacks they could be expected at any time day or night. It was working. Many of the people were anxious straining to listen for the low pitched buzzing of the bombs. Rapid construction of new shelters and underground living quarters became a high priority for the government. It was an urgent project in order to prevent mass panic as the rocket attacks intensified.

Mike had been asleep for only two hours when the air raid sirens woke him. His first reaction was to ignore the sirens. Like many soldiers who had undergone heavy artillery attacks he knew running didn't help anything. If a shell was to find you, it would. Running somewhere didn't make much sense. Here in London he did have to temper his thinking somewhat. He had to allow for the danger of being in a city building if it were hit.

He would have stayed put anyway but an MP on duty at the mansion roused him out of bed. He was grumpy from this rude treatment. Defiantly took his time putting on his clothes and smoking a cigarette. When he finally entered the hall it was empty.

So he went down to the ground floor. It was black as pitch and he had trouble finding the entrance to the basement of the building. He heard the first buzz bomb overhead. It buzzed along then suddenly there was silence as the V-1 jet engine shut off. The most terrifying element of a buzz bomb was the silence. It was an interval of stillness which seemed to last years as the rocket silently cut through the air on its way to impact.

Mike instinctively threw himself face first to the floor. After the silence came an ear-splitting explosion. That one

must have landed about a block away, he thought to himself. He tried the basement door but it was locked from the inside. No use pounding on the door, he thought. With those sirens wailing away they'll never hear me.

So he sat down in a corner of the living area close to the bar. He took out another cigarette and lit it. He was determined to sit out the air raid right there. Carrying a helmet at all times was a general order for all military personnel since the buzz bomb offensive had begun. Mike donned his now.

Imagine being in the middle of London with a helmet on, he thought to himself. When he had first arrived in England, it had been a real pleasure to shed the heavy helmet he had been wearing daily for many months. Mike never thought he would be wearing a helmet again. War is unpredictable he thought as he felt the weight on his head.

Above him he heard another buzzing sound rapidly becoming louder followed by the dreaded silence. Again he hit the floor. After an ear splitting explosion he looked up, the front windows of the mansion had been blown out. Getting closer. It would be ironic to be scratched off in an air raid after all of the combat experiences I've survived.

In the silence following the explosion he heard a whimpering sound about twenty feet from him. He groped in the darkness toward the sound. His hand hit a door knob. He turned it and felt his way in the small room. One of his hands touched a sink. Mike realized he was in a bathroom. The crying was coming from a rear corner of the room.

“It’s all right whoever is there, the bomb missed us,” Mike said into the blackness of the room. “Let’s get a drink and relax.”

He felt a trembling hand on his arm and then the faint scent of a familiar perfume.

“I’m damned glad to find someone. The basement door was locked when I got to it.”

Mike recognized Barbara’s voice. He said to her,

“It’s Major Canyon, Barbara. Come on. I meant it about the drink. We can sit under the bar so you feel safer.”

She resisted being pulled out of the corner of the bathroom and Mike had to cajole her.

“We might as well be out there having a drink as in here. If a bomb gets us, it gets us. There isn’t much you can do about it. Come on,” Mike said coaxingly.

Reluctantly she let herself be led,. She clung to him as he felt his way to the bar in the living area. Arriving at their

destination Mike felt for and found a bottle of brandy. With bottle and two glasses in hand he scuttled under the bar to where she was huddled in a ball.

He poured the drinks, and, handing one to her, he said,

“To your health, so to speak.”

She took a long drink then clung to the side of his body as tightly as she could.

“Your first air raid?” he asked her.

“Yes. Scary isn’t it?” she replied.

"At first," he admitted. "Then you develop a mental discipline about it after enough explosions have gone off around you. But you never get used to it completely. Just more—oh, what's the word I'm looking for?—philosophical about your chances. I saw men killed in fortified pill boxes by direct hits from artillery fire while I stood out in the open. Those experiences help you see that when you're in combat it doesn't matter where you are."

They heard another buzz bomb approaching overhead. Mike listened with an experienced ear. He could tell this one was going to land close to them by the loudness of the buzzing sound. He grabbed Barbara as the rocket engine shut off and threw himself over her. This time the explosion was deafening as parts of the mansion were blown away. One timber hurtled across the room and cut

the bar in half. The air was filled with choking dust and smoke.

Barbara was trembling uncontrollably. Mike stroked her hair and made soothing sounds. Then he put his helmet on her head in an effort to help her feel more secure. Without hardly being aware of it they were suddenly kissing each other deeply. Mike cuddled her in his arms.

“It’s over. It’s all right now,” he said quietly.

Still she held him tightly. Then she whispered,

“You must be the bravest man alive.”

Mike chuckled and replied,

“Not hardly. I’m as afraid as you are. It’s only because I’ve had more experience learning to control fear from living and fighting in combat. Control and discipline are the keys to handling fear. Everyone in combat is afraid but they do their job anyway. Hey look, the bar is split in two, but the bottles aren’t even cracked!”

He poured them another drink.

Barbara had a sudden urge to tell Mike about herself.

“I’m not here in England to party, Mike. I really want to help out in this war. I haven’t done anything socially since I’ve been here except to have a few drinks with the soldiers. I haven’t slept around like so many do. For some

reason I really need you to believe me. Let me tell you something funny. Three years ago I was the National Backstroke champion. I tried to join the WACS but I was turned down as being physically unfit.”

She gave out a nervous giggle, then continued.

“The doctor said I have flat feet. Don’t you think that’s hilarious? One of the best women athletes in America has flat feet!”

They both began to roar with laughter, the kind you can’t stop. Mike finally gained control of himself and said,

“Now don’t start again.”

But, unable to contain herself, she giggled, and it set them off again. After a while their silliness wore itself out. It had been a great release from the tension built up during the rocket attack.

Silence returned to London as the sirens stopped wailing and the emergency vehicles reached the areas around the city which had been hit by the rocket attack. Now the police, firemen and medical workers were busy at their tasks. They were trying to save lives and patch up the wounded pulled out of the rubble. The sudden silence felt strange after the noises of buzz bomb engines and subsequent deafening explosions. Barbara and Mike had

been on the very edge of death several moments ago as several buzz bombs landed near the mansion.

They were still holding each other. Barbara said,

“I am a rich girl, Mike. You were right about that. But I was brought up by my family to believe wealth doesn’t make any difference. It’s who you are in life. I’m not apologetic about being rich. I’m fortunate to have money there’s nothing wrong with it. They taught me not to feel guilty. However they also told me it didn’t make me superior to other people with less than I have. So people have to take me as I am.

“Our family is old money. The Randolphs go back four generations in America. Most of the money was made from investments in railroads. We were fortunate to have arrived in America early and the family bought land at cheap prices. When the railroads began to develop we had valuable land in the right cities. Today our family has diversified into all kinds of endeavors because they’ve had the freedom of choice provided by wealth.”

Mike listened, he found himself agreeing with her healthy attitude. But she disturbed him too her beauty overwhelmed him and her proximity aroused him. These were uneasy feelings. He in turn, poured out his heart to

her about Diana and his marriage troubles. With an unusual lack of restraint and distrust, he told her a little bit about himself..

An all clear signal was sounded startling them after the earlier quiet. They looked outside through the gaping hole where a front window had once been. They were surprised to see the sky lightening. There was a trace of pale pink beginning to show on the eastern horizon. Mike said to her,

“The time went by quickly. We survived without a scratch thanks to a stoutly built bar holding wicked whiskey and other spirits.”

“I can’t thank you enough for saving me,” she replied. “If you hadn’t shown up I would probably be dead from terror or killed by running out in the streets in a panic. With the example you set for me maybe the next buzz bomb attack will be easier for me to handle.”

Mike assured her she would be fine. Then came the awkward moment he dreaded. He said,

“What happened between us tonight is pretty common when two people are sharing extreme danger. As I explained to you I’m a married man and I’m glad I was here to help you.”

In the dawn light Barbara looked steadily at him for a moment and then replied quietly, “All right, Mike.”

With that, she walked out to where the front door of the mansion had once been. He didn’t know how to react to her comment. More than anything he was surprised at her calm acceptance of his explanation. She’s quite different from the women I’ve known, he thought,

He shook off the thought then headed out onto the demolished street. He started walking to take up residence in a different officers' quarters a mile away. The house he was leaving was no longer suited for any purpose.

Chapter Fourteen

For the next few weeks, Mike turned all of his energy to his new assignment. Time rushed by while he worked fourteen hour days to meet his deadlines. He had so much detailed information to absorb and a limited time to do it. Between the exhaustive studying and the constant air raids interrupting his work he was often tired.

Most of the air raids on England in the summer of 1944 were being made by the buzz bombs. It was true about the serious damage caused by the V1 rockets. But they didn't have the capacity to be aimed accurately at a specific target. Moreover English army air defense teams were learning how to shoot them down. Still, more than half of the V-1's got through successfully to destroy London block by block.

On the Russian Front the military news was also upsetting. When the long-awaited offensive was finally put in motion by the Russians they were unable to break through anywhere on the Front. Hitler had gambled after being provided with ample evidence the Normandy invasion was indeed the allies' big push into France.

As soon as the Normandy front had been secured he sent forty more divisions to reinforce the two hundred divisions already in action in Russia. His gamble was paying off.

When V-1 rockets were added to the Nazi weapons the Russians had been thrown into confusion. The rockets were beginning to destroy their supply lines. The effect of several hundred V-1's landing close together was devastating. German scientists seemed to be improving the accuracy of the rockets as they gained experience. Anti-aircraft artillery was being rushed to the Front to defend the army and the vital military supplies. A stalemate on the Russian front was a crushing blow to allied hopes for a quick end to the war.

In the Pacific theatre the offensive efforts continued to rack up victories. There was now a real struggle going on in Washington DC over war supply priorities. Each theatre of operations was demanding first consideration. At the moment the Pacific theatre was winning the priority struggle about landing craft. There was a lot of pressure on the European command to get on with their summer offensive.

In the meantime the wheels of the proposed Greek invasion were turning quickly. Many of the landing craft,

transport ships and Naval support were already en route. They were spirited away from England at all hours and always in small numbers. Since the Luftwaffe had limited reconnaissance capability at this time these movements were going on largely undetected. Security was tight in England.

Reinforcements were pouring into Italy from Africa to participate in a giant offensive to be launched in coordination with the Greek invasion. It was designed to prevent the German army from reinforcing its troops in Greece. This strategy would spread the German army pretty thin. It would give the Greek invasion an excellent chance of success without too heavy a price in human lives.

Mike wrapped up his work in London a few days ahead of schedule. He gratefully headed back to Portsmouth. In the harbor area the air raid alerts and rocket attacks were much less frequent. He didn't see Barbara again in London although he once had an impulse to look her up. He decided not to act on it. He didn't need any emotional entanglements.

He was still uneasy about the calm way she had accepted his decision to remain loyal to his wife. Maybe he was wrong, he thought to himself. Perhaps he had stupidly

assumed she was romantically interested in him. No doubt there was nothing there but his imagination.

Mrs. Willoughby was delighted to see him.

“I see the buzz bombs didn’t get you in London. Don’t say no to a drink. Come on into the kitchen.”

He couldn’t refuse her invitation. He entered the kitchen and greeted the two daughters. They were much happier than the last time he saw them. Then the fate of their husbands had still been unknown. He accepted a stiff drink from Mrs. Willoughby. They sat down and he told them about the daily rocket attacks in London.

Mrs. Willoughby told him,

“We’ve had some buzz bomb attacks here too but nothing like you described. They were after the ships in the harbor but most of them are gone now. Things have become more peaceful around here.”

“How’s Charlie?” Mike asked her.

“In and out most of the time,” she replied. “But when he’s here he stops in for a drink and a laugh with me. A week ago he had dinner with us. He’s a real tonic for the nerves.”

“I’ll be around for a month or so. Is there room for me here?” he asked.

Mrs. Willoughby said,

“I have room for you. You’re a welcome change. Those two young lieutenants are no company at all. Either they’re working or drinking in the officers’ club, then coming in late and noisy every night.”

“Maybe I’ll join them,” Mike said teasingly. “Then you’ll never sleep!”

Laughing, she said,

“Come on now you like me too much. By the by you had a visitor two days ago. He was a high mucky-muck from America down here inspecting everything. He was with some other high and mighties. I told him you were in London on some military business and I didn’t know how to reach you. He left a note for you.”

She went to a table, retrieved the note and handed it to him.

“Thank you, Mrs. Willoughby. I can’t imagine who this is from.”

He opened the envelope. There was a note and a business card inside. Mike looked at the card, which read: “Congressman John Bullock.”

Then he read the note:

“Mike, I’m sorry I missed you. As a member of the subcommittee on the Conduct of the War I’m here on a

fact-finding mission. We're poking around into the Normandy invasion mess. I'm going back to London today. If I can't find you in London please call me." Here he had written a phone number, "It's very important that I see you while I'm here. Joe Stanton sends his regards."

The note was signed: "Bull."

He wondered why Bull wanted to see him so urgently. He shrugged. Probably wants to pump me for anything I know about the Normandy invasion he thought. Mike looked at Mrs. Willoughby and said,

"An old friend of mine. He's a congressman from Washington DC over here to see how we're spending the taxpayers' money. I won't tell him about the case of whiskey Charlie liberated for you."

She chuckled. He excused himself and went up to his room.

In his room he read the message again. The words, "It's very important" puzzled him. He changed his clothes and went down to the ops center to make the call to Bull. It was late afternoon so he was fortunate to catch him at his quarters in London. He was meeting British politicians.

At the sound of his voice, Bull boomed,

"Mike! Thanks for the call. I've been running around offices since yesterday trying to find you."

“What’s so urgent?”

Bull ignored the question and said,

“If you’re back in Portsmouth I’ll be down to see you tomorrow. Okay?”

“Sure Bull, it will be nice to see you. You can fill me in on the latest news from New York.”

They made arrangements to meet at the officers' club for lunch the following day. Mike was uneasy when he hung up the phone. This was a Tammany Hall politician so he wasn't sure what to expect or why the meeting was so pressing. Maybe Joe Stanton had ordered Bull to find him. The congressman was squarely in Stanton's pocket one of his loyal flunkies. He was a congressman because Stanton wanted him in the position. We'll see tomorrow, he thought.

At noon Mike sat at a table in the officers' club having a drink. He was impatient because his first session for training troop landings was looming. He was scheduled to start with the battalion officers that afternoon. He had composed a detailed outline for the battalion covering tactics and beach assignments to be taught to their troops. By going over his memories of all of the beach landings he had made little details about landings came back to him.

This group will be drilled perfectly to perform like a precision machine, he promised himself.

Chapter Fifteen

Bull finally arrived an hour late for their lunch meeting. He was a big chunky man with the ruddy cheeks of a heavy drinker. There was only a fringe of white hair on the sides of his skull. He looked like a politician. Mike was caught up in a squeezing bear hug.

“Damned glad to see a familiar face, Mike!”

They ordered drinks. When they were served Bull immediately began to pull on his gratefully and ordered another one. Mike decided not to have a second drink. He listened as Bull proceeded to tell him all of the important news from New York of interest to Mike.

“What’s so urgent?” Mike asked when Bull finally paused for breath. He replied,

“Before we get into it Stanton wanted you to know what has been going on with your wife.”

Mike’s heart skipped a beat. Bull continued,

“Joe is your friend and he knew things weren’t working out too well between you two.”

Mike acknowledged there was serious trouble.

“It turns out Joe and several of your other friends have been seeing her at dinners held for war bond rallies and

some other social events. Diana is always in the company of her boss, Craig Wilson, who, as you know, is a big wheel in advertising and high up in social circles. Now Joe isn't trying to hurt you Mike, but he thought you should know Diana is living with Wilson."

Although Mike had suspected something like this it felt as if a knife had pierced his heart to have his fears confirmed. Bull ordered another round of drinks when he saw the stricken look on Mike's face.

"Joe wanted me to tell you he can have one of our judges grant you a quick legal annulment of the marriage if you want. It would save you the pain of a divorce court and the legal battle which always seems to develop in a divorce. Think about it."

Mike recalled some of the things Diana had written in her last letter to him. He knew now there was no chance of reconciliation. Suddenly making up his mind, he said savagely to Bull,

"Tell Joe to contact Diana and lay it out for her. It's either an annulment or a scandal. Make sure she understands that. Also tell Joe she gets nothing from me only a quick ending to the marriage. It's obviously what she's wanted all along anyway. I never want to see the bitch again!"

Unaware of the months of agony Mike had been through over Diana's silence, Bull was startled by his outburst. He immediately calmed down and apologized to Bull for losing his temper. A few minutes past before Bull replied, "Okay, I'll let Joe know what you want done."

Bull then hunched forward in a conspiratorial posture.

"Now," he said "if you don't mind, I want to talk some business." Mike nodded for him to continue.

"This disaster in France has changed things politically. For the first time in this war Roosevelt doesn't have solid public support behind him. We have been his supporters in New York from the beginning of his presidency. While he has been racking up time in office there has been an erosion of our power with the administration. Patronage isn't what it used to be a few years ago.

"Opportunities have opened up for us in Washington because of this Normandy disaster. We New York boys have put our men in the right elected offices and on the powerful committees in Congress. There's some real power to be grabbed with the right handling of the situation."

"Joe wants a favor from you which he's sure you will be glad to do for him. He wants you to gather all of the information you can on military blunders, weak spots in

strategy and any dirt you can latch onto about the private lives of the SHAEF officers. “

“He has already put the wheels in motion to keep you stationed in England and attached to SHAEF. Start observing the officers and making notes. From time to time you'll be contacted by one of Joe's representatives here in England. You'll pass on the information in person. We can't record anything on paper because of the strict censorship the Army has on all correspondence.”

“With enough ammunition our bunch could become the real power in the country. The timing couldn't be better. Joe said you won't be forgotten Mike. Think of the investment banking business you could do if we become the power in the administration in DC.”

Bull winked at Mike.

Mike was stunned but he didn't let it show. He remembered his father's warning about political patronage. So the time has come for me to give my share, he thought. Joe figures I owe him which I do but he wants more than I thought he would demand of me. This order to spy on the SHAEF officers involves my pride and whatever integrity I might have. But to Bull he said,

“I’ll see what I can do. Give my regards to Joe and the guys at the club back home.”

“I’ll be in London for two more days then I fly back to the States if you need me for anything. Take it easy.”

Bull left the club.

News of Diana’s infidelity even though he suspected she was having an affair had hit him like a lightning bolt. It made him physically ill to think of his wife making love with another man. If only she had told me herself, he thought. It was much worse finding out from someone else about her cheating. He also considered it mental cruelty to write him a letter so vague it had left him in limbo.

As he struggled with his thoughts, he had to admit there had been serious marital problems for a long time. But even acknowledging the problems of long standing there was also bitterness. She hadn’t prepared him for this.

After a while he stopped thinking about Diana for it was no good to dwell on what had already happened. It was useless since he couldn’t do a thing about it. But he couldn’t deny the large void inside of him. He was determined to stand by his decision to have Joe annul the marriage.

Maybe being the one to take the action would lessen the pain.

Joe calling in a debt had caught him by surprise. He had felt uncomfortable handling some questionable financial deals in the past. He done them out of loyalty rather than greed. Joe was probably unaware of his motives for carrying out the deals for him. He's probably assumed I'm a sophisticated operator with little or no conscience over how I conducted my business, he thought to himself. The two of them had never had a deep conversation about Mike's values so how could Joe possibly know how he felt?

What bothered him the most about Joe's ordering him to provide undercover help—aside from the ethics of becoming a spy—was the future. Is this his first move to make me one of his flunkies like Bull? It was a troubling thought. Mike was very disturbed about the unethical aspects of the deal. It was almost beyond his comprehension.

He tried to imagine himself working against his fellow officers in SHAEF. It came down to finking on their weaknesses and mistakes so Joe could make political profit from the misery of others. He understood the ruined reputations of others were matters of supreme indifference

to the political machine boys. There were few ethical rules. Anything was possible as long as it brought them more means to apply political pressure. They would stop at nothing to further their bid for national power.

He had to think of something fast. There was no way he would feed damaging information to Joe if he could help it. Maybe he could make reports on minor things, he thought. Maybe like the oddities and sexual activities of the military leaders. Most of what he knew was pretty much common knowledge in military circles in England anyway. He decided he would try this approach for the first report and see what happened.

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Chapter Sixteen

The failure of the Normandy invasion was continuing to make political waves in Washington DC. President Roosevelt's bloc of supporters in Congress, the middle of the road Republicans and Democrats who could be depended upon to vote with the President was beginning to weaken. Doubts were being voiced about the administration's handling of the war effort. It was a perfect climate for power politics.

There were many moves being made to unseat the present political power structure. There was nothing new about this kind of political turmoil in the middle of a major war. The American Civil War had been rife with political conflict as the wheels of war kept on grinding along. Now history was threatening to repeat itself in America.

In the few weeks since General Marshall had taken command of the European theatre of operations there had been sweeping changes. SHAEF staff had been cut from nearly five thousand members to two thousand—and there were rumors more cuts would be made. Liberated officers were transferred to combat units. All staff car drivers were now American male soldiers.

Eisenhower's female driver was replaced by an army sergeant.

Gradually the image of a glamorous affluent American army was changing to that of a disciplined professional force. Many new regulations were issued regarding the conduct of American military personnel during their stay in England. To ensure the new regulations were followed the military police command was tripled.

Another change brought on by the daily V-I attacks was a wide dispersal of the Army. Many divisions not involved in the invasion of Greece were moved to newly constructed camps around Yorkshire and further north. Troops stationed in London continued to construct underground facilities. A significant number of civilians had left the city. It was estimated nearly two hundred buzz bombs were attacking England every day.

Nearly half of the troops assembled for D-Day were leaving England. These troops were headed for Italy or enroute to various rendezvous points for the Greek invasion. With luck allied intentions were unknown to the Nazis.

Russia continued to be stalemated by the German army. Added military pressure points were desperately needed if the Russians were to break out of their present position. An

enlarged offensive in Italy and the invasion of the Balkans were of crucial importance. At the present time the war was beginning to favor the Nazis. It was evident German war production was rapidly rebuilding. With new facilities underground Nazi industries were no longer vulnerable.

Mike became deeply involved with his new assignment. The battalion officers with whom he was working caught his passion for attention to the smallest detail in training their men. There was rehearsal after rehearsal for each move to be made on the beach. Detailed topographical layouts of their assigned section of the beach in Greece were pored over. They needed to eliminate any chance of mistakenly occupying the wrong beach area. It was vital to the whole invasion plan that each command carry out its assignment in the right place.

Training days were long and grueling. Mike tried to ignore the periodic pain from his war wounds but eventually it became so extreme that he finally sought medical help. After a thorough examination the doctors informed him some of the less stable pieces of shrapnel might migrate inside of him from time to time. A minor surgery was performed to remove fragments pushing up to

the dermis.

If the pain became intense he was ordered to go to a hospital immediately. Any major movement of the jagged steel fragments could kill him. Getting to a hospital quickly was urgent so surgeons wouldn't be too late to operate. As an alternative to the potent analgesic prescribed for him, he took a few drinks when the pain flared up. It seemed to relax his muscles. He needed to stay mentally sharp to do his job. Being sent back to the States for medical discharge was a constant worry. There were two more weeks of this demanding schedule to go and he was determined to tough it out.

Charlie finally caught up with him. They made plans to have dinner at the officers' club. When Mike got there, Charlie was already at the bar with some other officers from his supply section. They were engrossed in shop talk about shipping schedules availability of ground transportation and other topics. They were working against the same kind of demanding schedules as he was. There was little time for relaxation for anyone in England now. Because it had rained heavily training sessions had been confined to indoor conferences so Mike had a rare respite.

When they were seated for dinner Charlie remarked,

“I didn’t know you were a big shot in New York.”

“I don’t get you. Why do you think I’m a big shot?”

“We had a bunch of senators and congressmen snooping into everything. They spent two days with my section going over the supply situation. Congressman Bullock was asking everyone if they knew you. Said it was important to contact you. To hear him talk you are best friends.”

Down-playing his connection to Bull, Mike replied,

“He’s a member of the social club I belong to in New York. He was anxious to give me some personal information from home. I met him for lunch the other day. We spent about two hours together.”

Charlie was not a stupid man. He saw through the elaborate explanation.

“Your denial is showing Mike. I don’t care why he wanted to see you. It’s none of my business.” Punching him on the shoulder, Charlie said, “Come on Mike, I know you’re not a politician. I was just impressed by the fact you had a friend who was a congressman.”

Mike realized he had overreacted.

“I’m sorry. I’m jumpy these days I guess. Bull brought me some news about my wife Diana. It wasn’t good.

I'm asking my friend Joe Landon to use his influence to have my marriage annulled."

Charlie looked at him sympathetically.

"Sorry to hear that. What a hell of a way to find out! At least you finally know for sure where you stand."

"Let's forget it," Mike replied. "I need to get drunk with a friend."

"You're on!" Charlie agreed enthusiastically.

When dinner was over they began some serious drinking. Things became vague for Mike as the night progressed. He was dimly aware they had joined a larger group of men and women. He and Charlie were laughing with the group and dancing with the women.

Chapter Seventeen

Mike came out of his stupor gradually. He was in his own bed but he couldn't remember getting there. Someone moved next to him. He reached out and touched a shoulder. Leaning over he peered down at a sleeping woman. It was a WAC he had seen around Portsmouth. How did she get here? he asked himself.

Then the girl woke up.

"Well, I see you finally came to. God you were drunk! You insisted I come home with you. I figured it was safe enough given the state you were in. I didn't want you to get arrested by the MPs."

Mike jumped out of bed and put on his pants. Watching him thoughtfully, she said,

"I figured maybe we could get better acquainted now that you're somewhat sober."

"Look, I'm embarrassed about this whole deal. Why don't we try this again sometime when I'm really sober?"

She got the message quickly dressed and left.

Mike sat on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette in an effort to clear his head which was still rather fuzzy. What a sophomoric thing to do, he thought, get drunk and spill out

a bunch of self pity. Then seek manly reassurance with the first woman in sight. What an ass! Still hung over he dragged himself to work. When he arrived at the op center, Sergeant Severinsen told him,

“Colonel Smith has ordered you to London for a progress report on the training. You report at 0600 hours tomorrow. I’ve arranged transportation for you. Your staff car leaves in an hour, sir.”

He had just enough time to pack his things and report to the transportation center. London was being leveled by the buzz bombs. In some sections of the city Mike saw whole blocks intact a month ago now completely demolished. There were few people on the streets. Nearly every city block in the business districts had a deep air raid shelter.

People hurried along the streets with an air of expecting another alert at any moment. Rocket attacks could occur at any hour of the day. Constant bombardment was taking a toll on the inhabitants of the English cities. Their anger at the Nazis however was keeping the war effort moving along at a steady pace.

When Mike arrived in the area where he had last been billeted he found it reduced to rubble. He went to Colonel Smith’s headquarters to inquire about sleeping

arrangements. An MP directed him to a row of large homes two blocks away still undamaged. V-1 attacks were leaving a strange pattern of destruction. One side of a street could be virtually untouched while the other side had been reduced to a pile of rubble.

He wasn't due to report until 0600 the following morning so he went to the BOQ to check in and get cleaned up. This billet was another mansion even grander than the last. His room was on the third floor of the building. After he had showered and put on a fresh uniform he went downstairs to a temporary bar set up in a large sitting room. Several officers on Colonel Smith's staff waved him over to their table.

Barbara was sitting at an elaborate table with three other Red Cross volunteers and a group of officers. She saw him and waved. Mike merely nodded at her then turned his attention to the other officers at his table. Dinner was served in the huge dining room with a seating capacity of fifty people. During dinner Barbara came over to him,

"How are you Mike?"

"Fine Barbara. Are you taking a break from your dedication to hospital work?"

Barbara flushed at the sarcasm. Then replied,

“I don’t believe I appointed you to be my guardian. Where I go is none of your concern. I didn’t ask you why you were here.”

She walked away and rejoined her friends. Mike wished he hadn’t insulted her and felt a sharp pang of guilt. He followed her to her table and touched her shoulder.

“I’m sorry, Barbara. That was a lousy thing for me to say. Please accept my apology.”

“Apology accepted,” she replied with a smile. “But Mike, you seem to think I have some designs on you. I don’t. To clear the record this is my first time out in two weeks. The officers at my table are my brother’s friends. They looked me up and invited me to dinner. How are you doing?”

Mike knew he had been politely told off, His reply was delivered in softer tones.

“Working hard, like you. I’m here to make a training report to Colonel Smith then I’ll be returning to Portsmouth. How are you handling the buzz bomb attacks these days?”

“I’m getting used to them. You were right enough experience with attacks makes you develop an accepting attitude. I’m still scared to death when a buzz bomb engine

stops but I'm not terrified. Why don't you join us for a drink? I have to leave in half an hour for the hospital."

Mike accepted her invitation. He was introduced to the others and sat down at the table with them. He barely had time to finish his drink when the Red Cross volunteers left for the hospital. Later undressing in his room he thought about Barbara. She certainly had a strong sense of herself and a positive attitude. Maybe it came from being wealthy, In any case, he was really beginning to like her.

Colonel Smith saw Mike at precisely 0600 hours. He had prepared the report on the training for an amphibious assault. Smith asked him to give his findings verbally and listened. When he had finished, Smith asked Mike,

"Will the training be completed in the next ten days?"

"Yes sir. The battalion officers are hard workers and the morale of the enlisted men is excellent."

"Good, Major. Don't let up on them or allow them to believe they are better than they really are. Keep the pressure on them for continued improvement."

"Yes sir."

Then Smith asked him,

"Are you fit to travel on a transport ship?"

"Yes sir," Mike replied quickly.

Colonel Smith continued,

“I’m aware of your serious wounds. If you feel physically fit I want you to accompany the battalion. You will assist the battalion in disembarking. You are not to accompany them on the beach assault. I don’t believe your physical condition would allow it, and neither do the doctors I have spoken to about your injuries. I want you to observe the landing from the transport ship.”

“We are adopting several timing maneuvers for the small landing craft being used in the Pacific. I want you watch the landing closely. Then compare the results with the techniques described in this report.”

He handed Mike a bound set of papers.

“Those are confidential Major—for your eyes only. Study the report before you leave London and return it to my aide. That is all.”

Colonel Smith’s aide brought Mike to a desk where he could sit to study the report. By early evening Mike informed Smith’s aide he would have to stay another night . He had missed his transportation back to Portsmouth. Later when he had finally finished studying the report and was about to leave the office he was handed a new set of orders.

During night there was an air raid alert in the area. It was over an hour before the all-clear was sounded. The next morning Mike was still tired and in some pain again. He debated with himself whether he had been wise to assure Smith of his fitness for travel. But he dismissed it from his mind because he wanted to be there for the invasion.

Chapter Eighteen

He found an unexpected visitor when he arrived at the house in Portsmouth. Captain Greg Turner met him at the front door and asked,

“Would you mind if I bunked in your room for a few days? Portsmouth is packed again. Mrs. Willoughby will furnish me with a cot if its all right with you.”

Mike was glad to see him and grateful for the company.

“No sweat, Greg. I’ll be glad to have you. Charlie will be happy to see you too. We’ve missed the bull sessions. Of course your social life might suffer since you’re crammed in with me.”

“Too busy for fun and games lately,” Greg replied.

It was a hectic time at the embarkation site as the invasion date drew near. The Portsmouth harbor was always busy with ships coming in and going out. And the same was true at the house for Mike hardly ever saw Greg in the next few days. Whenever he came in for the night, Greg was either asleep already or about to leave.

Finally there was one night when they were all able to get together in Charlie’s room. Charlie complained about interference with his jobs.

“Damn generals. They get in my way, second guessing me, asking for more stuff than they need to fight the war for a year. Thank God my boss knows his business. He blocks most of their moves on me but I’m on the firing line with the brass anyway because I’m not a popular guy with the generals. Also our supply losses from the Normandy invasion haven’t been completely made up. “

‘You know of course the Germans have greatly enlarged their submarine fleet in the North Atlantic. Attacks on the convoys coming over from America with supplies are losing at least twenty percent of their ships on every crossing. I thought we were supposed to be winning this war.’”

Greg laughed at Charlie’s lament.

“That’s why they made you an officer and a gentleman Charlie to take all this abuse. The Air Corps has its troubles too. More German fighter planes are knocking big holes in our bomber squadrons even though we’re not flying daylight missions anymore. We’re losing aircraft faster than we can replace them. So the German manufacturing plants are recovering fast since we’re no longer pelting them from the air. Pressure on them isn’t nearly what it was before the Normandy invasion.”

‘Our reconnaissance is picking up something disturbing in Europe. In Italy the Nazis are busy with massive construction projects about fifty miles behind the present battle front. At first we thought they were building more rocket launching sites because of the amount of concrete they used to build rocket sites in France and Holland.’

‘But this construction is different from rocket launching sites. They figure there are close to two million slave workers working on the construction sites in Italy. The Nazis are cooking up something really big. Reconnaissance reports on the construction have been confirmed by underground sources.’

Charlie spoke up.

“The same thing is going on near the Russian Front. Some of my friends on the SHAEF staff were talking about a huge construction project there. They estimate there are two million workers on the projects in Russia too. Security is so tight around the sites no one can get close enough to form a clear picture of what they’re up to. They don’t know if all of that concrete is for a new secret weapon or what. Hitler has the manpower. It’s estimated that there are seven million workers conscripted from other countries to work for the Nazis.”

Mike listened to them talk and he wondered where this war was heading. Times together were rare now so he attempted to lighten the mood.

“Maybe they’re building some really big latrines for their combat troops.”

It wasn’t very funny but it broke the somber mood. Charlie asked Greg,

“How’s your love life? You’re the lady-killer here.”

“Too much work lately but I did meet a lovely girl in London. You would have drooled over her, Charlie. She’s a dancer on the stage, blonde, blue eyes, lots of curves and she loves to have a good time. That’s all I’ll say.”

Noting Charlie’s expression, Greg said,

“If we’re ever in London together I promise I’ll introduce you to her if she’s around. Veronica likes nice things so you might be a hit with her seeing as you’re a supply officer.”

Charlie sighed, “Thank you Greg.”

Greg looked over at Mike and asked,

“Are you still celibate?”

“Like you, I’ve been working my butt off. I may be single soon though. I finally got the information, second hand, about Diana’s life. It made the decision for me.”

"Sorry to hear it Mike. It must hurt a lot."

"I'll survive. My work has been so intense I've had little time to brood about personal problems. Time will heal my feelings."

Greg was uncomfortable, he hadn't intended for his remark to hit a sensitive area. Mike caught the look.

"Come on, Greg. It's all right. Have another drink."

Charlie had stepped out of the room and he returned with Mrs. Willoughby,

"We can't have a real party without Mrs. Willoughby."

She sat down in a comfortable chair. Greg poured her a drink and she let out a sigh of contentment.

"I've acquired a fondness for your American bourbon. What will I do when you Yanks leave. Cheers."

Charlie said to her,

"I'll give you the name of a liquor distributor in the States. You can have the bourbon sent to you by the case if you have an English liquor dealer here to receive it. I suppose you know one?"

Mrs. Willoughby laughed and replied,

"Charlie, you have a devious mind. But yes, I do happen to know a whiskey peddler. I can only stay for one drink. My daughters' husbands are arriving this evening."

Charlie gave her a bottle.

“Here, Mrs. Willoughby. Serve them a drink with my compliments.”

It was late when they decided to retire for the night. Mike said to them,

“You won’t see me for a while. I’m leaving on a transport ship in a few days. Let’s hope this next offensive fares better than the last one.”

Charlie replied,

“I hope so too. With the supplies we lost at Normandy and the demands of this new offensive we’re almost in a critical situation. Not to mention the supplies sent to Italy recently. Our convoys are smaller now too because they tell me the Pacific theatre is getting top priority.”

They departed, casually saying goodbye. The war had touched these three men often. From experience they knew to keep it light. Charlie and Greg weren’t going into a combat zone but Mike was. They knew he might not come back.

Greg’s work with the Air Corps kept him in touch with the reality of the situation every day as the bombers raided Europe. The air war over Europe was a daily combat which never stopped nor did the losses of men and aircraft.

There were rumors the Eighth Air Corps alone had lost nearly sixty thousand airmen either killed or missing in action over Europe.

In two short months the Nazis were gaining back some of the control of the skies in Europe. At the Karla underground aircraft factory jet fighters were being rapidly produced to replace propeller-driven fighter planes

Chapter Nineteen

In the higher military echelons there was speculation about the more advanced rockets the underground sources claimed were being developed. The possibility of intercontinental missiles reaching America wasn't the only thing that concerned them. Early in the war the Nazis had been working to develop an atomic bomb. The heavy water facility used for atomic energy research in Norway had been destroyed by the Norwegian underground. Hitler seemed to have lost interest in atomic weapons. However, the Allies had been taken by surprise more than once by Nazi secrecy.

Military leaders in England knew only the barest theoretical possibilities of the destructive power of an atom bomb. In reality the Germans had been a mere two years away from producing atomic bombs when the heavy water plant was destroyed. But no one could say for sure that research was halted. Only a few of the top military commanders knew about the vital importance of heavy water to creating an atomic bomb. Scientists in America held highly confidential meetings for some high ranking officers to explain the significance of heavy water.

They informed them that heavy water was the remaining residue from producing ammonia. Its molecular structure was highly unstable and under the right conditions it could create the necessary chain reaction to split the atoms. This would lead to a release of the awful radioactive energy into an explosion of undreamed of proportions.

German scientists chose a cone shaped war head to design their atom bomb. Heavy water would be used as a lining in the cone-like chamber. A powerful explosive charge would explode in the chamber to cause the chain reaction of the heavy water atoms. The scientists concluded their lectures by stressing how important the destruction of the heavy water plant had been to delay the Nazis from creating a horror beyond the imagination.

Even so, a large rocket carrying tons of explosives capable of reaching New York City was a frightening specter. There were also rumors about jet propulsion aircraft, robot tanks, nerve gas, super submarines and a host of other weapons. Hitler was certainly a maniac but not one to be taken lightly. While the allied army was somewhat restricted in the type of weapons they would use in warfare, Hitler was capable of any horror.

Now the naval forces scattered to many ports as a deception then head for a rendezvous off the coast of Greece. Although this invasion force wasn't of the magnitude of the Normandy offensive it was nevertheless formidable. In Italy reinforcements were beginning to arrive and quickly moved up to the battle front to prepare for the massive offensive to be launched there to keep the Germans from shifting troops to the Greek invasion site.

So far the Nazis didn't appear to be aware of the imminent landing in Greece. There were no troop movements toward the Balkans from Italy or from the Russian front. Nor did there appear to be any build up of air power in the area. It was quiet in the sector. Troop movements by the Allies to Greece and Italy followed along the same shipping lanes from Gibraltar. This provided a convenient screen for the army until the Greek invasion fleet split off from the supply ships bound for Italy.

Mike was accustomed to the crowded conditions aboard a transport ship. He was quartered with nine other officers in a single cabin. There were two sets of bunks stacked five high. Hopefully, the men on the top bunks didn't walk in their sleep. A fall from the top tier could be fatal. He knew the enlisted men below decks had more cramped quarters

than he had. Working on a staggered schedule, the men were brought up on deck for fresh air and some mild exercise.

Fortunately, the summer weather was perfect in the Mediterranean area. Mike spent most of his time up on deck with the other officers enjoying the sea breezes. There was an air of expectancy aboard the ship. The army was relieved to be going somewhere after Normandy. For the enlisted men it was a relief to be away from the strenuous construction work on underground shelters in England and the hard training in preparation for the invasion of Greece

Everyone aboard the transports speculated about their possible destination. There were arguments for another landing on the coast of Italy. This idea was hotly refuted by those soldiers who had suffered through the Anzio Beach debacle. They argued vehemently against another landing in Italy in the fervent hope that it wasn't their destination. These soldiers were praying that SHAEF had learned a bitter lesson about attempting a surprise landing on the Italian Peninsula and wouldn't make the same mistake again.

Other speculations included a possible landing somewhere in the Middle East. But an invasion of Greece won the majority of votes mainly based upon the terrain

they had studied and the type of beaches they were trained to attack. Some carriers of the latest scoop swore their information was straight from the horse's mouth. Why information from a horse's mouth would be accurate was never explained nor did anyone question the source.

The prevalence of rumors running through the ranks of the Army was in fact just one more manifestation of a time-honored tradition. As far back as the American Civil War there had been self-appointed couriers of scuttlebutt scurrying from one campfire to another with rumors.

Mike leaned against the railing admiring the beautiful summer night a full moon reflected brilliantly off the gentle waves. They were sailing along on a tranquil sea and the breeze was warm on his face. This was their third day at sea in a convoy of two hundred ships. He wondered what sort of ordeal lay ahead for the men in the battalion he had trained. Maybe this will be an easy one he thought hopefully. He had seen enough death.

Although he wasn't going in on the landing, his view of the battle from the bridge of the ship would show him how the troops were faring on the beach. After a while he reluctantly turned in for the night. However before bedding down he carefully broke down and cleaned his .45 caliber automatic and Thompson submachine gun.

Combat veterans always had their weapons ready for killing.

When he awoke the following morning the ship was no longer moving. Around him lay many more ships than had been in their convoy from England. He guessed there were at least five hundred gathered together. Presently the transport was underway again fitting itself into a predetermined slot in the formation.

After morning mess all officers were summoned to a meeting. They crowded into the designated stateroom. A brigadier general who was the ranking officer on the transport ship entered the room with his staff.

Without any fanfare he announced,

“Now that we are underway to our final destination I can tell you where we will be landing. This task force will invade the mainland of Greece and several of the large Greek islands. We will begin loading landing craft at 0400 tomorrow. Weather reports forecast perfect weather in Greece for the next week. There should be no problems landing the men and equipment ashore. “

“On the table to my right are the orders for each company aboard this transport. Study the landing timetable for your company and brief your men so there can be no

confusion about who is supposed to be where and when. Good luck to all of you.”

He left with his staff.

Well this is it, Mike thought to himself. No matter how many times he had been through a new offensive action there had always been a moment where he felt his gut tightening. Even though he would be high up on the ship's bridge the sensation was there. The commander of the battalion he had trained came by and thanked him for his help in readying the unit.

They all stayed up for a short while in the evening and talked about many things, including girls, home, London and the war. Conversation helped to ease the tension. Then they went to their quarters to rest for the coming ordeal. Now there was nothing left to prepare for all was in readiness for tomorrow.

Reveille was sounded at 0300. All at once the ship was bustling with activity as the troops were moved around in shifts for mess, readying equipment and final briefing by the officers. Mike lent a hand inspecting the men to be sure their equipment was in order. Morale was high. They had been trained to a fine edge and now the waiting was over.

It was a perfect summer morning. As the sky turned red in the east the convoy stood out on the horizon. Navy personnel began bringing landing craft alongside the ship. In good order the men climbed over the side and clambered down the cargo nets to the boats gently rocking on the sea below. As the sun reached the horizon the first wave of troops began their journey toward the beaches.

Like a giant curtain rising the sun hit the rim of the horizon and the war ships opened fire on Greece. Mike watched the landing craft carrying his battalion as it joined in formation at the rendezvous point and headed for the beaches. His battalion was in the first assault wave. He looked out at the assembled convoy. It was thrilling to take in the display of assembled military power and hear the roar of the battle squadron's guns.

He turned his binoculars on the mainland. Along the shore there were distant flashes from the guns of the enemy ships. Shore batteries began to join the naval artillery dueling with the Allied war ships. He saw several landing craft take hits from enemy artillery as the rest thrust forward in an orderly formation toward the beach. He made notes on his clip board about the rendezvous techniques adopted from the Pacific experience. They were working

well and there was very little lagging in the landing craft formation.

He concentrated his attention on the designated area for the battalion he had trained. They were now near the beach. He could see mortar rounds exploding in the water around the boats as they came within range of the German shore defenses. Several shore batteries began to bombard the area scoring hits on a number of landing craft. He could see the survivors jumping over the side and swimming for shore.

Resistance to the landing was becoming heavy as the boats dropped their ramps for the troops to wade ashore. Fountains of water began to spurt up among the men as they struggled to find their footing on the sand. Casualties were mounting rapidly as the troops began to run forward to their appointed areas on the beach.

His battalion began to fight back as they became a solid front of fighting men. Firing on the men still wading ashore became lighter as the Germans had to contend with a fighting enemy well entrenched behind rock formations.

Enemy coastal artillery was still firing on the beaches and the ships in the convoy. But as the morning progressed, the firing became desultory which told Mike the assault troops were moving off the beaches and silencing the

German guns. Naval war ships were still fighting with the enemy ships but the German naval force opposing them didn't seem to be of any significant size now.

At the moment it appeared to him the Germans had been caught off guard by the landing in Greece. Unless they were preparing a surprise after the landing was completed. Great plumes of black smoke dotted the sky from damaged ships and burning structures on the shore.

Around 1500, a ship's officer came up to Mike, and gave him a progress report.

"Major the landing is a success. Our troops moved rapidly off the beaches and we have already secured our hold on the mainland."

And in fact they had encountered stiff resistance at the beginning of the landing but this had lessened as the army moved in.

Landings on the two large islands met with little resistance. German garrisons there had been caught by surprise. Though the Nazis had put up a short sharp fight at first they surrendered when they realized they were surrounded and cut off from any possible reinforcement.

By early evening artillery fire had lessened. After the constant roar of heavy artillery the ensuing quiet seemed

strange. Mike suddenly realized he hadn't eaten anything since breakfast. So he made his way to the mess hall where naval officers were talking excitedly about the promising beginning of the Greek offensive. Mike caught bits of conversation as he walked over to pick up a tray.

"They were caught flat."

"We're already moving on Athens."

"I heard the Germans pulled out of the city."

"Half the ships they put out against us were sunk."

"We had control of the air going in. Someone told me there was only one squadron of German fighters patrolling the shore line." And so on.

With the worst of his hunger satisfied Mike became aware his wounds were bothering him again. So he sank with relief into a chair for the first time since dawn and tried to relax a little. After an hour or so he returned to the bridge. There was nothing much to see now since the troops had moved inland toward Athens. As the sky darkened he could make out the distant flashes of artillery on the mainland as the battle continued on into the night.

The excitement of the invasion had left Mike keyed up and restless. His wounds continued to bother him more and more.

To get a little sleep he was finally forced to take his pain medication.

At 0400 he went out on the deck to have a cigarette. It was a clear night. When he looked up, the stars above him seemed so peaceful in contrast to the shoreline. Dozens of fires were reflected on the water from burning ships and buildings. It was a fascinating dichotomy.

On several occasions he had heard birds singing in the trees in the middle of hot fire fight. And unless directly disturbed cattle merely stared tranquilly for a moment at the combat soldiers before going back to the placid business of grazing. And always the heavens were undisturbed by the horrors of war being committed on the little planet below.

He wondered if the easy success of the invasion in its first day was a German trap of some kind. Had the enemy let them in on purpose? His combat experiences had given him and most other soldiers a healthy respect for the German army. Their soldiers were good, almost too good for Mike's liking. He knew the mountains in Greece would provide the Nazis with perfect defense positions. It would be very difficult to dislodge them. It would be tough going

fighting them in the hills. Thinking about the possible combat situations made him uneasy.

In the morning Mike sat in on a briefing given by the captain of the ship, who started with some encouraging news. "I am pleased to report our troops have successfully occupied Athens this morning."

This announcement was greeted with enthusiastic cheers from the assemblage.

"Our landing met heavy resistance yesterday on the beaches but the fight only lasted a few hours. Then the Germans moved off the beaches to inland positions. Our casualties have been light so far. In the city the Germans put up a sharp fight for about six hours then began an orderly withdrawal out of the Athens area.

"It is the opinion of the high command the Germans had probably shifted a number of divisions to the Italian Peninsula to meet the offensive there. Our timing seems to have been perfect. We will be underway to the harbor area in one hour. After refueling, we are ordered to return to England as soon as the military command is certain our position is secure in Greece. That is all, gentlemen!"

A radioman delivered a message to Mike from Colonel Smith ordering him to command headquarters in Athens. Further orders would be waiting for him there when he

reported in. He packed his duffel bag and a motor launch took him ashore. On the ride in he surveyed the damage sustained by the landing forces. He was relieved to note only a few wrecked LSTs in this sector of the beaches. He would soon know how the attacking force had fared.

The motor launch arrived at a temporary dock on the beach. Mike looked around the assault area. There were some badly damaged tanks near the water's edge as well as artillery pieces. Overall it was obvious the cost of the invasion in terms of men and equipment had been light. In the distance there was the old familiar rumble of artillery.

When he heard cannon reports it reminded him of the sound lumber makes when it is pushed onto the ground from a truck bed. This was a sound he had heard as a child when his father was supervising the construction of power plants. Mike estimated the guns were at least ten miles from his position. They're making good progress, he thought to himself.

Mike reported in at headquarters. His orders were to remain in Greece on temporary duty status. He was to critique the amphibious landing then prepare a report of his findings for Colonel Smith with recommendations for future invasions. Field operations were familiar to him, so

he was content with the assignment.

Since Headquarters staff was extremely busy he arranged his own transportation for an on-site inspection of the assault beach. By the end of the day he had completed his tour of the landing area. Allied casualties resulting from the beach landing had been less than a thousand men.

German maneuvers made it clear they were following a predetermined plan of defense. It was obvious they were heading for the rugged mountainous terrain where repulsing Allied attacks would be much easier. However, the invasion did cause a further stretching of the German army needed to defend its occupied territories. Hopefully the Greek and Italian offensives would relieve some of the pressure on the Russians. Some victories in their sector of the European front were badly needed by the allies.

Ten officers had been sent by Colonel Smith to observe the amphibious landing on the beaches. Their orders were to work together to find the battalions they had trained for the landing. They were to hold face-to-face interviews with the officers about their experiences in the initial assault.

They spent the day together organizing their assignment. In the morning they were loaded onto a truck for the trip into Athens. The ride was hot and dusty. Along the sides of

the road were crowds of people with their belongings headed back to their homes in Athens.

Mike looked at their faces. He had seen the same expressions scores of times before in North Africa. Refugees of war everywhere all had the same empty look of shock and despair on their faces. Their eyes gave an all-too-eloquent reflection of the pain they were feeling. He began to feel anger rise up in him for the people who were responsible for starting wars.

They finally arrived at a large hotel in Athens. Mike inspected the exterior of the building but found no signs of any damage. Probably German army headquarters two days ago he thought to himself. In the spacious lobby of the hotel he saw soldiers busily pulling down Nazi flags. He had been right it had been German headquarters!

After several hours of being processed in by the new Allied army headquarters personnel he gratefully settled himself in the hotel room assigned to him. His back was throbbing again so he lay down on the bed and rested for an hour. After freshening up he went down to the hotel bar. Some of the officers in his assignment group spotted him and waved him over to their table.

One of the officers, Captain Sam Barrett said to him with a laugh,

“War is hell. Look at this opulent set up. German officers definitely know how to live in a war; now so do we.”

Mike smiled as he replied,

“I think I know you from North Africa but I can’t place the outfit you were with.”

“I was on headquarters staff there too. Supplies at the time but up close to the front lines. I qualified with enough combat experience to meet Colonel Smith’s demanding standards. You and I brushed elbows in four or five dirty towns in Africa.. We all knew your division very well.”

“You probably know my division no longer exists after Normandy,” Mike said glumly.

“Yeah, it was a rough deal. But aren’t they all?”

Sam looked at him for a moment and added, “You and I live next door to each other in the hotel. I’m terrible about getting up in the morning. Make sure I’m up, will you?”

Mike assured Sam he would get him up in the morning.

Sam was close to his age several inches taller and with a heavier frame. He appeared to be physically strong. He had light brown hair and blue eyes. His smile was engaging. There was an air about him which told you he didn’t take himself seriously nor anything else for that matter.

Over a few drinks, Mike learned Sam had been in radio management in Chicago. A college buddy's father who owned a chain of radio stations in the Midwest had set Sam up in the company. He had worked his way up to become the manager of the company's largest radio station in Chicago. Mike found Sam to be both interesting and amusing. He liked him.

Chapter Twenty

Athens was now under Allied military authority. There was a blackout order and since no one was allowed on the streets after dark, the officers were confined to the hotel at night. Several days later word came in from the Provost Martial office that the battalions they had trained had been located. Arrangements were made for them to visit the combat area so they could gather the information they needed about the amphibious landing.

They had to travel nearly fifty miles from Athens to reach the combat zone. The Germans were making an orderly withdrawal toward the mountains. Mike located the battalion he had trained in the afternoon. They were temporarily out of the fighting area. He found them moving slowly along a road as a reserve unit. As time permitted he interviewed the officers. In the distance there was the constant rumble of artillery as the Allies pushed forward.

Mike stayed with the battalion until he was satisfied that he had all of the information he needed about their experiences on the beach. He was with them for two days before they were ordered back into combat. He wished the officers good luck and watched them spread out on each

side of the dusty road. Although he wasn't close to anyone in the battalion he still felt his gut tightening as it always did when he watched soldiers head off into the combat zone. These men would either be surrounded by death at close quarters or possibly be killed in action themselves.

Athens was beginning to return to normal living. Some shops were open and there was civilian traffic moving around the city. At the hotel Mike gratefully collapsed on his bed. He hadn't slept much up near the line. This is becoming a habit he thought to himself as he went to sleep fully clothed.

The next thing he knew someone was shaking him awake. He looked up. It was Sam.

"You'd better get up or you'll miss chow."

"What time is it?"

"It's 1830 hours. They'll close the dining hall at 1900.

So step on it."

Mike did a quick clean up and went down to eat with Sam. As they were eating, Sam said,

"Tonight we have some fun. A bunch of us hired a local citizen to take us to a local hot spot that's reopened.

Are you in?"

"Sure," Mike replied, "I always wanted to try ouzo."

Seven officers took off together for a night out in Athens. They left the hotel late in the evening with a local guide who took them around the city to see the sights for several hours. The only exception was the Parthenon. The ancient ruins had been declared off limits out of concern for their preservation. Greek officials had prevailed upon the military commanders to place guards around the ruins until the war had moved a safe distance away from the city.

Later they arrived at a night club located in the basement of an old building. When they opened the door to the club a wall of noise greeted them. It was quite large with an open main area, a long bar and several side rooms opening out to the center room. There was a mixed crowd of about two hundred people both civilians and military personnel.

They made their way to an open space at the bar. Mike looked around the large room and immediately spotted a number of young Greek women sitting at various tables. Highly impressed with their dark beauty, he asked the guide if the women were prostitutes. The man shrugged and put out his hands in a gesture which said, "I don't know." It didn't make much difference, as Mike wasn't buying anyway.

A Greek band began to play. The music was strange to him but the rhythm and pulsing beat were pleasant. Then the room was darkened. A spotlight was focused on an area in front of the band stand. Into the light stepped a beautiful woman in a brilliantly colored costume.

She was voluptuous. By American standards her hips would have been considered too large but she was striking. As the band played her music, she performed a belly dance with sensuous movements. He marvelled at her seemingly effortless muscle control. When she was finished the crowd roared out its approval.

Mike and the other officers left the club near eleven. Their passes were only good until midnight. They were all a little drunk so they decided to go back to the hotel, where the party continued in Sam's room. There was a noisy poker game and more drinking. Around three in the morning Mike decided since he wasn't having very good luck at poker he should leave.

Their work on the troop landings was completed in another week. They had a conference with the area commanders, at which time they presented a critique of the assault operations. Allied aircraft were now using the air fields around Athens in support of the ground offensive.

There had been no sign of the German Luftwaffe in Greece except for an occasional reconnaissance fighter plane flying high and fast over Athens. It appeared the Germans had decided to concentrate their fighter squadrons over France to thwart Allied bombing raids.

At the beginning of the week the officers were ordered back to England by transport plane. While Sam and Mike were waiting to board the plane, Sam said,

“I hope you won’t be a stranger when we get back to London. You and I should team up. We’re both free as birds. Let’s have some fun along with all of this drudgery.”

“It would suit me fine,” Mike replied, “but I’m stationed down in Portsmouth.”

“Not for long. I have some inside information from Colonel Smith’s aide. We ten officers will become a permanent training group for assault landings. We’ll have plenty of work since a direct invasion of France is out of the question. I predict they’ll make four or five smaller landings next spring to keep spreading out the German defense lines.”

Traveling by air to London took two days. It was necessary to hop around to several air fields enroute to England. They were all travel weary when they finally landed at a military air field ten miles away from London.

Mike spent the night at officers' quarters near Colonel Smith's headquarters.

It was late in the afternoon when their debriefing with Colonel Smith and his officers was over. Mike was given his new orders and Sam had been right about his future assignment. He was attached permanently to the colonel's staff. Fortunately he was allowed to have an aide of his choice. He picked Sergeant Severinsen. In his opinion the sergeant was the best man for the job. They had worked together for several months. Mike had found in Sevvy a scrounger and a hustler who nevertheless had a keen understanding of people. A scrounge will be a good thing to have in London he thought to himself.

Sam met him for a drink at the officers quarters.

"You were right about the unit," Mike admitted. "My orders give me three days to move from Portsmouth to here. I'm going to miss the quiet around there.. At least it's more peaceful than here with these constant air raid alerts."

"It won't be so bad," Sam replied. "We'll probably average three or four air raid alerts a week in this area of the city. I have a lot of action to show you in London. In fact we're going out tonight to a special place."

After they had finished evening mess Sam said,

“Okay let’s roll. I have a jeep waiting for us outside.”

Sam’s aide was driving the jeep. It took over an hour maneuvering around destroyed neighborhoods and stopping at military checkpoints but the aide knew what he was doing. Finally they stopped in front of a large brick house located across from a public park.

Mike knew enough about the city to realize they were in a fashionable neighborhood. With the blackout in effect it was hard to distinguish much but he had a general idea about the area. Sam spoke to the aide who promptly drove off in the jeep leaving the two officers in front of the house. Sam took a key from his pocket and showed it to Mike with a smile. “This is a little private key club and I just happen to be a member.”

When they stepped inside he saw a beautiful interior decorated in a traditional English conservative manner typical for wealthier Londoners. Several British officers were sitting in the living room. They appeared to be the only people on the first floor of the house. He followed Sam down a hallway to a door leading to a lower floor. This seemed to be where the action was. It looked like the interior of a large nightclub. There was a bar, a dance floor

and lounge areas with tables along the walls.

Sam looked at Mike, curious to know how he would react and was satisfied to see he was impressed.

"Quite a place," said Mike. "Everything looks expensive."

"It is, but it's worth it. Membership dues here aren't for the poor. There are two hundred members; they're all prominent politicians, businessmen, social giants, celebrities and military officers. I'm the lowest ranking officer in the club. I got in because of my radio career. My boss has a lot of friends in London so he pulled a few strings for me. This club is dedicated to whatever we please."

'Here at the club you will meet some of the most beautiful women you've ever seen. Dining is gourmet. There are four poker rooms if you care to lose some money and two billiard rooms. There is a dance band and entertainment every night by some of the city's top performers. But I should warn you about the women. Some of them are invited guests and others are prostitutes. Try not to get them mixed up."

"I don't want any of the women in the trade. I will be careful not to make an embarrassing mistakes."

"Don't be too sure about the women, Mike. You haven't seen them yet."

Sam was well known at the club. He made the rounds at the bar talking to people he knew and introducing Mike to club members. Sam then led his friend to an office at the rear of the bar area. They entered and Sam greeted the man sitting at the desk.

“Byron, I’d like you to meet Major Mike Canyon. I want him to have visiting privileges here. Please make the arrangements.”

“Welcome, Major Canyon,” said Byron obligingly. “We will record you as a visitor and give you a card to use in the club.”

Outside of the office Mike thanked Sam for his generosity. He replied,

“It’s only the beginning. I think we should set up our own apartment instead of living in the officers’ quarters. It’s easy enough to get permission. I figure you and I have enough extra money to live well. We might as well enjoy London while we’re here and still alive. Don’t you agree?”

Mike thought it over. He was making big profits from his brokerage business and now he was divorcing Diana so he had no one to spend it on. Why not? The idea of some high living had an element of defiance to it which seemed all the more attractive because of his hurt feelings over Diana.

So he replied,

“Great idea Sam! Do you have a place in mind?”

“I do. There’s a flat available just two miles from our headquarters. Sort of half way between the club and our offices. It’s expensive but tastefully furnished. It belongs to a Swiss banker. We can rent it on a month-to-month lease.”

“How much is the rent?”

Sam gave him a number which made Mike swallow hard. But then he said,

“Oh, what the hell! If we like it, let’s take it!”

They stayed at the club for several hours. There had been a sensational singer. Sam had left to play some poker after the entertainment. Mike wandered around the club becoming familiar with the layout. Several of the working girls made approaches and he politely turned them down.

Later Mike sat at the bar observing the crowd while he waited for Sam to finish playing poker. The dance floor was crowded now. There was an atmosphere of gaiety mainly brought on by the social lubrication of alcohol. They were there to escape from their war worries.

Mike understood a little better now about the partying in London. He began to see what these people had endured for the past five years. They had their fears and concerns for loved ones. It was similar to his combat experiences; the

only real difference was during battles his life was on the line moment by moment. Here, it was less immediate but the danger was real enough.

As he watched from the bar his attention was drawn to a young woman standing with a small group of people. She laughed over something and her head turned in his direction. Studying her he saw a striking woman with large green eyes, a pert nose and a full mouth now open in laughter. Thick black hair framed her face in a short cut popular at this time. She was wearing a tight short skirt showing off slender shapely legs. In conformity with wartime fashions her hemline was several inches above her knees.

Mike continued to look at her as she participated in the group conversation. Every motion, facial expression and gesture struck him as sensual. He found to his surprise that he was strongly attracted to her. In his eyes she had a natural sensuality quite absent from any of his past experiences. What's wrong with you? he thought. She was just another girl. Was it some kind of rebound thing from the upsetting news about his wife?

Sam came up to him.

"I thought you said you weren't interested in the women here. You have been staring at the girl over there. From the

look on your face I'd say it's more than a casual interest."

Then he laughed.

Mike was somewhat embarrassed to be caught ogling a girl.

"She's kind of fascinating. Do you know her?"

"Yes, Rachel Jones. I'll introduce you."

"What about her? What is she like?"

"She comes here with the political crowd. Rachel is a wild one. She does what she wants."

"Does she work somewhere?"

Sam laughed at the question.

"Not hardly. She is well taken care of by the political bunch. She decides if and when she wants to be with one of them. I told you she's a free spirit. Come on, I'll introduce you to her."

Mike almost stopped him. He didn't understand his sudden confusion at the prospect of meeting her face to face. But he didn't stop Sam as they made their way over to the group. Sam received a warm greeting from them. He then commenced to introduce Mike to everyone, saving Rachel for last. He grinned at Mike as he made the final introduction.

"Miss Rachel Jones I would like you to meet my close friend, Major Mike Canyon. He's a great admirer of yours."

She looked at him with amused curiosity as she took his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Major. Why do you find me so interesting?"

He was caught off guard by her bluntness. He replied,

"It's a pleasure to meet you Miss Jones. Sam likes to get me flustered if he can. Just ignore him."

She pouted and looked at him with her head lowered as she peered up at him.

You mean I'm not good looking, as you Yanks say?"

"Oh no, I think you're very pretty. I meant Sam likes to kid me you know what I mean."

He felt like a small boy now and stopped talking to keep from getting in any deeper. Rachel laughed at his discomfort, "Never mind, Major. You're being teased. I'll let you alone." She then turned back to her group. Sam had joined in the conversation. Mike stood on the edge of the gathering and tried to keep his eyes off Rachel but inevitably he would turn to look at her. She gave him a sidelong glance every now and then with that amused expression, She appeared to be about twenty or so but her poise was surprising for her age.

Impulsively, Rachel took Mike's arm.

"Come along, Major. You can buy me a drink."

He was startled, but followed her to a small table near the bar. After they ordered their drinks she looked him over.

“You’re a handsome man, Mike. Is it alright to call you by your first name?” She went on without waiting for an answer, “You remind me of the actors in your Western cinemas, the Indian I think.”

Mike flushed, annoyed at himself for his lack of poise.

“Well thank you. Is Rachel all right?”

“Perfectly.”

“Okay Rachel. I think you’re good looking.”

“Come on with it. You want to bed me.”

He reddened at her frank remark. She laughed.

“Get used to me. I say what I damn well please. And I’m not wrong about you. I can feel your passion.”

She reached across the table and took his hand,

“I’m flattered you think I’m good looking.”

He relaxed a little, knowing she was having some fun teasing him. With a warm smile she said,

“You can take me to dinner tomorrow night.”

Elated at his good luck he made arrangements to meet Rachel at the club at seven the following evening. They finished their drinks and as she stood up she brushed against him.

He caught the scent of her perfume and the effect was overpowering.

On the trip back to their billet, Sam remarked,

“You sure caved in quite quickly for a guy who was determined to stay away from women. I never saw anyone drop so fast.”

Then he laughed, leaving Mike feeling a little foolish.

“I’m as surprised as you are Sam,” he admitted. “But she fascinates me.”

“Yeah, she’s a sexy kitten. Watch out for claws though.”

“She was charming to me.”

Sam looked serious when he replied.

“Be careful Mike. She isn’t fresh out of a convent. Rachel is willful and sophisticated. Her whole thing is men. Just be careful.”

Chapter Twenty One

Where Mike was working the current topic was the progress the army was making in Greece. In a few short weeks they had gained control over half the country. But progress was beginning to flag as they began to fight in the mountainous areas. There German resistance became stiffer and ground gained was extracting a heavier toll in lives. It wasn't a surprise to the allies they had foreseen the Nazis would adopt this defensive tactic. It did accomplish its main objective for the allies which was to put further strain on the Wehrmacht to field sufficient troops to defend expanding fronts.

In Italy the coordinated offensive with the Greek invasion had kept the German army from reinforcing their troops in Greece. The allied push had gained another thirty miles of territory but the fighting was fierce. Italy had turned out to be a particularly difficult country in which to keep offensive pressure on the Wehrmacht. The rugged terrain could be easily defended by a tenth of the troops the attacking forces needed to effectively move forward.

There was a growing anxiety at SHAEF headquarters over the stalemate and the weakening of the previous

supremacy over the skies of Europe. With each passing day the Germans were buying the time needed to refurbish their war production facilities and increase production of armaments.

General Marshall had the reputation and power with congress to demand the supplies necessary to keep the offensives moving, But the landings in Europe planned for the following spring would require all of the pressure he could muster in Washington. Weighing in against him were the dismal reversals they were suffering in Europe.

One of the heaviest blows to allied hopes had been the Russian offensive. They had depended upon a quick breakthrough on the Eastern front but the failure of the Normandy invasion allowed the Wehrmacht to keep their army in the east at full strength. Normandy was supposed to force the Germans to weaken the Eastern front to defend France. Now the war appeared to be prolonged for another two years. On the French coast the Nazis were busy day and night completing the coastal defenses designed by General Rommel. In another year an invasion of France would be suicidal.

Within SHAEF there was a power struggle underway. The British led by Field Marshal Montgomery were

insisting on strategic control of the European theatre of operations. They argued the American forces should be relegated to a support role. Roosevelt and General Marshall were resisting the proposed change of command. Finally, Roosevelt was forced to play his trump card with Churchill, American supplies and armaments.

He was reminded of the vital role American supplies not to mention food were to the crusade in Europe. Without America there wouldn't be any Russian or Italian offensive. Churchill knew it and he backed his commanders away from an explosive confrontation. To his credit Churchill was as trusting of General Marshall's abilities as Roosevelt was. It was an uneasy time in early August, 1944.

Sam and Mike inspected the flat they planned to rent. It was completely furnished down to the table linens and silverware. They were impressed with the place. Mike had never lived in such luxurious surroundings. In spite of the breath taking rent he agreed to lease the flat with Sam. He had spent only a small amount of his army pay over the last two years because of his combat duty. Now he would spend it and some of the profits from his business. Live a little he told himself with the rockets his time could be up anytime.

They signed the lease. Pleased about the living arrangement Sam said, "If a rocket doesn't get us we'll live very well here. After we change clothes I'll spring for drinks at the club before you meet Rachel for dinner. You haven't changed your mind about her?"

Mike was uncomfortable about his sudden attraction.

"I guess not. She caught me by surprise."

"Don't get serious about her, she's for fun."

It was already crowded at the club when they arrived. Sam introduced Mike to a host of people. Some of them had their names in the newspapers quite often. He was impressed. At eight o'clock the maitre' d approached Mike,

"Major Canyon, Miss Jones has been seated. She is waiting for you in the dining room."

Rachel smiled at him as he walked up to the table. She was lovely in the candlelight. Rachel was wearing a deep green dress which was a perfect contrast to her creamy white skin, black hair and sparkling green eyes. He had to catch his breath.

"Good evening Mike. I knew you would be on time," she said with a teasing smile.

Mike replied "You have every right to be sure of yourself Rachel you are lovely."

“Thank you. Order a large scotch for me. I drink it neat.”

During dinner Rachel drew Mike out by asking him general questions. She was an artist at focusing her attention on a man. It was done so subtly even the most sophisticated man wouldn't be aware of the ego boosting being administered by her. The effect was to feel warm and special in her company. Mike was no exception he was completely captivated.

He was thinking the evening was one of the best he could remember. Certainly the finest since he left the States. Rachel knew she was accomplishing her purpose. While they were enjoying after dinner drinks she looked at him with an amused smile,

"I've learned a great deal about you tonight Mike. You're an interesting man and attractive too. I know how badly you want me, no, don't deny it. It's alright. I find it flattering. I see no reason not to give you what you want. Let's go up to the bedrooms here at the club."

Mike was caught completely unprepared for her frankness. He colored, embarrassed he replied,

"You make me sound like a sex maniac."

She gave him a level look,

"You're a man and I want you too. Let's go."

She led him from the dining room to the upper level of the house. Upstairs Rachel spoke to an attendant. Mike felt like an awkward school boy. This was a new experience for him. The attendant was all business as he led them down the hallway to a room. When they entered Rachel said,

“This is my favorite room here.”

It was a feminine bedroom all in pink. She turned to him and kissed him passionately. The embrace lasted a long time. In the closeness Mike smelled her hair and skin. Passion welled up in him. He could feel her responding too.

She murmured endearments to him as she undressed him. When he was undressed she stepped away. Without taking her eyes from his face she began to disrobe. She stepped out of her dress then she shed her slip. As she stood in front of him in her bra and panties he stared at her body. She was at her physical peak with the glowing, creamy skin women from the British Isles are world renowned for. Rachel removed her bra and his eyes took in the firm breasts. They turned up at the nipple line. Next her panties came off he viewed her supple hips and the round muscles of her belly.

In bed, she hungrily explored his body with her hands and mouth. She made love to him in many ways. As her passion increased her needs became insistent. When she climaxed for the final time she pushed her nails into his

back, screamed and fainted. Mike had never encountered a woman like her. He was afraid he had hurt her. He went to the bathroom and returned with a wet towel. He placed it on her forehead. She slowly came back to consciousness.

Her eyes opened,

“ I’m all right. I should have warned you I can go like that sometimes.”

Mike was relieved to hear she was fine. They had a cigarette and talked for awhile. Then she turned to him,

“ I need you again Mike.”

It was the wildest sexual experience of his life. He did things he had only read about and he was completely infatuated with Rachel. Much later over drinks Mike tried to express to her how he felt. She stopped him,

“Before you say too much let me tell you how it is. This is my business.”

He looked shocked.

“Didn’t you know I’m a prostitute?” she asked.

“Sam said you sort of lived with the political bunch I saw you with at the club. “

Rachel laughed, "That’s a polite way of putting it. It’s true I do what I want I’m fortunate there but it’s for money. I know you had a good time Mike, I’m not inexpensive your

fee for the evening is five hundred American dollars.”

“I’m confused Rachel. I could have sworn you enjoyed the lovemaking.”

“I did Mike. I’m in a business I enjoy. If it makes you feel better I don’t enjoy it as much with most men as I did with you tonight. Fainting is a rare thing for me. I have to be really aroused to get there. I like you Mike. Let’s be friends and lovers.”

He was silent for a time trying to come to terms with his confusion. “ I don’t understand, you’re a prostitute, but you like me?”

Rachel looked at him impatiently,

“Yes, I fancy you but I’m in business you see. Can’t you accept that?”

He looked at her helplessly,

“I’m trying Rachel. This is different from anything I’ve encountered before. I don’t know if I should believe you about the liking part or not. Maybe it’s a standard line.”

He was becoming angry out of disappointment and for being so naive.

She picked up on his agitation.

“Look I’m a whore. I make no apologies. My mum was a whore. I never knew my father the bastard ran off before I was born. He left us to starve me and my mum. She only

had her beauty to sell. I watched her struggle along selling herself cheap for me. I swore I wouldn't sell cheap and I haven't. My mum now has a neat flat in a better section of the city and she is retired from the business."

"The criminals in the poor section of London we come from are friends of ours. Several of the top mob bosses grew up with my mum. When I was fourteen I let one of them know I was ready to sell but at a high price. Johnny set me up with a number of wealthy men he knew. They were willing to pay plenty for a fourteen year old.

It's a business deal. Johnny is no pimp although he receives 10 % of my earnings. His job is to protect me from the pimps and other scum. He's the reason I can do what I want. No one is foolish enough to challenge Johnny. So I've always been a whore. So what? I know worse. If you're going to get moral on me then get out of my life. It's that simple."

Mike listened to her with the beginnings of sympathetic feelings for her, "I didn't know Rachel. My life has been much different than yours."

Hearing his changed attitude she put her hand on his shoulder "It's alright now you know, Do what you want."

He changed the subject and told her about the flat he and Sam had rented,

"Would you like to live with me Rachel ?"

"It would cost you a fortune to keep me. I earn more than most cinema stars."

"I have a good business I could afford it."

She laughed, "Believe me, you couldn't possibly afford me. I told you this is a business with me. My earnings go into solid business investments for the time when men like you won't be buying anymore."

Her harshness made him uneasy. She said in a softer tone,

"I do fancy you Mike but I can't live with you for the reasons I just told you. Don't push it."

Then she pinned him to the bed.

Chapter Twenty Two

At the beginning of September there were reports coming from all over London about tremendous explosions. People who had been in the vicinity said they weren't buzz bombs. There was no buzzing sound at all. It was a loud explosion then a few seconds later they heard the sound of a rocket. It was very puzzling. These explosions continued and began to become more frequent.

Ordnance experts announced the Germans were now launching a more powerful rocket called the V-2. They went on to explain to a disbelieving public how these rockets traveled faster than the speed of sound. Therefore, the V-2s exploded on contact then the sound of the rocket came afterward. It was very difficult for people to understand such a concept. As the rockets continued to explode around London with the delayed noise of the rocket engines they came to believe. Here was a much more frightening threat to their lives.

It was impossible for the RAF to shoot them down. Being a silent killer there were no air raid warnings to alert people to the danger. Only a sudden explosion made you aware of these deadly missiles and it was already too late to seek shelter. Their effect on the British people was

devastating. They had learned to cope with constant danger from the Luftwaffe bombings and the strange buzz bombs you could hear. But this inhuman silent killer was causing wide spread paranoia. Another million Londoners left the city. Over 1400 of the V-2s attacked England in six months. Unlike the V-1 rockets which could be shot down, they were 100 % effective.

V-1s also continued to rain down on London. In all, nearly 12,000 of these rockets attacked England in less than a year. It was a hell created by the Nazis. Rockets kept the streets of London deserted except for necessary travel. People were staying indoors because it gave them some sense of protection and in the bomb shelters during the air raid alerts. Booming noises rumbled around the city constantly.

In Europe the offensives had ground down to agonizingly slow progress. In Greece and Italy the allies had to contend with nearly impregnable mountain defense positions. The Nazis began to use V-1 rockets to attack allied supply lines effectively. In the combat areas there wasn't a well organized air raid alert system like England's comprehensive warning system. On the battlefronts only anti aircraft batteries defended against the V-1 rockets but often too late to do much good.

Within two weeks of the initial attack on London with the new V-2 rockets reports began to come in to SHAEF about attacks by the ultra modern weapon in all of the cities occupied by the allies in Europe. Rome, Athens and Moscow were being bombarded with the V-2s day and night. It was a great shock to the allies to learn the Nazis had such an abundant supply of the rockets.

Efforts by the military intelligence services to find and destroy the launch areas for the V-2s were ineffectual because the rockets were being fired from mobile units easily moved every day. Most of the rockets were launched in heavily wooded areas which provided excellent concealment. The Wermacht had created and trained a new branch of the army called the "rocket troops". Each unit was comprised of 30 vehicles carrying all of the equipment needed to set up a launch area in a matter of hours. When the rocket launches for that day they dismantled them and move on to another site.

In August of 1943 allied bombers had located and destroyed the Nazis' above ground rocket production complex. So they created a giant underground facility for rocket production called the Dora Project near the Buchenwald Concentration camp. It was a complex of interconnecting tunnels with two large ones to build the

V-2 rockets and a number of side tunnels for quick access for the slave workers who were assembling the rockets.

V-1 rockets were also built at the Dora Complex.

It was a mad realm under the complete control of the SS who ruthlessly pressed the shivering denizens into working twelve hour shifts. It is estimated that at least twelve thousand slave laborers died there of starvation, murder, malnutrition and physical exhaustion. It was not unusual for the slave workers to be laboring under a steel beam with hanging bodies dangling from them. They had failed to work hard enough to suit the SS. Efficiency and high output were the goals. The SS kept records showing that a V-2 rocket could be completed in 12,400 man hours while a V-1 rocket could be finished in 800 man hours.

In all, the Nazis built 3,800 V-2 rockets of which 1400 rained down on England and close to an equal number on the allied armies and their supply depots. The death struggle in Europe had taken on hellish proportions that were almost incomprehensible. On the battle fronts explosions were heard on a constant basis from these terrible weapons.

Meanwhile, construction activity behind the Russian and the Italian fronts continued at a frantic pace. The Germans were creating a five mile deep belt in front of the defenses

they were building. These areas had been totally cleared of any trees or buildings leaving a barren plain without any areas of concealment. Advancing armies could be seen for miles if they attempted to attack the fortifications set back behind the barren strip. It was obvious the construction was for an elaborate defense system. But the nature of the defenses was a mystery.

A top level conference was held in Washington DC in August. Balancing the supply needs of two gigantic theatres of war widely separated by thousands of miles was a herculean task. One of the major causes for bitter controversy was the demand for the ships needed to carry on the offensives underway in two hemispheres.

Heavy losses of ships in the North Atlantic caused by the new Nazi super submarines was the main reason for the problem. Aircraft and armaments could be manufactured rather quickly but ships were another matter. They took longer to build so the gap between losses and replacements was always widening.

In order to try to satisfy everyone and avoid a political revolution, a compromise was struck to give the Pacific theater priority in the winter months. In the spring, supply priority would go to Europe. No one was completely

satisfied with this plan but it would have to be endured all the same.

New voices were being heard in Congress. Political pressure was mounting against the Roosevelt administration. So far none of the recently formed coalitions in Congress had come up with a new approach to the war to catch the public's attention. Times were uncertain and there was no guarantee a new power bloc wouldn't split the government.

Mike was given time to wind up his affairs in Portsmouth. Mrs. Willoughby was quite upset to learn he was leaving, "Damn, we sort of got used to having you here. I'll miss our tate a' tates."

While he was packing Charlie came into his room,

"It's a hell of a note you leaving but I'll see you in London. My trips there are going to become more frequent now. In fact I may be transferred to London in the fall once the supply situation here is stabilized.. A transfer to the city would put me back with my old bunch in SHAEF. I expect the winter to be hectic it will be quite a job planning for the spring offensives."

Mike told Charlie about his hook up with Sam and the exclusive club. He described the expensive flat they had

rented. Charlie was impressed,

“I’m glad you decided to live a little. I had heard about the club when I was stationed in London but I didn’t have enough pull to get in there.”

“Where’s Greg?”

“He’s over in Greece working on air support.”

They talked about Greece. Mike described the invasion to Charlie concluding his story by expressing his suspicion the landing may have been too easy.

Sergeant Severinsen had been appointed as Mike’s aide and he was glad to have him. On the drive up to London they discussed the new assignment. Sevvay said to Mike,

“I’m good at keeping my eyes open. I’ll protect your back real good. I’ve been around these headquarters officer types for awhile and believe me this bunch won’t be any different. There’ll be a fair share of cliques but don’t worry about it.”

Mike nodded and thought I’ve picked the right man.

Toward the end of the week he received a message. Mr. Kenneth Barnes, a friend of Joe Stanton wished to meet him for lunch the following day. The invitation upset Mike. He was sure this was Stanton’s man who Bull said would contact him. Now he would have to begin feeding some

kind of information to the Tammany Hall bunch. He spent the evening in the flat writing out the least damaging information about the military situation and the leaders as he knew it, hoping to satisfy Joe.

He had attempted to contact Rachel many times since his return with no luck. He and Sam were going to the club tonight and he hoped she would be there. His desire for her had only deepened he had to be with her. On the way to the club Sam kidded him,

“Anxious to see if Rachel will be there? I don’t blame you she’s a sexy thing. If you don’t see her tonight I know where she’ll be on Saturday night. “

“Where might that be ?”

“At a big political party. I’ve been invited and I snagged an invitation for you too. Don’t ever say Sam let you down.”

He thanked him and Sam brushed it off as usual.

At the club they had a drink at the bar and watched the crowded dance floor. Rachel was nowhere in sight. Sam talked Mike into playing poker. After several hours they decided to leave the table. Mike was ahead a few hundred and Sam had lost nearly a thousand. The loss didn’t seem to bother him. They decided to have another drink at the club before heading for the flat.

As they entered the bar Mike saw Rachel at a table with two men. From the bar he caught her eye. She excused herself and came over to them,

“Good evening you two. Have you been playing with the ladies ?”

Mike replied, “No, only some poker. I’ve been trying to reach you ever since I returned from Portsmouth.”

“I come and go. Actually I haven’t been home for a week. Try again.”

She started to walk away. He touched her arm,

“Wait a minute. I want to see you again.”

“Maybe soon. Keep ringing my flat.”

She continued her walk back to the table. Mike was numb. Sam saw the look,

“I told you she’s a free spirit. She won’t be pinned down by anyone. Take it easy. Play the field like me.”

Kenneth Barnes was prompt for their lunch date. He was a stranger to Mike. He said to Barnes,

“How’s Joe doing these days ?”

“Last time I saw him okay, it was two weeks ago. I’m an attorney too. My office is here in London. I take care of Joe’s legal business over here. I get back to New York once a month. I travel on a military pass.”

After some general talk Barnes said,
“Joe wants you to know I’ll be your contact.”
It was an obvious lead for Mike. In an hour he had told Barnes some of the scuttlebutt about ranking army officers in the European Theatre regarding their personal lives and about officers' cliques in SHAEF.

When he had finished Barnes looked dissatisfied,
“Is that all? Surely in your position on the SHAEF staff you know more than that.”
Telling about SHAEF could only help the war effort by getting rid of the incompetent. Then too, I owe Joe a lot. Without him there wouldn’t have been an opportunity to become a successful investment banker. Rachel’s philosophy about business being business crossed his mind. What would it hurt to cooperate? At the office Mike took Sevvv aside,

“You mentioned doing some watching for me on the ride up from Portsmouth. If you’re willing to help me I’d be interested in anything you learn about the officers here. You know scuttlebutt. Well hell I’m no fink but I thought about your advice to protect myself from military politics. Any corruption you hear about would be valuable too.”

“I get the picture major. I’m glad you’re taking my advice. I’ll pass on to you anything I pick. up.”

Chapter Tweny Three Sevvv was a hard case. He genuinely liked and trusted Mike. He made a very dangerous enemy. He had an animal cunning about him coming from his background. Sevvv's father had been a drunken itinerant farm worker. He followed the harvest season every year from the south to the Canadian border. His mother had died when he was ten years old. His life became hard after his mother's death. His father didn't care about his son one way or the other. He learned to steal money from his father when he passed out from drinking so he could eat. He became a well known lone hunter in the Dakotas. Farmers were happy to pay him to rid their land of the predators endangering their livestock When Sevvv was drafted into the army they saw his potential as a scout. He was a crack shot, lived like an animal outdoors and had a hunter's keen instincts. His assignment in England was only temporary. Army doctors had insisted on a year's convalescence for him because of the injures he had sustained in Italy. As a scout he ranged far behind the German lines gathering information on troop strengths and movements. During the Anzio stalemate he had been wounded several times as well escaping from German prison camps three times. On his final return to the allied lines he had come in with infected wounds and a bad case

of malnutrition. Despite these experiences Sevvv was waiting impatiently to return to combat.

On Saturday night Sam and Mike attended the party given by the politicians. It was a large affair held at an estate outside of London. There were easily five hundred invited guests at the ball all wearing their finest clothes and happy to have the rare opportunity to attend a grand ball. Occasionally even at this distance, there was the faint sound of a rocket exploding somewhere in the London area.

Mike was beginning to fit in with the club members and enjoying the evening. The king and queen made a brief appearance with Lord and Lady Churchill. It was nearly an hour before he located and danced with Rachel. She was decked out in a low cut white satin gown. For contrast she was wearing a ruby necklace set with diamonds and matching ruby ear rings. Her black hair was swept up away from her neck in a hair do currently in vogue. It was held in place with a diamond studded clasp. She was breathtaking.

Tonight she was warm and responsive. As they danced she said, "My, you are handsome tonight. I've seen a number of ladies looking your way."

“I’m not interested in them Rachel you are the one I’m crazy about. You’re so beautiful tonight.”

“I do fancy you Mike. I shouldn’t damn it.”

His hopes rose in the warmth of her gaze. At the end of the dance she said,

“I must go for a little while. I have to spend some time with my escort the little man Mr. Parker, you met him at the club. I won’t be long please stay. I’ll be back to you.”

A little after midnight Mike became tired of waiting for Rachel to return. He decided to leave. As he headed for the reception room to retrieve his hat, Rachel caught up to him,

“Going somewhere?”

“I had given up on you.”

“Mr. Parker took some persuasion. I finally convinced him to play poker with his cronies in the game room. He didn’t want to leave me unescorted. I assured him I would be fine. Take me to your flat Mike.”

On the way to the flat he asked her,

“Why did you brush me off at the club the other night? It hurt like hell.”

“I was with someone that night. When I’m being escorted I don’t pay any attention to anyone else. Business, remember?”

“Who were those two men you were with?”

“Don’t ask such questions Mike. The less you know about my affairs the happier you will be.”

The remark hit him like a slap in the face. He said to her, “I can’t help being upset. You overwhelm me.”

“Look,” she said wearily, “my business is none of yours. Let’s enjoy each other Mike I have no intention of changing my life to suit you.”

Seeing the effect her harsh words had on him she softened,

“Our time is right now. We have a hunger for each other. Live it for the moment luv.”

At the flat they made urgent love. Mike knew her passion was real. He could feel it. Their hunger exploded into wild, driving lovemaking. This time he was prepared when Rachel screamed and fainted at the peak of her sexual arousal. To his surprise, he learned she had a humorous, playful side to her nature. With the radiance of their lovemaking on her face she cavorted with him like a young girl. She teased him, tickled him and wrestled him around in the bed. Being so street wise it was easy to forget Rachel was only twenty years old. They became hungry and Rachel went into the kitchen to prepare a large breakfast. She rummaged through the cupboards and refrigerator excited to find food items nearly impossible for English citizens to obtain,

“You yanks are so lucky to have such lovely food.
Oh, wonderful, you have bangers.”

"What are bangers ?" he called out .

“Don’t you know what’s in your own fridge?”

“Sam’s corporal was sent out to stock the kitchen.”

“Well, bangers are sausages. Never tried some?”

“Not yet, I have only been in England a few months.”

Rachel showed another side of herself when she brought in a large tray to the bedroom full of breakfast treats. Settled in and eating ravenously Rachel said,

“You never mention your war experiences.”

“Not much to tell. I had several years of misery like so many others.”

“I asked Sam about you. He told me a lot. He said you were a much decorated officer and you were badly wounded in Sicily. I’ve seen your back you know.”

He grinned at her,

“I know and a lot more.”

Rachel laughed, “I meant your scars are terrible. Is there much pain?”

“Only when I make love to you.”

“We’ll have to stop then.”

He grabbed her and embraced her, “Not a chance.”

They spent the entire day at the flat. Fortunately there was only an occasional far off explosion of a German rocket exploding somewhere in London. Mike couldn't remember a time when he was happier than he was with Rachel. He learned a great deal about her that day. She could be playful, moody and certainly cool in her outlook toward life but she was always spontaneous. Late in the afternoon after they had made slow love he said to her,

"I'm absolutely in love with you Rachel. Can't we make this permanent "

Rachel looked at him seriously,

"No, Mike we can't. It's wartime which is a completely different thing than ordinary life. There's the urgency of the moment it happens to most people caught up in the danger. My life is my own. This kind of wonderful wild insatiability for each other isn't meant to last. It just happens and one day it's gone. Enjoy it. You will always remember this."

Mike tried again,

"Can't we be together at least once a week?"

"I've thought about it. You arouse me sexually. I want more of you. Money doesn't seem right between us so I've come up with a solution. See what you think. I would like you to give me things that are scarce in England I know

you can obtain for me. Nylons, cigarettes, chocolate, coffee and something I'm dying to have."

"Such as?"

"All kinds of American lingerie, you know, panties, bras, nightgowns, slips, robes, oh, all of it! In every color and style. It would be grand!"

He thought about Barnes. He could contact him before he left for his monthly trip to New York,

"Give me a list of your sizes, the items you want and how many of each."

Rachel's face glowed with excitement,

"You mean it Mike? Really?"

"Next week I can send an order with a man I know who will be flying to New York. He'll be back by the weekend."

"In a week? I can have those things in a week? Oh Mike! I can hardly wait!"

On Monday Mike contacted Barnes. When he was finished giving him his latest report on the officers in SHAEF he asked him to do him a favor. A little embarrassed he handed the list to him. Barnes read the list then he smirked,

"This looks like an inventory for a chorus line. You don't have one do you?"

A little annoyed Mike replied,

“No only one friend.”

“You take care of your friend very well.”

“Look, can you do this for me?”

“Sure, and don’t worry about the money to pay for these lady things. After what you passed on about the drunken general Joe and I will pay the bill.”

A talk with Sam revealed food and other items Rachel wanted could be obtained through him.

“How come you know where to get this stuff?”

“I’m well connected. Do you think you’re the only GI who is being pressed for these things? English girls have been deprived of the little luxuries for a long time. GIs are very attractive to them given their access to the good stuff. Rachel has had most of these things all along but I’m glad you’re making some headway with her. I want you to have fun Mike” he smiled at him, “we’ll spoil your sex kitten rotten.”

Mike had to laugh at him,

“You really are a jaded man but a good buddy.”

Chapter Twenty Four

In the middle of September Hitler suddenly attacked the allies on all fronts in Europe. There was mass confusion on the battlefronts in Russia as a million people streamed in endless waves toward them. Simultaneously a million people advanced on the allied positions in Italy. No one had ever seen such a moving mass of humanity.

At first, the astonished Allied armies believed they were being attacked by an entire German army in a mass assault. In Russia and Italy, the Allied forces fired furiously with everything they had in an attempt to stem the human waves threatening to engulf them. Their fire power couldn't kill them fast enough and their lines were inundated with the mass of humanity.

In the confusion the Nazis slashed large holes in the Russian Front and threatened to flank them. Ultimately they drove a wedge into the Russian Front a hundred miles deep. The Russians were forced to retreat rapidly to avoid having their armies surrounded by the Germans and destroyed piecemeal.

In Italy the Allies were driven back to Rome leaving the forces in Greece with their flank badly exposed. Here, the

retreat ended only a few miles short of Athens. Within two weeks the allies were fighting a defensive battle for their very existence. Losses of vital supplies from these attacks placed them in a dangerous position. They were short of everything an army needs to be an effective fighting force.

Desperate calls for supplies went out to SHAEF. The Nazis had anticipated the increase in convoys headed for the ports in Europe to save the allied armies. Every shipping lane was guarded by large fleets of the Mark series of super submarines. A gigantic naval battle began in the North Atlantic to protect the badly-needed supply ships from being sunk by the U-boats. For their part the Nazis were attempting to end the war by choking off the flow of vital supplies the Allied armies needed to fight a war.

In April 1944 the first squadron of the new Messerschmitt jet fighters were ready for use in combat. An elite Luftwaffe unit of fighter pilots with combat experience had been commissioned to begin training pilots to fly them. They also learned how to use the increased firepower. Armaments on the jet included four 30 mm cannons, 24 rockets and a 500-pound bomb. It was superior in every way to a propeller-driven airplane. Maximum speed was 600 MPH with its two jet engines. Nearly 200 MPH faster

than a propeller-driven fighter aircraft. It could reach 28,000 feet as opposed to 20,000 feet for other planes.

Now the first squadron of the deadly jets became operational in September 1944. The training course for the pilots who would be taught next had been perfected. Since everything was now all smoothed out the new pilots could be ready to fight in a fraction of the time the first squadron had taken. Hundreds of pilots were undergoing training at air bases all over Europe.

German jet fighter planes began to appear over France to attack the Allied bombers. All of the overpowering fire power of the Messerschmidts was used to destroy dozens of bombers in the first flight they encountered. One German pilot was reported to have shot down twenty bombers in one day. Allied fighters escorting the bombers were no match for the jets either in speed or in armaments. Allied planes were ineffective and they also suffered heavy losses.

On the ground the Allies figured out what Hitler had done to begin the offensive. To their horror they learned that millions of slave laborers had been herded like cattle in front of the German army. In the fighting and confusion a large percentage of these unfortunate humans had been killed. It was an inhuman act of such a magnitude people's minds couldn't totally grasp it.

This cold slaughter of people served the Nazis' purpose well. Their offensive was devastatingly effective.

News of the terrible defeat in Europe rocked the free world. All hopes for a quick end to the war faded from people's minds. Doubts about the leadership were being openly expressed everywhere. Fear was eroding away the confidence of the people. in the allied countries.

As if to celebrate the Nazi rocket attacks on England doubled for a while. Living underground was becoming more natural to the British than the short periods of time they spent outdoors. Something had to be done to restore confidence. But there didn't seem to be a quick way to show the free world the war would ultimately end in an allied victory.

England was being stripped of all available tanks and artillery to replace the losses from the German offensive. Mike's section abandoned their planning work to help move troops to embarkation areas. He went back to his old post in Portsmouth working long hours again. Charlie invited him to stay in his room at Mrs. Willoughby's. Mike accepted the offer but he wasn't there much except to sleep. By early October, England was nearly cleared of troops and equipment sent to reinforce the European campaign.

Mike and Charlie met at the officers club one evening.

“This is the first night in nearly three weeks that I’ve been here,” Charlie remarked. “What a time! This is as bad as the Normandy invasion. June seems to be about a thousand years ago. We have only a two months’ supply of rations in the warehouses for our personnel here in England, almost no tanks and very little artillery. The Germans could walk into England right now.”

“They can’t. Their armies are all tied up in Europe. We can be thankful the war is staying there.”

“What the hell is going to happen Mike?” asked Charlie, looking very serious. “I can’t figure this deal out. We got caught real good.”

"We don't fight without humane rules of conduct the way the Nazis do. They thought nothing of herding two million people in front of them to be slaughtered. In their eyes the ends justify the means. It's frightening. I had a feeling the invasion of Greece was pulled off too easily. They were laying a trap for us."

“Their Panzer divisions had been moved up and then hidden in the mountains behind the front lines in Greece. Our troops had to abandon their positions or the flank attack planned by the Germans would have pushed them into the sea. As it is now our troops in Greece are fighting

hard to hold on to Athens.”

“This disaster has caused a change in our military tactics. At a top level logistics meeting we were told ETO would have first priority for supplies for a while to ensure our hold in Europe. The Pacific theatre will have to hold its own and stop its island offensives for now. I wouldn't want to be the President for anything at this moment. Everyone's after his hide.”

Mike got up to leave, “I have to pack Charlie. I've been ordered back to London. Thanks for letting me camp out in your room.”

In London the sound of intermittent booming explosions from Nazi rockets was heard day and night. Air alerts were heard almost on a continuous basis. SHAEF was now quartered completely in underground facilities. Mike's section was in a bunker forty feet underground. It was relatively quiet except for rockets exploding a few blocks away. Their work was never interrupted by air alerts.

When Mike arrived at the flat he rented with Sam he could hardly believe the number of boxes stacked in his bedroom. There were crates everywhere. Sam came in and began an inventory.

“On your right are my contributions to the fair Rachel, On your left what looks to be the entire lingerie department of some store in New York was sent here by Mr. Barnes. You keep this up and you’ll never get rid of her. She called this morning bless her greedy little heart to inquire if her treasures had arrived yet. I told her they had arrived from New York and she’s on her way over here. Ah, true love!” Then he laughed and handed Mike a drink.

When Rachel took in the sight in Mike’s bedroom she gave a cry of delight and began to pry open boxes. There was more lingerie than he had ordered. Joe was obviously showing his appreciation. Rachel oohed and aahed as she opened each box. It did indeed look as if a department store had been looted.

“Oh Mike, I’ve never seen such beautiful things and so many! You must have good friends to do this for you.”

“Joe returned a favor,” Mike replied.

“Who’s Joe?” she asked as she continued to inspect her largesse.

"Joe's a lawyer who helped me start my investment firm and he has political clout."

“Now that’s more like it, Mike! You stay with a powerful man like him and you’ll go somewhere.”

Mike nodded his head in agreement.

To celebrate they went to the club where Sam was a member. At Mike's earlier invitation Charlie Morgan joined them for dinner. Sam took Charlie in tow as birds of a feather they hit it off immediately. After some dancing Mike and Rachel joined them at the bar. A group of club members who were actors now entered the bar along with some friends they had invited to join them. Included in the group was a sensational looking blonde.

"Is the shapely miss in the middle a dancer?"

Charlie asked Sam.

"Yes she is. How did you guess?"

"A friend of mine, Greg Turner described her. His description of her was perfect. It couldn't be anyone else."

"Come on, Charlie, I'll introduce you to her."

Part of the group including the dancer was now seated at a table. Sam led Charlie over to them. After the introduction Charlie moved right in on her. At first Veronica was surprised and a little annoyed. But Charlie was charming when he needed to be and his wit kept her laughing. He was a great bear of a man and reminded her of her own father whom she had always adored. Within an

hour Charlie had cut her loose from the group and found a table where they could sit by themselves.

One of the actors said to Sam,

“Your Yank friend knows what he wants and he goes all out to get it.”

“I wouldn’t have thought Veronica would be attracted to him.”

“You have missed the point Sam. Earlier before you came over to see us she found out from another dancer who met him at a popular pub, he’s a top supply officer. Hence, the love at first sight thing.”

“I’m obviously in the wrong section of SHAEF,”

Chapter Twenty Five

In America Joe Stanton wasted no time using the inside information Mike and some others stationed in Europe had passed on to him. Congressman “Bull” Bullock invited party leaders to a dinner at his home in Washington DC. It was a private affair. Without exception they accepted his invitation wondering what Bull had in mind. The intimate nature of the affair told them something was up.

Bull loved his role as host to some of the most powerful politicians in Congress. Things were looking up for him. His status in Washington was about to increase significantly. It excited him to think about the bomb he was about to drop on the movers and shakers in his political party. He had always been a lowly congressman to these boys but they would soon change their minds about him. Bull chuckled to himself as he waited for his guests to arrive.

Talk at dinner ranged from the war to the upcoming presidential election. This was an election year. Roosevelt would easily be elected to another term; they were all confident on this point. It was a well-known fact that the American people were afraid of any change in their government in the middle of a war, and the party had

spared no effort to circulate this theme constantly. They had every reason to be sure of themselves.

In the library after dinner, a guest said to Bull,

“It was a hell of a meal, but you didn’t invite us here just to feed us. What’s the story?”

Bull had to exert all of his willpower to suppress his excitement.

“I have disturbing news to share with you guys. Information has been given to me about the conduct of some of our commanding officers. It was passed on to me by some loyal party members serving their country in Europe and the Pacific. To save time I have prepared a confidential report for you to study. It’s not long. I thought you could read it here, and then we can talk about it.”

Bull went to his desk and brought out the bound reports. He sat back while they read savoring an after-dinner brandy and a cigar. Stanton could have used any number of people to handle this deal but he chose me, he thought to himself. I’m making my mark. It was quiet in the room for almost an hour as his guests digested the contents of the report.

When everyone was finished reading the most prominent politician in the group said,

“I don’t know how you gathered this information or who else knows it. If it’s all true and it got out, there would be a major upheaval in the government. How did you find out about a major general selling army carbines in exchange for custom-made rifles for his personal use?”

Bull shrugged and shook his head.

“I can’t reveal any of my sources. There are many people involved who are willing to do the right thing.”

“The drunken general was a shock. I know him. To my knowledge, no one in Washington knows the story or I would have heard about it. Then there are six more incidents at the top level which are outright corruption. This stuff is dynamite.”

The room began to buzz with talk among his guests. He held back a smile. When Bull was asked who else knew this information, he replied,

“Only us here and of course my group.”

They all knew the group was the Tammany Hall bunch. These party leaders groaned inwardly wondering what this was going to cost them in terms of power sharing and patronage. Speaking for the group, the top leader bluntly asked him, “

"What do you guys want to keep the lid on this?"

Smiling Bull replied,

“Hey, we’re in the same political party. We’ve always been team players. You know we support Roosevelt all the way. Why he’s our native son from New York!”

“Granted but let’s cut the crap. What do you guys want for playing ball with us?”

Suddenly Bull had a hard look in his eyes.

“We don’t want the party split anymore than you do. But we do want a larger role in the Administration.”

“Like what, Bull? We appreciate your loyalty and the digging you guys have done here. I’m sure we can come to terms.”

He rattled off a number of positions on committees in Congress and several Pentagon appointments for certain military officers. He dangled the bait but held back the bomb shell.

“Is that it? We’ll have to discuss it of course, but most of your, uh, requests seem reasonable.”

Then Bull made his move.

“There is one more thing we want out of our concern for the country. When Roosevelt is reelected here is the man who will be named Secretary of State.”

He handed the leader a slip of paper.

Looking at the name all of his polite manners evaporated. He replied sharply,

“You can’t do this! You guys can’t make administration policy through the back door this way! Our administration team is already selected. Tell Stanton from me the answer is no!”

Bull looked at him calmly, then he replied,

“Since you’ve decided to take the gloves off, I guess I’ll do the same. First of all, this is only the first report of dirty dealings in the military. We have more garbage on the Pacific theatre of operations that I didn’t even bring with me. We’ll just hold on to the Pacific report for a while. Now you guys have been real happy to have our backing to keep the party in the White House for so long. But over the years your patronage to us has been gradually cut down. We don’t like it.”

“Either accept these terms all the way—our demands are not negotiable—or we split the party and Roosevelt becomes the lamest duck you ever saw in the White House. Then we’ll take over with a coalition of Republicans and you’ll be out on your asses. Think about it.”

The leader thought about it.

“We’ll discuss this,” he said. “Give me two days.”

“I’ll give you until tomorrow night,” Bull replied.

After the group had left his house, Bull sat in his chair for about fifteen minutes sipping his drink. When he was sure they were gone he threw back his head and roared with the laughter he had been suppressing for over an hour. He had won. Bull telephoned Stanton to make his report. Joe said,

“This is only the beginning Bull. We have a number of new informants in place now in every combat area. In two years we’ll be the power in Washington.”

Sevvy stopped by Mike’s desk one afternoon.

“Major, can I see you at your flat after work? I have some things to tell you in private.”

“Sure,” Mike replied, wondering what Sevvy had learned about SHAEF.

Later at the flat Sevvy told him what he had found out.

“I was right about officer cliques in our section but it was no surprise.”

He named the officers in each group, three in all, and how they operated to further their own ends.

“In this bunch the only one you have to be careful of is Lieutenant Colonel Carson. He wants to replace you with

one of his own bunch. So far Colonel Smith has blocked Carson's request because of his respect for your abilities. Be careful around him and watch what you say."

Annoyed, Mike asked,

"Who the hell are we fighting SHAEF or the Germans?"

He hated the idea of being forced to defend himself against inflated egos and the ambitions spawned by fools.

Sevvy went on with his report.

"You asked me to keep an eye out for dishonest stuff. A corporal I know real well from Africa is working light duty in the central supply division here in London on account of injuries, you know, like me. He's doing me a favor by keeping his eyes open for stealing in supply. He is on to something. He says it might be a big operation."

Mike kept his excitement about this development to himself and nodded to Sevvy to continue.

"There's an organized ring of enlisted men working together to steal supplies. They sell the supplies for high prices on the black market. There's the usual scarce stuff the British will pay big money for, like coffee, sugar, chocolate and so on. But the most serious thefts are selling Penicillin on the black market. The miracle drug, as the British call it. It's almost impossible for them to buy."

Mike was stunned to hear about the theft of a drug that was so vital on the battlefields to prevent wounds from becoming badly infected. There were hardly ideal conditions in surgical units close to the front lines. If Penicillin became scarce because of major thefts of the drug, many GIs could die for the lack of it.

“Those bastards! Let’s blow the whistle right now on this thieving scum. Can your corporal friend identify them all for the Provost Martial office?”

Sevvy shook his head.

“This group is good at covering up. They falsify records and move stuff around whenever there’s a surprise inspection of supplies. Sure we could get three or four enlisted men but this thing is much bigger than those guys. An organization like this has to be run by officers in the right positions to oversee the operation. My buddy knows one of the officers, a Captain Brown. Proving anything at this point would be impossible. We need to catch them with the stolen stuff and trace the organization to its bosses. It will take some time.”

“Great work Sevvy. Tell your buddy to keep on watching. I’m going to talk to Charlie Morgan about this deal. He’s a big wheel in supply.”

Around nine o'clock Charlie arrived at the flat in answer to Mike's call,

"Thanks for calling me, Mike," he said. "I needed to see you anyway about something that's very important to me. You know I've been seeing the dancer Veronica. It may seem bizarre to you, but I'm crazy about her."

Mike was genuinely surprised. He knew about Charlie's peccadilloes with some of the girls in Portsmouth. They were the typical wartime sexual encounters. To hear him professing serious feelings for a woman was a different matter altogether.

Charlie was clearly uncomfortable sharing the details of his love life with Mike. For one thing there was a twenty-five-year gap between their ages. Veronica was barely nineteen while Charlie was forty-four. He forced himself to continue.

"We want to live together. You know I'm not a rich guy and I have my family in Ohio to support. I have to take care of Veronica's theatrical agent too so he doesn't lose any money since she won't be dancing. Plus the flat we want to rent is expensive. I could swing it with help."

"What do you have in mind?"

"I own some stock in the manufacturing company I worked for in the States. You can hold the stock as

collateral if you would loan me some money.”

“How much?”

Charlie named a figure. Mike stared in disbelief at his friend, and asked,

“Is she really worth that much to you?”

“I know this whole thing must seem insane to you but I have never been happier. It’s worth everything to me. Hell, anything can happen in this war. I want to live now while I can. You bet it’s worth it to me.”

“I’ll lend you the money Charlie,” said Mike, “but please keep your stock for your family. I know you’ll pay me back and I’m in no hurry to be repaid. Pay me when you can even if it’s after the war is over. I wouldn’t have understood how you feel if I hadn’t met Rachel. I do now.”

“You’re right, we’re involved in an all-out war. We might as well live right now. Don’t get your pride up about the loan. This is a business deal between us and I’ll make up a note for you to sign. My friend Joe Stanton has a partner over here who set up a bank account for me here in London so I can draw on my funds. I’ll get you a check.”

Charlie was very relieved, he simply said,

“Thank you Mike. I’ll pay you back.”

Mike changed the subject to his reason for inviting Charlie to his flat.

“I have some serious matters to discuss about black market dealings involving military supplies here in London. I need some information from you about your supply section.”

He proceeded to tell Charlie everything Sevvv had dug up about supply thefts. He concluded by telling him there wasn’t sufficient proof to start arresting anyone.

Then he asked him about Captain Brown.

“I don’t know him Mike. He was assigned to my section a couple of months ago, after Normandy. His personnel file is impressive enough about his experience in logistics in the army. His military record appears to be clean. I’ve been too busy to get to know him. Everything I know about him is from the reports on his job performance made by his superiors. No blots on his escutcheon.”

Mike looked intently at Charlie as he said,

“You know how I feel about our combat soldiers. If this Brown is a ring leader selling Penicillin meant for use in combat areas, I swear I’ll be tempted to kill him myself.”

Charlie was shocked at the intensity he saw in Mike’s face,

“If there’s any shortage of medical supplies, I’ll find out

about it fast. As far as I know there haven't been any reports of shortages in the combat areas. But don't worry I'll start my own sniffing around."

"Will you call in the Provost Martial to begin a thorough audit of supplies?" Mike asked him.

"Too early to do that. Like you said yourself taking action too quickly lets the big fish get away. I'll handle it."

"Thanks Charlie. Keep me posted."

Chapter Twenty Six

When Rachel told Mike she was leaving London for a month's holiday it was as if she had dropped a bombshell on him.

“What do you mean you’re going away for a month?” he exclaimed.

She looked at him coolly.

“I spoke in perfect English. I’m leaving tomorrow on holiday with one of my political friends. He’s invited me to his country home and I’m looking forward to leaving London for a while. I need some quiet in the country away from those damned bombs dropping on us every day. You won’t die without me. We’ve been over this many times.

I will not be controlled by you.”

He was devastated and angry. She became impatient.

“I don’t like you when you’re angry. I’m going and that is that.”

She walked out of the club leaving him frustrated. About the time I think I have her figured out she does something else, he thought to himself. He wished he could drop her, but he couldn’t. Sam and Charlie tried to talk him into dating some of the girls at the club but he refused. He spent

long hours working at his office until he was exhausted then going to the flat to sleep.

It took Sam a week to persuade Mike to take a break and come to the club with him for a night out. They sat in the lounge listening to the featured singer. A few drinks loosened him up a little and he began to enjoy himself. Sam left to play some poker. He decided to stay in the lounge.

Suddenly Barbara sat down next to him.

“You and I seem to be destined to bump into each other in bars,” she remarked. “How are you Mike?”

His mood changed when he saw who it was.

“Well, if it isn’t the Donut Girl! Where’s your colonel tonight?”

Barbara looked at him and sighed.

“You have a streak in you that’s pure jerk, did you know that? I’m not with the colonel tonight although it is none of your business. I don’t want to fight with you. I merely stopped by to say hello to you.”

“Don’t mind me, Barbara,” he said by way of an apology. “Have a drink with me.”

“I don’t mind you and yes I’ll have a drink with you.”

“Do you like to dance?”

“Why sure! Let’s go!”

Mike was a little unsteady on the dance floor. She laughed and helped him regain his balance. As they were dancing she commented,

“I saw you with a stunning girl here at the club the other night. Is she more than a casual date?”

“You mean Rachel. Yeah, I’m crazy about her.”

Then he stopped talking.

Barbara was curious about his reaction to her mention of Rachel.

“Where is she now if you’re so head over heels?”

“Oh she’s gone. So I have to wait to be summoned by the high priestess.”

“Why does she upset you so much?”

“She just up and took off on me for a holiday in the country for a month. I had no say in the matter. She does what she damn well pleases.”

Barbara studied him while they were dancing,

“She sounds like an independent young lady.”

“She’s a free spirit for sure and she’s young, but she’s no lady.”

“That’s not a nice thing to say, Mike! If you care for her then how can you make derogatory remarks about her?”

“She’d tell you herself that she’s no lady.

Rachel says and does whatever she wants.”

“And you don’t like it. She sounds like a girl who is more than a match for you Mike,” Barbara said with a smirk.

He was annoyed about her cool support for Rachel.

“I guess you women are all alike. You all seem to stick together no matter what.”

“Aw, you poor man!” she replied cheerfully.

He was becoming angry and his emotions were being fueled by alcohol.

“I’m going home now. See you sometime, Barbara.”

“Okay Mike,” she replied lightly as if nothing was wrong.

“Be very careful going home by yourself.”

Mike grunted and left.

General Marshall and the joint chiefs of staff had not been idle during the military reversals the allies had been suffering in Europe. They were planning to launch a late fall offensive in coordination with the Russian army. From two different battlefronts the armies would squeeze the Nazis like a giant fist.

In order to minimize the chances of impossible weather paralyzing an army the first week of November had been chosen. With any luck the weather would continue to hold

its early fall conditions for a month or so. They were maneuvering to apply enough pressure on the Wehrmacht to create a breakthrough on either one of the battlefronts. If they were successful it would result in a major retreat by the Nazis. With some breathing room the allies would then have time to build up their forces for a final push in the spring of 1945.

All of the ultramodern weaponry now in use by the Nazis was having a major impact. Mark series submarine fleets were causing serious supply losses in the North Atlantic. U-boats were again sinking merchant marine vessels as they sailed out of the Eastern seaboard ports.

V-1 and V-2 rockets were destroying the cities in England. It is estimated that the Nazis destroyed one million homes in the city of London alone. Other British cities were reporting proportionately similar destruction to their homes. In 1943, aircraft losses had been two to one in favor of the allies. Now, the losses were three to one in favor of the Luftwaffe.

Its jet fighters were nearly invincible because of their speed and climbing abilities. The Allies had hoped the Luftwaffe would have insufficient numbers of trained pilots to man the fourteen hundred or so jet fighters being

produced monthly at the underground plant at Karla. So far, they didn't seem to have any problem with manpower. Their long term planning for training pilots quickly was paying off in a big way.

With daytime bombing abandoned due to the devastating fire power and air superiority of jet fighters there was no effective reconnaissance of the Nazis' military movements. Army Intelligence had not been able to decipher the new Wehrmacht military code since Ultra became obsolete. It left the allies without an effective method to spy on the German High Command and their plans.

Germany had a veil of secrecy behind which to operate freely without any threat of having its plans discovered. Successful land operations were now the allies' only effective way to defeat the Nazis. Gaining territory wasn't the objective for the allied armies. Rapid offensives to destroy Nazi armies and war production were the most desperate and vital goals. As one general said,

“We'll either break their backs or they'll break ours.”

PART II:

FORTRESS EUROPE

Chapter Twenty Seven

On November 2, 1944 the Allied attack on two fronts opened with a tremendous artillery barrage. On the Eastern battlefield the Russians concentrated their attack on three key points. On the Italian front, American and British forces launched two flanking movements.

Fighting was stubborn and bitter on both sides of the conflict. At one of the three attack points the Russians made a breakthrough. Then the British completed a successful flanking attack and drove the Wehrmacht into a retreat to avoid a British envelopment of the rear of their army. By the fourth day of fighting the Germans were beginning to retreat on both fronts. The Allies pushed their advantage hard.

This was the kind of success the free world had been waiting for on the European front. It was a shot in the arm for the allies and it took some public pressure off both the American and British governments. Momentarily at least,

the political opportunists were left without any ready ammunition to advance their own ends. These same political critics were already proclaiming it was too early in the fall campaign to be claiming a major victory. However within another week the Germans had been pushed back to within ten miles of the defenses they had been constructing since June.

Information about one area of the war was being kept from the public. Shipping losses being inflicted by the fleets of Nazi super submarines was being withheld. Not much about the North Atlantic conflict made its way into the newspapers. No war correspondents were allowed to sail with the convoys. Merchant marine sailors and the navy were silent about the terrible cost in lives and ships.

No one likes to speak to outsiders about constantly losing in a war. But on American shores ships were being sunk at night brilliantly outlined by flames against a black skyline. In the morning corpses would wash ashore. Those incidents did make headlines.

Shipyards in America were busy around the clock building new anti-submarine vessels with speeds to match the quick super-subs. These new defensive ships were a top

naval priority and the plan was to triple its anti-submarine fleet within one year. New sensing equipment was also being devised to track and destroy German U-boats.

Time was the enemy here. Until the new counter-measures were operational the Nazis subs would continue to have a field day in the North Atlantic shipping lanes. This grave situation existed at precisely the time when the allies needed to be stockpiling supplies for a spring offensive.

Chapter Thirty Eight

Mike met with Joe's man Barnes for lunch at his flat to keep their conference private and confidential. Barnes said,

“Your information and our reports from some other sources accomplished a great deal politically for our bunch. Those military scandals being suppressed here in England by SHAEF were instrumental in allowing us to name one of our own men as Secretary of State in Roosevelt's cabinet. Your old friend Bull will be the new Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. There are many more appointments to be gained by having the party leadership. You get the picture. What's new Mike?”

Barnes listened closely as he told him about a scandal in the Central Supply Command. Charlie had brought the pretty young dancer to a party he and Sam had hosted at their flat one night. He'd proceeded to get exceedingly drunk and then told Mike about the frantic search underway to find five hundred jeeps which were mysteriously unaccounted for. Supply records showed they had been landed from ships at English ports.

Charlie laughed and said,

“Five hundred missing vehicles have the top three

logistics generals sweating. So far the Provost Martial's office hasn't been informed. There would be hell to pay if those snoops found out about it. I figure some clever non-coms developed a system to change the serial numbers on the jeeps and then sold them to GIs for their personal use.

Those jeeps are probably right under our noses but with altered serial numbers we'll never find them. There are thousands of jeeps running around England!"

He had roared with laughter and went on to add,

"Even better than that is the hundred tanks unaccounted for. Who would want a tank?"

Barnes was extremely pleased.

"Great piece of information, Mike! Who told you about the jeeps?"

"I can't tell you. He's a close friend of mine. I don't want to get him into trouble for failing to report what he knows to the Provost Martial. He doesn't deserve it and I consider him to be an excellent officer."

"Okay Mike, I understand. What we'll do with this information is to leak it to our man in the Provost Martial's office here in London. Then we'll tell him to investigate the matter himself. This bit of news will make some important people squirm." He paused and changed the subject, "Can I

bring back anything for you from the States?”

Mike was a little uncomfortable but he asked him to purchase the finest mink coat he could find. He gave him Rachel's coat size.

“Sure, Mike,” Barnes agreed with a grin. “I will have to meet this girl sometime. She must be something special for you to buy her the luxury clothes only the richest people would purchase.”

“She's worth it to me,” he replied defensively. She's worth anything to me he thought to himself. Purchasing a mink coat had been Rachel's idea though. Using her powers of persuasion she had kept at him about the cold damp English winters and didn't he want her to be warm? When she put it that way how could he say no?

There was no lull in the Fall offensive in Europe. Maximum pressure continued to be applied by the allies. Air support was being maintained from makeshift bases constructed as close to the battlefronts as possible to support the army on the ground. There were daily air battles with the Luftwaffe. Although Allied aircraft losses were heavy the fighters and bombers were having some success in disrupting German supply lines and troop movements.

During the fourth week of November the Wehrmacht began to pull back on both fronts to the new defense lines which had been constructed over a five-month period. The allies knew very little about the configuration of the defenses. Most of the construction seemed to take place underground.

What was visible was a labyrinth of concrete anti-personnel fortifications and anti-tank obstacles extending across the fronts in Russia and Italy. This network was much larger and more elaborate than the famous fortified Siegfried line on the border with France.

The Allies advanced cautiously toward the defenses. They halted about a mile away from the obstacles. There was no cover anywhere for the infantry within five miles of the defenses. During their construction, they had watched the Germans cut down every tree leaving a naked barren five-mile stretch of land.

Named the Valkyrie line it wasn't like anything the military commanders had seen before. What information they did have indicated that the Germans had poured millions of tons of concrete yet there were no pillboxes or artillery bunkers to be seen. Planning an intelligent attack on the German positions was impossible. The allies knew neither the location of the enemy nor the nature of the

defenses they needed to destroy. Air reconnaissance couldn't enlighten them much.

From the air no German troops could be seen. Reports indicated except for a few truck convoys and some tank columns there was no activity around the defensive lines. The battlefronts became strangely quiet. Patrols were sent out but were ineffectual in providing any intelligence. It was an unsettling featureless massive fortification.

A joint conference of the Russian, British and American army commanders was convened to discuss tactical approaches. Pooling their intelligence reports only indicated that the Germans had disappeared into their defensive positions and didn't seem to be planning an offensive.

In the end, the consensus came down to probing the lines in depth with tanks spearheading the infantry. There would also be all-out artillery and air support. It was clear they had to force their way into the defensive lines in order to force the Germans to expose their positions. Attacking was the only way to learn how the defenses were designed.

Two days later the Allied attacks began. There was a heavy artillery barrage intended to force the enemy into their lines when the army attacked. Then the tanks rumbled

forward into the five-mile strip of barren ground. Behind the armor came the infantry. They advanced several miles into the area unopposed. So far there had been no German artillery response to the Allied advance. Slowly the allies advanced to within two miles of the Valkyrie line. As the advance continued more than half way to the concrete anti-tank obstacles all hell broke loose.

German artillery opened up with a tremendous barrage. Then Panther and Tiger tanks seemed to pop up out of the ground and attacked the allied armor. German infantry caught the allied infantry from two sides driving them deeper into the defenses. Now the columns were being slashed in half by flank attacks. Forward elements were cut off from behind and forced to advance further toward the German defenses.

They found themselves in a labyrinth of interconnecting paths and roads. Firing seemed to be coming from everywhere. It was difficult to spot German positions, which appeared to shift every few minutes. The allies were being cut to pieces and every move they made to extricate themselves from a hot spot put them into an equally difficult place.

The rear elements of the attacking force had now been cut off from the forward fighting units by the German flanking movements. They began to retreat but the last mile of the lines which had appeared to be barren before were now bristling with German tanks and infantry. Like the forward groups they found moves to evade the crossfire in which they were caught only put them in positions as hot as the ones they had just left.

Counter attacks by the allies to fight their way out of the Valkyrie line were met with walls of flame from concealed gas pipes. These devices were triggered by remote control. Although they wanted to retreat their way was blocked at every turn. It became a rout as the infantry broke and ran. Then allied tanks following in the tracks of German armor turned around to go back and were blown up by land mines even though they were on the exact path the enemy tanks had taken.

As remnants of the three attacking forces started to pull out of the defenses hundreds of small German tanks began to appear. These were the new Goliath robot tanks the Nazis had developed. Crews operating the remote controls of the robots were in concealment over one hundred yards away. They were designed to be tank killers.

One foot high and four feet long, each of them carried seventy-five kilos of explosives. Selecting their targets operators of the robots steered them under allied tanks. By remote control the explosives were detonated ripping the bottom out of the allied vehicles.

Tanks nearest the German defenses were blown up first, then robots were steered out for more targets. At first the Allies thought the tanks had been caught in a mine field. But then more Goliaths were sent further into the allied lines seeking out tanks to destroy. Now as tanks located nearer to the allied lines began to go up in explosions the robots roaming the field could be seen. The allied armies had heard about strange robot tank destroyers but most soldiers had believed it was more Nazi propaganda.

A grim game of cat and mouse began on the battlefield as allied tanks tried to avoid the Goliaths while the Germans steering the robots pursued them. When most of the allied tanks had outrun the robots moving at top speed artillery began to zero in on the Goliaths with some success. Next the German Panzers counterattacked as the Allied troops cleared the Valkyrie line. They delivered a punishing blow to the retreating allied forces. Then the Nazis broke off their attack abruptly and returned to their defenses.

On the Russian front losses were better than fifty percent while the losses on the Italian front were close to this figure. German losses by contrast were minimal. It was now quite clear that the Nazis had made Europe into an impenetrable fortress.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Another conference of the joint chiefs of staff was held in London to review the military situation in Europe. Offensive plans needed to be re-evaluated in light of the new defenses the Nazis had erected. They were exploring possible approaches to cracking the German lines. At the moment, it seemed impossible to formulate an offensive strategy because of the radical nature of the defenses. The Valkyrie line extended well past the battlefield positions. There wasn't anything to flank and frontal assaults, as they had just learned, were suicidal.

One general who commanded a division gave his report. Then he shared his observations and conclusions.

“That’s no Maginot line. Those defenses are designed for optimum mobility. Everything is below ground with interconnecting tunnels and defense positions. Their tanks popped up in front of our armor, attacked then withdrew and disappeared. Our tanks followed their tracks exactly and were blown up by land mines. They must have moveable mine fields that are probably operated hydraulically. There are fixed flame thrower positions operated by remote control and the gas pipes are well hidden. Many of our men were literally fried by them.

“This is the beginning of war by remote control. There are probably numerous command points underground where the controls are located to activate hydraulically operated lift devices for armor and large gates that can be opened or closed to fight attacking forces. A spider web comes to mind when I imagine how it must be designed.

“We saw these kinds of defenses in North Africa on a smaller scale designed by General Rommel. I understand he is in command of the defenses for the French coast. I believe it is Rommel who is the chief architect mostly responsible for ‘Fortress Europe’. If so, we can expect more surprises when we fight in the Valkyrie line. I’m sure he will mount his offensive actions from there. He won’t fight from a defensive position it’s not his style.”

Battle plans were drawn up based on what they knew about the defenses. They decided on a mass attack on a narrow front several miles wide. The objective was to thrust rapidly across the five-mile barren strip in front of the line with an overwhelming force in a wedge. With the line breached a corridor would be created to pour their troops into the rear of the German defenses. If this succeeded more attacks using similar tactics would be coordinated at other points and the lines neutralized.

It was a big gamble for the allies who could not afford to be stalled in front of the Valkyrie line. The campaign to crush the Nazi stranglehold on Europe had to succeed soon to stop the terrible loss of life incurred by the allied armies. Being twenty years ahead of the allies in weapons development was beginning to pay off in a big way for the Nazis.

In the first week of December, 1944, the Russians made their attack in accordance with the revised offensive plans. Speed was the key to traversing the barren five-mile strip. Armored columns moved swiftly across the line on a two-mile-wide offensive spearhead with the infantry following in the path of the T-34 tanks. German resistance was stiff in the beginning.

Artillery bombarded the Russians and Panzer units moved up to meet the attack. German infantry concealed in many areas opened fire. At a heavy cost in lives the Russians began to weed out German infantry positions in an effort to clear the way for the divisions coming into the line. Arriving divisions were to continue moving all the way through the defenses to the other side through the corridor the fighting forces was opening up for them.

By mid-afternoon, the first Russian division had

breached the line to the other side and spread out to the right and left. They were forming a corridor for the rest of the attacking force in accordance with the allied plans. Troops were quickly pushed through the cleared area to the rear of the German defenses.

As the last Russian division entered the defensive line the air was suddenly swarming with German jet fighter aircraft. They attacked the Russian infantry with a fury. Then German artillery and Panzers began a murderous barrage. Tiger and Panther tanks were firing at them from three sides. The Russians slowly realized they had been lured into a position in which German armor squeezed them like giant pincers. They were cut off from their army and left in a vast pocket.

When the situation was understood by the Russian commanders they ordered an all-out attack on the German tanks. They hoped this firepower would allow the trapped army to withdraw from their exposed position. As the Russian artillery fire became heavy the Panzers moved into tank pits leaving only the turrets above ground for firing. The area became an inferno of exploding shells of all types. V-1 rockets began to land around the Russian artillery positions trying to support the surrounded attack force.

The battle lasted for two days. Attempts to reinforce the beleaguered force were cut off by the Germans. Eventually about sixty percent of the trapped Russian army was able to fight its way out of the German lines.

A new kind of warfare had been born using remote control weapons, ultramodern tanks with devastating firepower and jet aircraft. The allies had no weapons to match this kind of fire power. This defeat clearly showed the allied disadvantages, It was obvious the Germans could attack at will, and then pull back to the safety of impregnable defenses. If some new way were not found to prevent this from happening the Nazis would slowly bleed the Allied armies until they were weak enough for a full-scale offensive to push them out of Europe.

Without the public announcements of Allied victories in Europe to which the free world had become accustomed, the realities of the terrible conflict came home to the public. People began to blame military leaders less as the facts about the new Nazi weapons became known. Criticisms of the government leaders for their short-sighted view which had led to their inability to keep up with the technology of Hitler's Third Reich became the new drum beat. Pressure mounted from many sides demanding an acceleration of

research and production of advanced weapons.

Dissident political groups were beginning to make inroads into government administrations in the allied nations by attracting those members of the public who were seeking new answers to the war problem. All of this furor was an impediment to the war effort rather than a help. By publicizing any technological development a desperate American government hoped to appease a frightened and angry public.

Washington DC was an uneasy place. Political leaders were watching their backs and being extremely careful of their answers to questions posed by the press. Caution is obviously not a close companion of bold progress. Roosevelt and his administration were doing their best to keep the citizens well informed about how the war was progressing.

An effort to speed up the development of new weapons was being undertaken by studying and copying the engineering of captured German jet fighter planes, V-1 rockets, robot tanks and armor piercing rockets. They were torn down then production models were built for study. Development of a jet engine was the top priority. It was vital for the Allies to regain their former dominance in air

power over Europe. As it stood now the Luftwaffe controlled the skies and prevented daylight flights which took away information on the Wehrmacht's troop movements

Duplication of Nazi engineering would help to speed up development of new weapons. However it was only a bare beginning toward the goal of actually manufacturing the weapons for field use. Revised production systems would have to be designed and the major task of retooling to manufacture components needed to be accomplished. Best time estimates by engineers put the mass production of new weapons at eighteen months. This was an almost impossible duration for the armed forces in Europe to hold on to their positions in Europe mainland against a revitalized enemy.

In America it became necessary to tighten rationing. Until now war production had gone on without undue sacrifice on the part of the civilian population. It was necessary to provide for military needs and to replace the supplies being lost to the bottom of the North Atlantic. So more food items were removed from the American diet.

Beef, pork, poultry and dairy products became extremely

scarce, as well as sugar and coffee. Even if a civilian had enough ration coupons to buy the rationed items it didn't guarantee they would be on the grocery store shelves. It didn't boost morale at all to exist on a daily diet of starchy foods.

Gasoline for personal use was almost non-existent. Carpooling for factory workers was stopped entirely. Only public transportation was available to get to work. Any personal travel on trains or airlines required a pass issued only for proven family emergencies. Some of the harsh realities of a global war were now being felt in America.

The oil industry was hard pressed to keep up with military demands for gasoline. Conversion of America's huge stores of coal into a crude synthetic gasoline began. Its use was restricted to agricultural production so the world could be fed. Never before during the war was it so clear how important the resources of America were to winning the war.

Nazi leaders were making the most of their triumphs over the Allied armies. Their propaganda was spread all over the world in every language. They were now predicting victory in Europe within a year. There were promises from Hitler of new weapons capable of raining

down destruction on any country on the planet. He boasted they would soon be bringing destruction to the capitals of all countries opposed to the Third Reich. Hitler promised to bring the world to its knees.

These threats were then followed by his offer to consider surrender terms tendered by any Allied country. He warned that continued defiance of the Third Reich would only bring complete destruction of his enemies. In the name of mercy he continued (for he was a peace-loving man) the allies should surrender now to avoid the continued slaughter of the best of their youth. And so on, and so on.

Fear, like a prairie fire was spreading in the free world as military reversals seemed to confirm that the Nazis were not making empty boasts. They truly had created a new generation of super weapons capable of bringing destruction to every country in the world.

What the Nazis had unleashed on the world in the last six months was impressive enough. No one doubted any longer the Nazis' capacity to produce weapons of world mass destruction.

Chapter Thirty

Barnes returned to London in mid-December. This time his trip had been an extended one. Rachel had pestered Mike about her mink coat almost every day. He was relieved when Barnes finally asked to meet him for lunch. He told Rachel about Barnes' return from New York and asked her to hold tight for another day. She pleaded and begged to go with him to the lunch with Barnes. In exasperation he finally gave in.

Barnes was delighted to meet Rachel for the first time. As he eyed her appraisingly he understood her hold on Mike. She was beautiful indeed. During lunch Rachel fidgeted impatiently and looked at Barnes expectantly.

When lunch was finished Barnes turned to Rachel and said with a smile,

“If you will go to the cloak room and ask the girl for the package Mr. Barnes left you will have your mink coat.”

Rachel jumped up with excitement, hugged Barnes, then took off making a beeline for the cloak room.

He turned to Mike with a chuckle.

“Quite a handful you have there. Now I know why you treat her so well. She is truly remarkable and beautiful! There is definitely a sensuality about her every expression

and gesture projects her nature. I can't remember meeting any woman quite like her."

"Neither can I," Mike replied with a smile.

Barnes changed the subject.

"Joe was pleased with your report. He said your marriage annulment has been finalized."

Mike felt a momentary sinking feeling. Barnes went on.

"Joe tried to contact your wife but she wouldn't see him. He had to send her a certified letter telling her of your offer of an annulment to avoid the mess of the divorce courts. She responded to his letter quickly and accepted the offer with obvious relief. She readily agreed to all of your terms.

The apartment furnishings, her personal savings account and clothes is all she will keep. She gets nothing from you. I have some papers to leave with you for your signature. You're a free man. You have Joe to thank for the smooth handling of the matter."

Mike looked at Barnes with sadness in his eyes.

"It's a relief to have the marriage dissolved, At the same time I'm sad it had to end in such a lousy way. On the other hand Diana never gave me the feelings Rachel has. She has made me more alive than I ever felt in my life."

"I must leave now," said Barnes. "I'll be sure to tell Joe how grateful you are for the painless annulment. You know Joe is fond of you. He speaks of you as if you're his son."

Just before he left, Rachel returned to the table wearing her mink coat. She simply glowed as she caressed the thick fur. It was a coat of fine quality and workmanship. She twirled around for the two men to admire her in the luxurious coat. They smiled at her excitement over her treasure. Barnes said to her,

"You are truly dazzling in the coat Rachel." Wordlessly, Rachel hugged Barnes and then Mike. She'll stay with me for a little while at least, Mike thought to himself.

There was a Christmas message from President Roosevelt promising in 1945 the Allies would begin to match the weaponry of Nazi Germany. He asked everyone to pray for an end to the war in the coming year. Hope he said should not be diminished because of the recent military setbacks. The free world was a force for freedom which would be proven to be irresistible. As he said the words he did not look well. His strained and weary face betrayed the extent to which this world conflict was sapping away his energy.

It was a miserable Christmas on the front lines in Europe. The anguish and pain of war didn't stop for a

holiday. On the Italian front the Nazis attacked a section of the Allied lines on Christmas Day. It seemed like a mockery of Christianity. The Allies were pushed back twenty miles and now they would have to fight hard to regain the territory they had lost. It was the only way to stop the Germans from flanking the troops on either side of the gaping hole in the line.

On the Russian Front the day after Christmas the German army launched an attack similar to the one on the Italian Front. The Russians like the Americans fought desperately to plug the hole to prevent a military disaster. It was obvious the Nazis' strategy was to attack at will then retreat to their impregnable Valkyrie line and slowly bleed the Allies.

Hitler made his speech to the world on New Year's Day. He startled the free world by promising a series of attacks on America with new weapons. This was shortly followed by a second shocking announcement: He announced that the first attack on New York City had already been launched.

Later that day a call came into a police precinct in Queens from a nearly hysterical gentleman. He reported a loud explosion from an area six blocks from his house. The

man was so excited it was difficult to make out the whole story. They did understand there were many casualties from the explosion.

A sergeant at the precinct tried to calm him down so he could get the location of the blast. Slowly the officer was able to find out where the man lived. The man ended his call by saying he thought a gas line had exploded.

Fire trucks, ambulances and the gas company were rushed to the area. While the injured people were being cared for the gas company went about searching for a clue to a leaking gas line. They reported to the police their gas lines were in working order. They could not be held responsible for the explosion.

Within an hour four more explosions were reported around the city. Military commanders in the area were duly informed of the blasts. They knew then Hitler's boast was not an idle threat. New York City had been attacked by the first of the V-3 intercontinental missiles.

Outrage is the only word to properly describe the reaction of the American people regarding the Nazis' rocket attack on New York City on New Year's Day. Bad news seems to travel twice as fast as good news since the entire country knew about the attack before the day was over.

Indignation at this inhuman warfare against innocent women and children was a common sentiment. As if it were the first time Hitler had made war on the entire population of a country.

America was learning the realities of daily danger at least on the east coast of America. Global warfare was no longer some tragedy happening thousands of miles away to someone else. The American public could now read firsthand accounts of tragedies occurring in their own cities. Some read casualty lists in the newspapers and learned about a relative or a friend being killed in the rocket attacks.

President Roosevelt was on the radio with an address on January 2nd trying to calm the public. He pointed out how much England had endured in five years from Nazi planes and rockets. Their courage he said should be an inspiration to all Americans. He reminded them of the sacrifices American boys were making in this war to protect their homeland. He did not believe the spirit of the people expressed during the American Revolutionary War was dead in the hearts of Americans in this generation. It was time for the country to remember the hardships their ancestors were willing to endure for freedom.

As Roosevelt spoke from the White House the first V-3 rockets landed in Washington DC. Ten rockets in all exploded in the city killing five hundred people. One of the rockets destroyed a city block only a quarter of a mile from the White House.

Hitler was back on the radio promising to completely destroy Washington DC and New York City just as he was continuing to do to London. He boasted of having an arsenal of thousands of V-3 rockets to launch against America. He called for a summit conference with the allies to discuss surrender terms before it was too late. Hitler ended his speech with another threat to annihilate the free world

Washington DC became a bedlam of activity. All branches of the services were called upon to establish defense plans to meet this new aspect of the war. Members of Congress cut short their Christmas holiday and rushed back to Washington DC. It would be a major challenge to formulate plans for the protection of the people on the Eastern seaboard. They had to move quickly to prevent public panic.

The army was called out to enter New York City and Washington DC to try to handle the mass exodus from the cities which was now beginning to develop. Hundreds of

thousands of people were determined to leave the cities. Most were on foot or bicycles because there was almost no gasoline for personal automobiles. All public transportation terminals were jammed with crowds trying to board a bus or a train to anywhere away from the two cities being bombed.

In spite of the winter weather highways were still overflowing with families moving away. The army rushed to set up emergency stations to provide medical help food and shelter. There was no way to stop the people. Some had a destination in mind such as a relative in a rural area or farm. Most were fleeing blindly to get out of danger.

Along the east coast every type of boat was being used to make an escape. As a result shipping lanes became clogged with the small craft. It became impossible for the Coast Guard to do an adequate job of clearing the boats out of merchant marine routes. Convoys had to be kept in port to keep these large ships from running over the small boats. Despite the efforts of the Coast Guard many of the pleasure boats were involved in collisions and sank. More lives were being lost in the flight from danger than had been claimed by the rockets.

Within a week the nation began to calm down. There hadn't been any more rocket attacks and the public was

restored to sanity. Everyone wondered why the attacks had suddenly stopped. Military leaders speculated perhaps the Nazis had only a limited number of these sophisticated missiles.

Scientists estimated that the V-3 rockets probably reached a height of two hundred sixty miles into space. Becoming weightless the rocket engine served only to propel the missile to its highest trajectory point. Then the rocket moved in an arc under its own momentum to hit targets on earth.

They could only speculate about the fuel the Germans had developed to provide the millions of pounds of thrust required to propel the rocket free of earth's gravitational force. Production of the V-3's would accelerate now since the Nazis had made important breakthroughs in rocket design and fuel propellant.

Based on knowledge as well as their best projections the military began to lay long range plans for the protection of military installations and the populations in major cities on the East Coast. Work began immediately on these projects. The public was relieved to know the government had moved into action in the cities. For the present New York City and Washington DC were placed under martial law.

In America most of the people who had fled the cities returned home. Although the public was still apprehensive it was obvious that the panic was over. Civil defense and the army took over responsibility for crowd control in the event of an attack. Classes for the public were offered in order to instruct them on what to do when an emergency was sounded and on where the nearest shelter was in their area. First aid classes were well attended by volunteers.

Hitler broadcast another demand for the Allies to surrender. He stated the rocket attacks on America had been temporarily suspended to allow time for the Allies to make their peace offer to the Third Reich. He warned the free world his patience was giving out because his humane efforts on their behalf were being ignored. Therefore he said, the rocket attacks on America and England would resume and continue until the Allied leaders came to their senses and stopped the slaughter of their people.

He made good on his promise the following day. Ten rockets fell in Washington DC and ten in New York City. There was some panic but it was mild in comparison to the mass exodus at the beginning of the year. Casualties from the latest attacks numbered nearly two thousand people. One rocket exploded in the Time Square area of Manhattan

during the morning rush hour. Americans were finding out, as the British had, about this silent death in which there was no sound until after the rockets had exploded.

It was terrifying.

In England and Europe the GIs who were from east coast areas tried desperately to find out how their families were. Military communications centers were swamped with requests to send telegrams home. It became necessary to suspend all forms of communication except for military necessity. The Red Cross began to publish daily lists of the known casualties from the rocket attacks. At least the G.I.'s could review the lists for news from home.

Morale among the fighting men was damaged by the war on America's doorstep and the all too real possibility families and friends might be killed or injured. They began to wonder if the tide of the war had turned permanently against the Allies. Certainly the last year of fighting in Europe did not inspire much confidence. At best they felt they were at a stalemate with the Nazis. To many GIs there was a feeling similar to the desperate hours at the end of 1941 and throughout most of 1942, when one disaster followed another. It was the free world's darkest time in the war.

Mike had pored over the Red Cross lists for the New York City casualties. Neither his father nor any friends were listed. Although he was relieved to find his father seemed to be safe he contacted Barnes.

“My father lives in New York City. He is not on the casualty lists thank God but I want to be sure. Do you think you could contact Joe and have him check on him?”

“Luckily for you,” said Barnes, “I have a government priority for telephone privileges ever since our man became the Secretary of State. I’ve been appointed as a legal representative for the American Embassy here in London. I can get just about anything I want now. We’re really getting a hold in Washington DC. I have to call Joe tomorrow on some business. I’ll ask him then and as soon as I hear back from him I’ll call you, Mike.”

“Tell Joe he has my thanks and my loyalty.”

Chapter Thirty One

On January 16, 1945 a top level military conference was held to plot out strategy for the coming offensives in the spring. The meeting went on non-stop for over a week. Every section of the armies was called in for detailed reports to assess present strengths and weaknesses. SHAEF staff swelled back up to 5,000 as it had been for planning the Normandy invasion. Allied forces in Europe had retired to a defensive status for now. By the end of the week the military strategies had been plotted out for the work to prepare the army and the air forces for the coming offensive.

The first objective was to establish another front for the Germans to cover. This would force the Germans to shift some of their divisions away from the Italian front to cover the threat. By breaking up their army in Italy the Allies could launch their attacks against a weakened enemy.

The second objective would be the introduction of high-speed super flamethrower vehicles to spearhead the infantry in attacks on the Valkyrie line. These units were large, fast and armed with six flame throwers which had been designed to be very effective at long range.

It was hoped these new vehicles would help to clean out German infantry bunkers and establish allied positions within the defense line. Once inside the defenses the allies would be on a firm foothold to fight the German troops.

The third objective concerned the role of the air corps in Europe. The commanders of the air branches of both armies had their own sessions with the top brass. Since the advent of Nazi jet fighter planes the effectiveness of the air corps in supporting the armies in Europe and providing aerial intelligence throughout Europe was curtailed.

Requests to Washington DC for the new B-29 Superfortresses had been turned down on the basis of priorities. To date production of the B-29 was barely keeping up with the demand for them in the Pacific Theater of war. B-29's had pressurized cabins which allowed them to fly at sixty thousand feet without turning the crew into ice.

Their flying range enabled the army to reach Japan on bombing missions and return to Taipan the nearest island under American control. Reports of the success of the B-29's had a great effect on the morale of the soldiers. It was felt that the Americans were finally able to punish the Japanese for the pain and misery they had inflicted on the United States.

Bombing raids to Japan were accomplished without any loss of men or bombers because the B-29 could fly at altitudes neither the Japanese fighter planes nor their anti-aircraft guns could reach. SHAEF had argued for the B-29s as exactly what they needed in Europe to return to their former dominance in the air. They were bluntly informed that B-29s might possibly be available for use in Europe about September 1945 at the earliest. There were howls of protest which Washington ignored.

In their defense the air arm of the allied armies pointed out they were having some success with low-level bombing using the Martin B-26 Marauder and the British RAF Mosquito. There were plans to beef up the squadrons of medium bombers. Since they were fast and low-flying the German jet fighters were not as effective against them. They were able to disrupt enemy supply lines.

A top secret briefing was held, with only the four highest ranking commanders to discuss plans for May 1945. Two officers of General Marshall's DC planning staff—introduced by the General himself—presided over this conference and proceeded with the briefing.

Colonel Carlson began the presentation while the other officer set up several chart stands covered over with cloths. Standing in front of the top brass, he said,

“Since the failure of the Normandy invasion in June our staff in Washington has been working on a strategy to take into account the new strengths of the Nazis. We are not able to meet their weapons advances over any short period of time. To catch up with their technology will take several years. We cannot allow the Nazis another two years to perfect more deadly weapons with which to make war on the entire world. We know what the V-3 rockets can do.”

“It is necessary then to use a strategy to defeat the Germans with what weapons we do have at the present time and a major addition. A new dimension in infantry warfare has been developed in the last year due to the nearly superhuman effort and dedication of our industrial engineers.

“Mr. Sikorsky has been working tirelessly for years trying to persuade the army to let him demonstrate a new approach to the movement of infantry. He is a pioneer in the development of the helicopter. It is an aircraft that takes off straight up so it doesn’t require any special place for takeoff or landing. In June we were ready to listen to what

Mr. Sikorsky and other pioneers of this aircraft had to tell us. We were amazed at the versatility of the helicopter and its combat potential.”

“Working in secrecy these men have built a reliable fast helicopter for the army. It is capable of carrying twenty fully equipped soldiers into combat. One of these pioneers has built a powerful new engine to meet the needs of this troop carrier. We have one hundred helicopters ready for military operations and there will be more by the time they are needed for the proposed mission. For security reasons all phases of the planned offensive will be undertaken in Washington DC. Now I will show you our plans”

The major removed the cloths from the charts. One stand had charts for the helicopter and its operation. On the other was a large logistical map of Norway. Standing in front of the charts the colonel first pointed to the country map.

“When Prime Minister Churchill was given his briefing on this offensive he was mighty pleased. He has been in favor of another invasion of Norway. In 1940 he assembled some infantry units from Poland, Norway and France and attempted an invasion in northern Norway. It ultimately failed due to a lack of support and planning.

“So why Norway? Churchill saw several major tactical reasons. Control of Norway effectively chokes off the German Navy’s access to the North Atlantic. To reach the open sea they must sail between Denmark and Norway. If you occupy one or the other of these countries you can block their navy and leave them land-bound. It is in this area that the British Navy caught up with and sank the battleship Bismark.”

"Hitler knew this too. It is the reason why he invaded Norway early in the war. He wanted Nazi control over the access to the vital seaways. Occupying Norway has been costly for Hitler since he fears an invasion there. Fighting has been fierce with the Norwegian underground. It consists of a well trained and organized secret army which has about thirty-four thousand soldiers. These problems have forced him to leave an army of four hundred thousand German soldiers tied down in Norway. The Germans can't use those reserves on the European fronts.”

“As you can see at the northern end of this long narrow country there is a common border with Russia. Imagine the potential of controlling Norway for the movement of war supplies and troops into the Russian Murmansk front.

“An invasion of southern Norway would be almost suicidal. It is the area most heavily populated and where

most of the German army resides. Along the coast of Norway is a jagged rocky shore with nearly fifteen thousand islands and hundreds of fjords along the steep mountains. If we invade through northern Norway in the conventional manner we could end up in a stalemate or being cut off along the rocky coast. So here is where the helicopter comes in as a weapon.

“We propose to land ten thousand airborne troops and commandos in northern Norway in a matter of three hours by helicopter. There are no Germans to oppose the landing above Narvik. If our army pushes south from there it will be a real shock to the Wehrmacht. Once we have established ourselves we can open up a beachhead on the coast for the invasion forces. We will use the Norwegian secret army to sabotage the German defenses in the south.

“If this operation is to succeed it is critical that it remain a secret. For this reason not even the Norwegian resistance forces will have any information about the helicopters. They will know there is a plan to invade and their help is vital for the sabotage of as many Nazi fortifications as possible prior to the invasion. They will have a major role in making the offensive a success.

“Then there are several underground groups who are particularly skilled at espionage. British Intelligence has

relied heavily on their ability to provide valuable military information. Lastly, there is the Norwegian commando group who destroyed the German heavy water plant in Norway. In addition they sank the ships leaving for Germany with thirteen hundred pounds of heavy water. . Without this key ingredient Nazi research for making atomic bombs was set back at least two more years—maybe more. We understand that Hitler seems to have lost interest in the project after the major disaster in Norway."

Chapter Thirty Two

Mike received a confidential order from Colonel Smith to meet him at his quarters at 2000 and to bring Sevvv with him to the meeting. It was baffling to him because it wasn't the colonel's style at all. As ordered, they were at Colonel Smith's residence on time.

Smith said nothing to them. Instead, he headed directly for Mike's jeep and got into the front passenger seat. Sevvv took the wheel while Mike scrunched himself up as best he could in the rear seat. Following Smith's directions they arrived at a wooded area in the suburbs of London. In a small clearing he ordered the sergeant to stop.

There was an old building on the edge of the clearing. With weeds waist-high around its walls it looked as if it had been abandoned for many years. They surmised it had been a small aircraft hangar during World War I. To their surprise Colonel Smith pushed the long hangar door open with ease. Mike noted that despite appearances the door mechanism was well oiled.

Inside there was a clean open area. In the middle of the building stood the strangest machine he had ever seen. Sevvv unable to restrain himself, exclaimed,

“What in the hell is it?”

At a look from Mike, he snapped his mouth shut.

Colonel Smith replied,

“The strange machine is called a helicopter. You will note it has no wings nor tail. The huge propeller stuck on top operates as the aircraft’s power and its wings. It can take off straight up, hover in mid air and do about anything an airplane can’t do. Help me push the machine outside.”

As it was mounted on large rubber tires, it was relatively easy for the three men to maneuver. Then a man emerged from the building wearing a flight suit. Smith greeted him and introduced him to the others.

“This is Captain Mitchell. He’ll take us for a short ride in the helicopter.”

Sevvy and Mike stepped in to the strange machine.

A noise began above them. It was a little unsettling as the rotor blades began to rotate. Then they were suddenly engulfed in a roar as the propeller bit the air. It was a strange sensation as the aircraft took off vertically. There was a lot of commotion and vibration but they were moving swiftly over the treetops. Captain Mitchell then banked the helicopter sharply hovered over the clearing then slowly lowered the bird to the ground.

Returning to the hangar they entered a small office in the building. Colonel Smith and Captain Mitchell explained to them about the potential use of the machine for infantry warfare. Being combat veterans they grasped the principles easily. Somewhat in awe they envisioned another major change in the way wars would be fought in the future. At the moment it would give the Allies an edge in the fighting.

Mike spoke up.

“Will it be our job to train troops about helicopters?”

“That's the plan.”

“Seems a little out of our line of work. Our mission has always been to train personnel for amphibious landings. This aircraft is an assault weapon.”

“We have been ordered to become completely familiar with helicopters. We have devise the best methods for troops to enter and exit from them quickly. They are preparing mock-ups of the helicopter fuselage at our training center in London. Most of our work will be done there. When they've completed the training in moving in and out of the helicopter they will begin combat training. The troops need to be trained to work as small combat units as they leave the aircraft. It will be a demanding assignment.”

Back in London, Mike met with Colonel Smith in his office alone. Once seated, the colonel said,

“What I’m going to tell you is top secret, Major. I need to tell you what our objectives are on this project. It is necessary so you can properly prepare for the troop training necessary to ferry soldiers in helicopters. You are probably wondering why the airborne divisions aren’t in charge of this training. It’s a matter of secrecy and the next invasion will require many more men to be moved by helicopters than they can spare at the moment. Some airborne troops will participate but for a different purpose.”

“We will invade Norway in May using a radical approach. Briefly the coastal terrain of Norway is rugged. In northern Norway there are steep mountain ranges, hundreds of fjords and a tough coastline to maneuver. This makes a conventional landing difficult and risky. We will move ten thousand men into the country by helicopter.”

Mike was stunned. It was hard to grasp how a combat division could be transported by helicopter from ships.

Smith saw his reaction.

“There will be six small aircraft carriers to carry the combat division and the aircraft. These carriers were developed by the Navy in the Pacific to be used as a place to repair fighter planes since land is scarce in that part of

the world. So they bring their own repair facilities with them. It's quite a brilliant idea. They are really old destroyers turned into carriers by building a flight deck onto them. It's perfect for the helicopters since they don't need to take off in the conventional manner."

"There will be three hundred helicopters, fifty of them for each midget carrier. It ought to be quite a surprise to the Germans to discover an entire division invading them from the rear. We expect to move the division into Norway in three hours. Now you can see why these troops must be trained to move together like machines."

"Airborne troops will parachute into the area to secure the helicopter landing area. Our invading division will then attack the Germans from the north. And while they are keeping the enemy busy the landing area for the main invasion force will be secured. With all the troops engaged in battle we will push the Werhmacht into the southern area of Norway with their backs to the sea."

"This mission is the linchpin for the invasion's success. Our entire staff will be involved in the helicopter training. I will plant information clues to convince our group into believing these troops are being trained for assault gliders. Luckily the fuselage of a glider is somewhat similar to a helicopter. I repeat what I have just revealed to you is top

secret. Be careful what you say around your staff and the men you will be training. Only you and I know the real mission. That is all.”

Mike was excited by the bold concept of the invasion. It was daring and innovative. He knew there would be many long days of work ahead in the next few months. He was grateful for his duties would keep his mind off Rachel.

Chapter Thirty Three

Once again Hitler was on the radio. Now he was threatening to destroy America for defying the Third Reich. As he spoke V-3 rockets suddenly began falling on New York City and Washington DC Der Führer were making a dramatic demonstration of his power to back up his demand for allied surrender.

Congress was moved out of Washington to an emergency area being constructed in the Virginia hills west of the Capitol. Many government employees and some of the elected members of Congress continued to live in the DC area. In the Capitol district now deserted except for the Army troops there was an eerie silence. Especially at night since the blackout regulations had been restored. There were tent cities for the army in Washington's parks. Not since the Civil War had Washington been threatened with destruction by an enemy.

Seaman First Class Robert Paulson, a Navy radar technician stationed far out near the tip of Long Island, New York, sat in front of a radar scope. His face was an eerie greenish color from the reflected light of the screen. The illuminated arm on the screen swept around over and

over. Paulson scanned the outer edge of the scope with great care. A number of small dots were appearing on the periphery. They were not very distinct at the moment but he was sure they were real.

He continued to monitor the objects. After fifteen minutes had gone by the images were more recognizable. He knew he was looking at several squadrons of aircraft flying, he estimated, at well over thirty thousand feet. Paulson didn't know of any airplane that could fly that high except for B-29 bombers but he hadn't heard about squadrons of them on the East Coast. He decided it was time to notify the duty officer.

Lieutenant Commander Epstein came into the radar room. "What's up?" he asked Paulson.

"I'm not sure sir. I have a definite fix on several squadrons of aircraft flying at over thirty thousand feet. Right now they are heading directly toward New York City. My information on air traffic doesn't include any large formations of planes in the area. Maybe it was omitted from the report coming in by radio two hours ago."

"I'll check. How far out are the planes now?"

"About one hundred miles out and coming in fast."

Epstein hurried to the radio room. He made contact with Navy Headquarters at Bethesda, Long Island, New York.

There was no new information from the Navy. He then called the US Army Air Corps at Mitchell Field also on Long Island. Neither of the military branches reported any squadrons of aircraft flying near New York City at the present time.

Immediately after hearing those responses, Epstein got on the radio and alerted Naval Operations, the Coast Guard, the Army and Civil Defense Headquarters in New York City. Then he rushed back to the radar station.

“What can you tell me now Bob?” he asked.

“There are thirty aircraft traveling at approximately five hundred MPH and headed for the Metropolitan area.”

“My God! It must be some new German bomber. We don’t have any plane capable of flying at those speeds.”

They were Heinkel aircraft with pressurized cabins like the B-29 and boasting no less than four jet engines. Capable of flying to the east coast of America and returning to their base in Norway, they represented a giant step forward in aircraft technology. Their top speed was nearly 600 MPH and the pressurized cabins allowed them to reach an altitude of over 40,000 feet. No American fighter aircraft could fly as high so they were powerless

against the jet bombers.

It was late morning when New Yorkers heard the distinctive noise of jet engines. It was foreign to them. It sounded completely different than propeller-driven planes. Sirens wailed and the people headed quickly for the air raid shelters. They were set up since the V-3 attacks began.

New Yorkers heard anti-aircraft guns begin to fire at the bombers—another first for Americans. The bombing runs aimed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, began. The Navy tried desperately to move ships out of the dock areas so they could take evasive action. But it was Pearl Harbor all over again as the Luftwaffe picked off the easy targets. They wreaked havoc on the dry docks sank twenty transport ships, ten freighters, three destroyers and an aircraft carrier. In addition to damaging ten other ships.

As the air raid on New York City was taking place another squadron of Heinkel jet bombers was attacking the Philadelphia shipyards. Damages sustained there were about the same as in New York City. Over forty ships were sunk or put out of commission. Shipbuilding facilities and the dry docks used for ship repairs ceased to be of any use.

America was dazed. The war was now at its front door. American civilians were being killed and wounded at

home. There was a general feeling of impotent rage since the Nazi technology seemed invincible and at the moment the free world had nothing to challenge these terrible weapons. Twenty-four hours later fifty V-3 rockets fell on New York and Washington DC. There was terror in the cities targeted by the Nazis. It was beginning to feel like the end of the world.

Hitler made another worldwide broadcast demanding unconditional surrender. As he spoke jet bombers were attacking Moscow to bring home the message to the Russians as well. Recent successes made him more implacable. He had gone from peace negotiations to unconditional surrender on his terms.

As the news of the ultra modern Heinkel bomber spread around the world a number of small countries outside of Europe began peace negotiations with Germany. In the process these countries became neutral. As a consequence, not only did the allies lose some important naval bases but they also had to withdraw all military personnel from these countries.

Bomber attacks could be expected at any time. Subsequent missions concentrated on the shipyards in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. It was obvious the Nazis

were determined to halt America's production of the new super sub-chasers. In the North Atlantic these vessels were living up to their advance publicity as submarine killers. Some super sub-chasers with sophisticated electronics were already escorting the convoys. Mark XXII submarines no longer had a clear run at the ships. When they attacked a convoy the new sub-chasers were outrunning them and sinking them with more powerful depth charges accurately spread by new sonar equipment.

Allied losses of ships were smaller as the navy put more sub-chasers on duty the moment they came off the production line. However the Germans now had large fleets of Mark XXII's so the navy was faced with the difficult job of fighting ultra modern underseas technology.

Plans for expanding production in shipbuilding facilities on the southern and western coasts were top priority. These ports were out of the reach of the jet bombers. There was a constant battle in the North Atlantic between the U-boats and the navy. America was determined to take away Germany's domination of the North Atlantic.

Be that as it may morale on the European fronts was actually beginning to improve. Despite the attacks on America and England the troops were ready for the fight in

the spring. A new army was waiting in England ready to move. They were trained to a fine edge. This was one advantage the allies had over the Nazis. There were more soldiers available to them while the Germans had only a limited ability to replace their losses.

January 1945 was a bleak time for the free world. At this time the military situation in Europe was uncertain. 1944 had turned out to be a year of major disasters. Then in February the world was stunned by the news of President Roosevelt's death. It was a heavy blow to lose one of the most trusted allied leaders at a time when he was badly needed.

Americans were thrown into a state of anxiety. No one knew what the Vice President's capabilities were for leadership. He was thrust upon the world stage as an obscure politician from Missouri and a not particularly distinguished member of congress. It was generally feared he might place the wrong people in critical governmental positions or overstep his authority, thereby making a disastrous blunder. Things hadn't appeared this dark since the Civil War.

The public was unaware of the power shift which had been going on for over a year in Washington. Roosevelt's

death removed the last obstacle to Stanton's power bloc. Stanton and the Tammany Hall bunch swiftly filled a number of administrative positions making their hold on the government reins virtually unbreakable. Truman was hog-tied before he took the oath of office.

Stanton's organization had completed their work so quietly and smoothly only the people in the highest positions in the political parties were aware of how deeply the takeover ran. Those who opposed them were either compromised in some way, bribed, persuaded to join them or brutally smashed. Political struggles were not about to change because of the mere death of a President.

Hitler perceived Roosevelt's death as an opportunity. Within a week he launched more massive rocket and jet bomber attacks. Most of the rockets fell on Washington DC while the bombers attacked the seaports along the east coast. Hitler's emissaries contacted American embassies in neutral countries with offers to negotiate terms for America's surrender. His officials were promptly informed that America would never make any deals with the Nazis.

At this time the Allies launched several offensives to make it clear to the Werhmacht the death of President Roosevelt had no effect on the allied armies resolve to win

the war. Fighting was fierce and difficult in Europe because of winter conditions. Superior defense lines continued to give the Germans a military advantage.

Preparations for the coming spring offensive continued at a steady pace. Despite the terrible loss of ships and men in the North Atlantic the necessary supplies continued to build up in Russia and England. Along the battle fronts in Italy fresh army divisions moved in to get ready for the spring offensive as soon as the weather permitted them to attack. General Marshall planned to hit the Nazis with a sledge hammer blow using new weapons like the flame throwing vehicles, highly improved tanks and rocket launchers.

PART III

NORWAY

Chapter Thirty Four

Background

Norway was unique among the European nations occupied by the Nazis because there were neither peace nor war formalities between the two nations. Vidkun Quisling, a Norwegian politician, was in Berlin in December, 1939 persuading Hitler that the Nazis should invade Norway. Hitler was sold on the concept as a way to protect Germany's access to the North Atlantic ocean.

Norway declared itself a neutral nation in the European conflict prior to Hitler's invasion, as it had done during World War I. Here was the blunder. If Norway had been permitted to stay neutral, a stance which every nation but Germany had honored, the country would have been out of the conflict. However, the Nazis invaded Norway without warning.

On April 9, 1940 Quisling went on the radio in Oslo and declared himself to be the new prime minister of Norway. An incredulous nation then heard Quisling as his first act as the prime minister command the people not to resist the

German army which was about to occupy the country. By the time his speech was broadcast the Nazi forces had already invaded. Before long “Quisling” became a widespread but not quite universal opprobrious term denoting a traitor, a backstabber or a collaborationist.

By fighting a delaying action the Norwegian army was able to buy enough time for King Haakon VII and the country’s Cabinet to escape to England. While the invasion was taking place the Parliament met in a special session. It ceded the power of the government, a constitutional monarchy, over to the king and his cabinet in England. Norway’s government in exile became recognized by other nations as a legal political entity which became the sovereign government.

This being the case, technically speaking the Norwegians had never surrendered to, nor had peace talks with, the Third Reich. Until the end of the hostilities Norway was without a legal government within its borders. It remained merely an occupied country in the eyes of its citizens. Thus they had the legal right to expressions of patriotism and resistance.

These took very concrete forms during the five years of Nazi occupation, espionage, sabotage, assassinations,

commando raids and civil disobedience were a constant threat to the enemy. From 1940 onward there was a standing Norwegian army called Milorg. By 1945 it consisted of some thirty-four thousand well-trained soldiers within the borders of Norway who were ready to fight at any time to drive the Nazis out of their country.

Tragically, this defiance cost the lives of forty thousand men, women and children. The majority of those arrested, including the children, were sent out of the country to die in concentration camps like Auschwitz. In Norway itself prominent citizens were interned in concentration camps. They were used as hostages whenever the Nazis decided to kill them in retaliation for some act of sabotage by the underground.

Chapter Thirty Five

Near the middle of March, 1945, Mike was summoned by Colonel Smith for a conference in his office.

“You have done an outstanding job with the training program, major,” said Smith. “I commend you. At the start I had my doubts whether our unit could train ten thousand soldiers in a few short months, but we’re halfway through the mission. By May we will have a well trained assault division.

“Only you know the top secret part of this invasion plan. For that reason I am sending you to Norway on a highly sensitive secret mission. It will be your responsibility to plan and organize the helicopter assault. Study the topography carefully with the help of the Norwegian underground but without revealing the nature of the landing area. You must convince them you are there to lay out a drop zone for airborne troops. I have topographical maps for you to study.

“Our insertion will be in northern Norway somewhere north of Narvik the last village of any size in the area. Your assignment includes working with Milorg their secret army for their part in the landing. Their mission will be capturing Narvik and cutting the communication lines to Oslo.

Let them be the ones to tell you how they will execute the plan. When you have a clear picture it will be your responsibility to approve the plan or work to change it based on the orders from SHAEF I will give you. Hopefully they will be impressed and cooperate with you.

"Your aide, Sergeant Severinsen, will go with you. As you know he's Norwegian and it says in his personnel file that he speaks the language. I knew you would want him as your aide at any rate considering his scouting abilities and fighting talents. It will be good for his morale considering how he shows up every week asking for a combat assignment. This job should satisfy his hankering for action."

Mike didn't go back to the flat he shared with Sam. Instead he stayed in officer quarters so he could be alone to prepare for his assignment. He felt weighed down with the responsibility of getting it right for the invasion. It promised to be a difficult job so he concentrated on the maps Colonel Smith had provided for study. Working on the maps had an added benefit they kept his mind busy and prevented him from speculating about Rachel. Her prolonged absence continued to rankle him. She had extended her stay at the country estate outside of London.

The next morning his orders were delivered to him at the BOQ. Two days hence he was to be ready at 0300 hours for a British lorry to pick him up at the flat. Mike was ordered as a precautionary measure for the secret mission not to come in to his office nor contact anyone there. If they didn't see him then there was nothing to arouse curiosity. He was sure Sevvv was also confined to barracks waiting to be transported to some undisclosed place.

Sitting in the back of the lorry at 0300 Mike and Sevvv wondered where in London the rendezvous point was. They assumed that they would have to go to a train station or to an air base to be parachuted into Norway. It was so dark in the truck because of the blackout conditions they couldn't make out the features of two other men who were sitting on the benches across from them. Only the barest black outline was possible when there was a small bit of light from the sky. They rode along in silence.

After awhile, Mike could tell the lorry had left the city. The ride became rougher as they changed to more rural narrow roads. Every so often the truck would creep along to detour around a bomb crater or burnt out vehicles hit in the rocket attacks.

At 0600 hours, they turned off onto an even smaller country road. Mike wondered how the driver was able to maneuver the big lorry around in the blackness. Long experience he guessed. A few miles further the lorry came to a stop. There was now enough pre-dawn light to see a little. They were told to grab their gear and dismount from the truck.

They were at the edge of a river bank. Next to a small dock there was what appeared to be a fishing boat moored with its engines idling. Several crewmen came up to them, picked up their gear and hustled them aboard down into the crew's quarters. They stumbled as the cruiser accelerated its engine and headed out into the river current before they had a chance to stow their gear and sit down. They realized it wasn't a fishing boat, it was sub-chaser

Mike could now see the two other men who had ridden in the back of the lorry. They wore standard American uniforms like his. He noted one was a captain and the other a first lieutenant. He said to them,

“I’m Major Mike Canyon and this is Sergeant Sigurd Severinsen. I haven’t seen you around London. Are you fresh from the States?”

The captain and the lieutenant saluted Mike.

“I am Captain Jens Ericsen and this is Johan Bakke, sir.

We arrived in England three days ago. Our outfit is still in America. We are officers of the 99th Battalion of the 1st Army. I think we are probably on the same mission, sir.”

Mike had learned a little about the 99th Battalion from Sevvv The outfit consisted of five hundred Norwegians recruited by the army to be trained as a special combat unit for action in Norway. Most were Norwegian citizens but a few were Americans who spoke the language.

It was only a short wait then they cruised out into the Irish Sea lying between Ireland and the west coast of England. Once they had reached the open sea the cruiser accelerated quickly. It became difficult to keep their balance against the buffeting the rapidly moving boat was taking. A crewman entered their enclosure to relay a message from the skipper: They were to stay put to avoid being injured. No one argued.

By early afternoon the skies clouded over and the wind picked up. A heavy downpour soon began to pound at them. It had become so murky it was difficult to see anything yet there was no discernible reduction in the cruising speed of the boat which pitched and rolled in the rough seas. Within two hours the storm front had passed through and the sun was out as if the squall had never

happened. All of them were familiar with the weather in the North Atlantic which could be changeable and capricious.

Not long after the patrol boat changed direction to the east as it came around the northern tip of Scotland. Why they had been taken to one of the most deserted locations in the British Isles was a mystery to him. It was nearly 2100 when the cruiser docked on a long pier among a large number of fishing boats. Its camouflage was effective for the sub-chaser blended in perfectly with the real fishing boats.

When the boat had been moored the captain came down to the dock to see his four passengers. He was a slender man of average height wearing a blue uniform unknown to Mike. Following military protocol he extended his hand first to the ranking officer and then shook hands with the rest,

“I am Captain Lars Bjornsted of the Royal Norwegian Navy. Please follow me. The crew will take your gear.”

They were taken to a building near the dock which served as headquarters for the Norwegian Navy contingent. Extending past the office portion was a long hallway with doors at intervals indicating sleeping quarters. At the end was a large mess hall where they were taken to dine.

After mess they adjourned to the captain's office. Bjornsted said, "You are at Shetland, Scotland. We have a secret operation running from here to Norway. We have three sub-chasers disguised as fishing boats to make the run. To date we have never been caught. Our trips are so frequent ferrying spies and military personnel and evacuating those Norwegian citizens who must leave the country, that our vessels are affectionately named, the 'Shetland Bus.'" He smiled.

"You will be quartered here for about twenty-four hours, after which interval we will make the voyage to Norway. Proper winter gear will be supplied to you since it is only the middle of March and northern Norway is still frozen at this time of year. The gear is the standard outdoor clothing worn by the Milorg army soldiers with sturdy boots for the snow and ice you shall cross. Your other gear will be stored here until you return. Get some sleep gentlemen for tomorrow will be busy!"

Mike had a meeting with the officers of the 99th Battalion to give them details of the mission they were undertaking in northern Norway and their roles as liaison to Milorg. To their surprise they were told they would remain in Norway with the Milorg army until May. They were to

coordinate with the Norwegians and the British SOE (Special Operations Executive) since the American army was to become involved in military operations there. The job sounded mild enough in the orders but they would learn how difficult it is to coordinate with two other armies over planned objectives.

In the afternoon Captain Bjornstad had one of his officers conduct an indoctrination. He told them about about Norway. Then he discussed the rendezvous point on the coast where members of the underground would meet them. Milorg was aware of the insertion of the four men to conduct logistics studies for an airborne attack at the end of April. British SOE was told the same story to keep the real objective top secret until it was time to begin the full scale invasion.

A geological contour map of the long peninsula containing Sweden and Norway was laid out for their inspection. Norway lay on the west side of the peninsula. Its coastline was more jagged than Sweden's. It had been created at the end of the Ice Age when the mountains that connected Scotland and Norway were torn asunder. As a result there are hundreds of fjords, deep inlets carved into the mountains and fifteen thousand islands of all sizes.

Captain Bjornstad ended the indoctrination by emphasizing how vital it was for them to obey any order given by the underground regarding their safety. Northern Norway was within the Arctic Circle and there were many steep mountain ranges with the ground in permafrost year round. He finished by saying it was a treacherous place to be for the careless.

It was a cloudy night with a slight drizzle when they embarked on their boat trip to Norway. It was a perfect cover for a secret mission into enemy territory. Out in the open water the sub-chaser accelerated quickly to running speed. Mike and the others were down below in the crew's quarters for the ride. They were told to try to sleep if they could since their journey would continue non-stop until they were put ashore and joined up with their underground escorts.

Somewhere around 0400 the sub-chaser's engines stopped running. Below decks the sudden silence brought Mike and Sevvv to full alert. The second officer came down to their quarters and announced,

“We have reached the rendezvous point to transfer you men to a Norwegian fishing boat which will ferry you to shore. Have your gear ready for loading on to the other

boat. It will be here in ten minutes.”

He left them and returned topside.

When they ascended to the top deck they were struck by a cold wind and a fine spray from the rough seas. Mike learned then about the comfort northern people can build into their clothing. Wearing Norwegian Navy gear only his face was freezing. He became aware of a black shape jutting out of the water and as his eyes adjusted to night vision he recognized it as a small island. When they were about a hundred yards offshore the skipper maneuvered the boat to lee side. In the shelter of the island the wind became less fierce but the waves were only marginally diminished.

Roughly a half mile from their position a signal light blinked off and on from another boat. They eased up to the fishing boat and a grappling hook was used to hold the two craft together. Sailors took their gear and moved nimbly to the other boat. For Mike and Sevvv who were not quite so agile they placed a short wooden plank between the vessels.

Captain Bjornstad came aboard to see the captain of the fishing boat. This was a rugged squat man with a weathered complexion gained from many years at sea. Mike judged him to be about thirty-five.

Bjornstad made the introductions to the fishing crew who gave them bone-crushing handshakes in the brisk way of seamen. After a brief private discussion with the captain Bjornstad and his crew wished the mission soldiers good luck. Then they quickly boarded the sub-chaser and the boat disappeared in minutes.

It was a strange dawn. The sun seemed to rise only a short distance in the sky and hovered near the horizon. It looked like a red fireball which left fascinating red patterns of light dancing on the waves. The fishing boat slowed down as they entered a fjord where the waters were smooth as glass in the protection of steep mountains jutting almost vertically out of the sea. Sheer walls of rock rose thousands of feet above them and enclosed the fjord.

To be sailing along in a boat making the only waves on the water from its wake into the majesty of the mountains towering over Mike's head left him speechless. He took in the deep clear blue water, the giant cliffs and the red light of the dawn above it all and knew this was the most dazzling spectacle he had ever seen. It set off a myriad of sensations within him but most of all an overwhelming humility as he realized how insignificant he was in the world. Looking around the boat, he observed how the sight was making the same impression on his comrades even

though they had grown up in Norway.

About ten miles deep into the fjord the fishing boat's engines stopped. The captain steered the craft in closer to the shoreline and then let it drift along in the still waters of the fjord. A smaller boat seemed to appear out of nowhere and moored itself to the fishing boat. The two men in the boat climbed up a short rope ladder to the deck.

They were a strange looking pair. One man towered over Mike and had the muscled blocky build he'd always associated with Vikings. The other man was nearly a head shorter with black hair and a dark complexion that gave him the appearance of being from a Latin country rather than from Scandinavia. They went to work with the crew to transfer their gear.

Only a few minutes passed before they were hustled aboard the smaller boat. It roared off at top speed on a course heading straight for the mountains. Near the shoreline the boat slowed then drifted up to a small piling and docked. Ahead of them was a cave in the mountain. They entered the opening and were plunged into a blackness all the more unsettling for the mission group because their guides were complete strangers.

Mike was relieved when they rounded a bend in the tunnel and saw lights shining in the distance. It appeared to be an enclave fashioned from a natural formation and augmented by drilling to provide needed space for cots lining the walls, a large storage area and a fully equipped mess hall.

Near the storage area in the rear of the cave sat three men who had apparently been awaiting their arrival. They all appeared to be in their middle twenties. They saluted the mission team. The senior officer welcomed them.

“I am Major Niellssen,” he said, “an aide to General Rhue who commands the Milorg army. I was sent here by the General to welcome you and pledge our cooperation to aid you in completing your mission here. We understand you Americans are planning an airborne attack north of Narvik to prepare for an invasion in the spring.”

“Major Mike Canyon commanding this project. We are grateful for your help, since I've been told northern Norway is wild inhospitable country.”

They shook hands and Nielssen had a smile on his face.

“Your information is accurate, Major. It is why it's uninhabited by people. Only the animals survive up here.”

Mike introduced them to the other two officers from the

99th Battalion under his command. Neilssen, in turn, presented his team.

“Captain Larsen is an engineer and he knows this country very well. He was born in a village near the Russian border in the north. Captain Wohl is a geologist, also well schooled in the treacheries of the area. The terrain has deep depressions and other natural formations hidden by the snows. By the time your airborne attack begins it will be late April I’m told. The landscape will have changed as the melting snow reveals the nature of the ground underneath. These two officers can be of great help to you in finding a safe area for the airborne landing.”

They adjourned to the mess hall area for breakfast. It consisted of British field rations for the most part. As they ate Captain Larsen, who was sitting next to Mike, told him,

“We are eating a meal substantially better than what the civilian population is living on. The Germans take all of the food to feed their armies. Thank heavens the codfish population is abundant for it is what most of the people eat every day. They have boiled cod, fried cod, roasted cod, baked cod, cod soup and cod stew.” Then he smiled.

“I looked around,” said Mike, “this cave appears to be stocked with everything you need.”

“Oh yes,” answered Larsen readily, “the British SOE keep us abundantly supplied. There are stations like this one stocked with food and ammunition all over Norway. There must be a hundred stations for the army. We supply the British with valuable intelligence about the Nazi marine activity. They count on us for military support by blowing up factories and sabotaging Nazi armaments. It’s a constant war I’m sure the free world isn’t aware of. Only the last Nazi either killed or pushed out of our country will satisfy us.”

Chapter Thirty Six

Captain Wohl outlined his plans for surveying the area above Narvik. Spreading a map on the table, he briefed the group on his approach to the logistic problems.

“We will begin the survey ten miles north of Narvik, then work our way south until we find the area best suited for an airborne landing. Several of my colleagues have provided me with detailed studies of the terrain in the area. The landing area should be approximately five miles into the interior. Any closer to the coast would be a risk.

“Major Neilssen and I have organized our group into three separate search parties. Major Canyon will go with me, your sergeant and the 99th infantry officers will team up with Captain Larsen. Major Neilssen will head up the Milorg support team. I have made maps for each group outlining the area they will be covering. A featureless land of white snow and ice can confuse anyone.”

Mike hadn't wanted to be separated from Sevvv since they had been planning to work as a team. Sevvv was also unhappy with the arrangement. Each had been counting on the other to watch his back. They would be alone with strangers in a strange land. It made them distinctly

uncomfortable.

They were issued a Sten guns, a British submachine gun similar in simplicity of design to the American Thompson weapon. They were easy to break down since there were few moving parts and the bullet clip was attached to the gun for quick replacement. Mike studied his Sten gun. He couldn't spot any major difference from the Thompson he had been using since 1942 in North Africa.

The gun did have one feature he thought was superior to the American weapon however. It was the placement of the ammunition clip to the side rather than underneath. This meant that the Sten gun could be easily fired from a prone position which was not possible with the Thompson.

They were ferried out of the fjord on a large fishing boat to the coast. The place where they boarded two smaller boats was among some small islands providing excellent cover for the group. At their destination their supplies were unloaded swiftly and the boats were out of sight by the time Mike was a few yards up on the shore. Working silently the teams stashed the supplies in a hidden cove and then attached their skis for the trip inland.

Mike had done some skiing around Bear Mountain in the Alleghenies when he was a student, but he was no match

for the Norwegians. Skiing seemed to come so naturally to them one could easily imagine that they had been taught to ski almost before they walked. It was incredible how swiftly they moved on the snow. Mike was already lagging twenty yards behind them. It seemed a shame to him that instead of being in this winter wonderland on vacation, he was on a dangerous mission demanding his complete concentration.

Suddenly on a slope in front of them appeared ten skiers coming on fast toward the group. Mike instinctively brought his Sten gun up to the ready. Wohl stopped him.

“Easy, major,” he said, “those are commandos from the Linge group. They have been reconnoitering the area for us since yesterday. Linge patrols will be active during the survey.”

Mike watched the ten young Norwegians with admiration as they approached. They were strong and had the look of fighters.

At the beginning of the day they had fair skies and sunshine. Mike and the geologist worked their way across a slope of unbroken snow casting blue shadows in the dips and snow banks. By early afternoon, cloud cover scudded

in quickly with a fierce wind blowing the powdery snow off the ground and they were soon in a white-out. Captain Wohl grabbed Mike's arm and supporting each other they made their way slowly to the lee side of the hill. They took shelter in an outcropping of rock.

Wohl studied the weather pattern as best he could in the blinding conditions. He was forced to shout to be heard over the howling of the winds.

"I believe our surveying day is over, major. This storm will last at least until this evening. There will be a heavy snowfall coming in behind this front. We shall have to wait it out and we should stay protected here."

Neither of them spoke after that. It was difficult to be heard over the gale-force winds so they remained silent while checking out their gear and rations. A small alcohol-burning stove provided enough heat for them to make some strong coffee.

Sunlight had dimmed by the afternoon. A heavy snowfall continued until early evening and then the front passed. In the crisp, cold air with no artificial lights on the ground to distract they watched the heavens unfold above them with countless stars burning a bright white. Around them on the ground lay the snow appearing to be a light blue in the reflected star light.

After they had eaten their rations Wohl took out a bottle of Norwegian whiskey called aquavit. Mike found its strong taste comparable to Russian vodka. They spent the rest of the night talking about their survey so Captain Wohl could get a better understanding of the standards Mike had in mind for a suitable site. Although he didn't express his thought Wohl thought the size of the landing area the major was outlining was inordinately large for a parachute landing.

Over the next three days they worked their way south along the slope they were covering. So far only one area came close to meeting the standards of safety Mike knew were essential for a safe landing of three hundred helicopters whirling into the area, leaving, and returning with more soldiers. He was finding the mission to be more difficult than he had expected. Because he could not reveal anything about the top secret attack to Wohl communicating the details of the site he wanted was awkward.

Wohl was baffled at times. He was sure some of his finds would be suitable and just could not figure out why Mike turned them down. He couldn't be told about the helicopters and the need to have a landing site close to sea level to get under German radar. In addition, helicopters had to stay

close to the ground to ensure stable flying they were not designed for fighting winds off a coastline. Mike had to thread the needle and he was sure Sevvv was having the same problem communicating with Captain Larsen.

Captain Johan Bakke of the 99th Infantry Battalion was a native of Narvik. There was a long discussion about whether it was advisable for Johan to contact his parents who lived in the town. Johan said his father was a fisherman and he might have some important information about the harbor. He might know something Milorg needed to be aware of before they attacked Narvik.

After a long discussion about the risks Mike rather reluctantly decided to allow the contact. Reconnoitering the town and possibly learning something about the German defenses on the coast might be vital to the success of the attack. It was decided the wisest course of action would be to send Johan to Narvik with Sevvv to guard his back.

Sevvv had insisted on going with him as the American representative. He was going along to Narvik to ensure Johan wasn't caught and forced to tell the Nazis about the planned invasion. Both Mike and Sevvv were being cautious in their dealings with the Norwegians, because of their highly secret mission. War has its own rules.

Two weeks into the mission Johan and Sevvv left one night for their journey into Narvik. Mike took this time to leave for the coast to rendezvous with the sub-chaser so he could send off his coded reports to Colonel Smith on their radio. Out in the open ocean he could send a clear radio transmission without the risk of German sound detectors picking up his radio signal. Mike was fairly pleased with their progress in identifying a suitable landing area and the logistics surrounding the assault site.

In the town of Narvik Johan and Sevvv made their way along the coastline for cover. His parents had a cottage near the fishing wharfs so most of their journey was hidden from view in the dock area. Johan led the way when they left the beach. They hid in some rocks near the sea's edge to assess the German fortified areas on the waterfront. There were many and there was constant flashing from the search lights turning in circles and creating almost an artificial daylight around the piers. Sevvv was by far the most experienced of the two about getting about in enemy territory and he laid out a plan. Johan readily agreed when he understood what Sevvv had in mind although he felt it was an extreme course of action.

After carefully observing the pattern of the sweep of the enemy searchlights Sevvv decided on the most cautious approach possible to reach the house of Johan's parents near the fishing wharfs. They would wade in the water near the shore for about one hundred yards taking advantage of the only blind spot he had observed in the light patterns. The angle of the lights wasn't steep enough to illuminate the water's very edge. Aside from the danger of being discovered there was the peril of exposing themselves to the icy waters for even a few minutes without freezing to death.

They shed their outer jackets to reduce the drag from their drenched clothing in the icy waters. After checking their weapons Johan nodded to Sevvv and they plunged into the surf. In better moments they waded in water that came up to their knees at other spots along the beach it reached their waists. Any more than one hundred yards would have been too much exposure to the extreme cold of the sea.

Their course brought them under a high pier up on pilings with a warehouse covering most of the dock. Gasping for air they climbed up the timbers to the pier. There were boats on both sides of the warehouse for easy loading and unloading. Sevvv slipped up to the edge then

stopped all movement for several minutes before looking in both directions. They were still in the dark area below the searchlights so they cast no shadows. As far as they could determine there was only one German sentinel marching up and down the pier

After ten minutes of clinging to the side of the pier and observing they nodded to each other. Only one guard to slide around then up the street to Johan's home two blocks away. Sevvv went first staying low and moving swiftly over to the side of the warehouse. Johan followed. His timing couldn't have been worse, though for the German guard rounded the corner as he was standing up. He heard the snick/snack sound of a bullet being loaded into the firing chamber and saw the guard put the gun to his shoulder to shoot him.

But he didn't get off the round. Johan watched in surprise as the guard's head snapped back sharply and his body fell backward on to the wooden pier. There had been no sound of a pistol being fired. Sevvv came up to Johan and showed him his 38 caliber pistol with a silencer attached.

Sevvv whispered, "Come on help me pull this guy into the warehouse. Hopefully they won't discover him until the guard's shift is over and his relief shows up. That could be

fifteen minutes or two hours. We have to take the chance. Let's move."

Two blocks in from the docks Johan signaled Sevvv to stay hidden where he was as he approached the rear door of the cottage. Momentarily Sevvv saw a light coming from under the door. He was now in blackness except for the light from windows in the neighborhood. Five minutes later Johan came back out to signal Sevvv to come in. He entered a small neat cottage that felt cozy and warm. Johan's parents were beaming with delight to see their son after nearly five years.

Johan spoke to his father about the information they needed for Narvik and the surrounding area. And after hearing what he had to say it was a very good thing they had made the trip. The Germans had fortified the town heavily since facing off against the British and other units in a battle at Narvik in 1942. Fearing another assault by the British the Nazis had built artillery and machine gun bunkers up and down the coast.

Recently they had mined the harbor extensively leaving only a narrow channel for boats sailing in and out of the harbor. Sevvv knew an assault from the sea side would be suicidal for Milorg. A major change in tactics to an inland

attack would be necessary but of course that would increase the complexity of the mission greatly.

Sevvy was anxious to leave before the dead guard was found but he didn't let on so Johan could talk to his parents for another ten minutes. As much as they wanted to prolong the conversation his parents understood the danger the two men were facing so they didn't object when they headed for the door.

Still holding Johan's hand his mother explained,

"We are used to these brief encounters with our sons. It is the same danger when Sven comes to see us every so often. Gestapo agents have been here questioning us about him since they somehow learned Sven is a soldier in Milorg. We are very proud of you boys. Be careful!"

Johan's father was shaking their hands when a slight tapping noise came from the other side of the door. Frightened he cautiously opened the door a crack peering out as Sevvy held his silenced pistol. There were whispers then the father opened the door a little wider to let in five men. Johan gripped Sevvy's arm as a signal to hold off. The tallest of the men stepped forward and embraced Johan.

"My brother. I'm so happy to see you alive!" exclaimed

the man. “We had no word after you left with the King and the Cabinet for England back in 1940. It’s a miracle to see you standing here—looking as ugly as ever!”

He and Johan laughed.

Now reassured, Sevvv put down his pistol and was introduced to Sven and the other four men with him who Johan didn’t know. When the formalities had been dispensed with several bottles of aquavit were brought out for the occasion. Sven explained he was sent there with these companions who were also from Narvik on orders from General Rhue to link up with Major Neilssen to add strength to the surveying party.

Much to Sevvv’s relief, they all left the cottage together a half hour later and made their way back to the waterfront. The plan was to leave on their boat and blending in with the other fishing boats in the early morning head out to sea. They would rest in the boat until daybreak.

They slipped aboard the boat one at a time from under the dock to avoid being seen. Sven, Johan and Sevvv were the last men to board the vessel. As they stood up Sven stepped away from them as the other four who had gone first surrounded Johan and Sevvv with pistols pointed at them. Sven quickly disarmed them

“Welcome home Johan, my traitorous brother!” he said.

“We are Waffen SS soldiers of the Third Reich and members of Norway’s Nasjonal Samling, our country’s noble Nazi party.”

Suddenly, the entire area was brightly lit up by flood lights from ships nearby and on the wharf. Uniformed SS soldiers and plainclothes Gestapo agents descended on the prisoners to shackle them. A German patrol boat, docked nearby came to life and cruised over. Strong hands lifted up the American soldiers and brought them below decks to a cabin. They were prisoners!

The trap had been expertly hidden until the last moment. And so far except for the rough handling and shackling the Nazis hadn’t assaulted them in any way. It was nearly an hour before either of them spoke. Sevvv didn’t waste time brooding about what lay ahead of them. He was already concentrating on escaping.

Johan was thunderstruck to learn his brother was a Nazi! He was very concerned not only about his parents’ safety, but how they would react when they learned their beloved son Sven, whom they had thought of as a hero of the resistance, had turned traitor and joined the hated Nazis. He was also worried about what his parents’ neighbors might do if they found out about Sven. Neither of them spoke for nearly an hour. Sevvv knew how broken Johan was over

his brother's defection to the enemy and he left him to his thoughts.

Johan was an American soldier caught in a dangerous situation. He had to force himself to concentrate on the present peril. He said to Sevvv,

"I wonder why they took our chains off."

"We can't possibly escape from them, so there's no need to lock us up."

While he was saying this, he was making gestures to Johan in an imitation of someone listening. Sevvv quietly searched the small cabin and found two tiny microphones which he did not disturb. He showed Johan the wires. After carefully searching for more devices, but finding none, he led Johan off to the corner of the cabin furthest away from the bugs.

He cupped his hands over Johan's ear and whispered,

"We're not in chains because the Gestapo wants us to feel physically comfortable. They are hoping we'll speak freely to one another. For the next hour we must keep a conversation going which sounds natural but tells them nothing of value." Johan nodded.

Survival habits were kicking in. Sevvv would try to get as much sleep as he could under the circumstances. It was vital to keep up his physical strength and rest was essential.

Before closing his eyes, he went over the last hours of the trip to Narvik to satisfy himself they had not told the others about the group's secret location on the coast. Finally satisfied that at least this detail had not been leaked, he slept.

Chapter Thirty Seven

It was nearly dawn when Mike and the rest of the group got back to their secret landing place from their run out to sea. In one of Milorg's hidden stations on the coast they ate then bedded down for a short sleep. They would be on the go the next day. Mike was pleased about the reports he had made to Colonel Smith. Results of their hard work were impressive so far. He knew his reports would soon be in the hands of SHAEF for study.

Weather revised their traveling plans the following day with a howling snowstorm preventing them from continuing on for the next forty-eight hours. Three days later they rendezvoused with the commandos who were acting as lookouts for them. Emerging from the forest two of the commandos came swiftly toward them on skis and made their report.

"The situation has changed completely in the last two days in this area. There have been SS troops moving through the mountains and a parachute drop was made on the western side. They must have found out about you major, or all of this military activity wouldn't be going on in this remote area. We have also learned the coast around Narvik is swarming with destroyers and patrol boats."

Mike wondered if all of this action had anything to do with the trip into Narvik. He asked the commandos if they had seen or heard from Sevvv and Johan. The answer was no. Nor would they hear anything from the townspeople in Narvik. Capture of the two American soldiers was kept a secret by the Gestapo. They would make a public announcement about the capture of the two men only when they were ready to do so.

Although Sevvv and Johan were supposed to meet them at their place on the coast the group wasn't alarmed at first. The weather had caused a disruption of their plans as well. But now the situation had changed. Mike was at the rendezvous place to be used as a second choice. No word. He was becoming concerned about their situation. Based on travel time needed to reach their present location the pair should have been there waiting for them for at least a day.

One of the commandos volunteered to make a run into Narvik to talk to some members of the underground for news. Now the surveying party would make their way to the original station on the fjord as the safest place to hide. In this remote area finding a cave on the banks of a fjord was like trying to find the proverbial needle in a haystack for the Germans. Their route to the station would be arduous since there were so many open areas they would

have to skirt. It meant traversing several rugged mountain ranges in order to avoid the SS troops roaming the area.

It required two days to reach the station. SS troops were present in such large numbers that it was necessary to make much of the trip at night in some of the most dangerous terrain in the world. As the area was completely covered with ice and snow every step they made when climbing had to be studied carefully. Mike was so grateful to be in the company of these Norwegians who had such superior mountain skills. He was sure that had he been on his own, the mountains would surely have claimed him.

Strict radio silence had been the rule during the mission so they didn't know what efforts Milorg was making to protect the group. In many areas occupied by the SS Milorg squads were shadowing their every move, so much so that it made the Germans uneasy to be in this remote area without military backup. In fact they usually avoided this territory altogether because of Milorg's advantage in the mountains they knew so well.

But the stakes were high for the Nazis to find the rest of the group they knew was hiding here. Searching for them was a risk they had to take because of orders from their superiors. All through the occupation false rumors of an

impending allied invasion had been planted in the minds of Hitler and the occupying force. It was so effective that Hitler insisted on an army of four hundred thousand in Norway.

Over the next two weeks the SS troops were harassed by Milorg with ambushes of small squads when they happened to stray too far from the main force. Recognizing their mission had been a failure and fearing a full scale attack on their troops the SS retired down to the coast to await further orders.

Outraged, Terboven, the German Reichskommissar, was on the verge of ordering a full scale invasion in northern Norway. But when he had calmed down he ordered the SS troops to retire to their base at Trondheim. A Nazi assault in northern Norway was a move Milorg would have welcomed.

When the commando who had slipped into Narvik for news about Sevv and Johan returned to the station he was nervous about giving a report. As clandestine as the Gestapo had been in capturing the two the underground kept a close watch on any activity of the Nazis. A fishing boat captain near the pier where the capture had taken place had witnessed the scene. Because he had been out of sight

working on the engine of his fishing boat at the time, he had fortunately managed to escape their notice. He passed on what he'd seen.

Mike had a large lump in his throat as he listened to the commando give his report. It gave him the old, too familiar feeling in his gut he always had when he learned of the loss of another of his comrades in arms. He cursed himself for allowing Sevvie to become a friend thus risking the heartache of losing him in a tragic manner. Being taken by the Gestapo was about as grim a fate as a soldier could possibly experience.

He was grateful now he had at least insisted that Sevvie and the two 99th Battalion officers wear their uniforms underneath the outer clothing supplied to them at Shetland. Under the Geneva Convention a soldier captured wearing his regulation uniform had to be treated as a military prisoner of war no matter what the circumstances surrounding the capture. Mike fervently prayed that the Reichskommissar would treat them as military prisoners. There was always doubt what action the Nazis might decide to take at any time.

A week went by without word about the prisoners' fate. Mike doggedly adhered to his schedule when the SS pulled

out of the mountains without any prisoners. To stay out in northern Norway for any length of time was inviting trouble. The members of the underground were as puzzled as Mike about the Nazis' silence.

Commandos stayed in daily contact with the surveying group but no news was forthcoming about the capture. Had Sevvv and Johan tried to escape and gotten themselves killed in the attempt? Were the Nazis preparing some elaborate public display of their American prisoners? Or maybe they had shot them? These were all possibilities but it made no sense to speculate.

Captain Wohl and Mike had narrowed the search for the assault landing to three potential areas. They surveyed the sites one last time to be certain they had done the most thorough inspection possible. The lives of soldiers were at stake if their choices should turn out to be wrong.

Mike looked at Wohl.

"Time to choose Captain. I will tell you my choice and please point out any flaws in my logic. Area B ten miles west of Narvik. It meets the requirements outlined in my orders from SHAEF."

"I can't agree with you, Major. Areas A and C also meet the requirements so why are they ruled out? I don't

understand your thinking. I would have chosen Area C. It's further out but it has more geographic advantages than Area B. In close to the mountain range it would provide good defensive positions if needed whereas the other area is much more open out on a plain."

"Area B has the lowest height above sea level. Coming in from the coast would be quicker and it fills other requirements I'm not allowed to tell you."

His last remark, caused Captain Wohl to have a flash of inward anger. Why use me at all if there are factors I'm not privy to? I suppose I'm not to be trusted. Damned Americans! he thought to himself. Betraying none of this outwardly he merely nodded calmly. But he was no fool. There was something secretive about this assault landing. Wohl had a feeling that altitude had something to do with the Major's choice. Areas A and C were considerably higher than B.

So elevation had to be the determining factor he thought. But why a lower altitude? It seemed to him that the assault force was more exposed to enemy resistance on the plain. And they wouldn't even tell him whether the airborne landing would be by parachute or by gliders. Either one of those airborne assault methods would benefit from a higher altitude. He shrugged then forced himself to let go of his

irritation and began to draft maps of Area B.

Mike felt awkward having to lie to Captain Wohl by omitting facts and offering no explanation. He couldn't tell him about the use of helicopters which the world hadn't seen yet. The helicopter's advantage was its ability to skim in at treetop level to the landing area making it impossible to stop them. At higher altitudes winds could become a serious threat since helicopters because of their structure, were not stable in high winds. He couldn't take a chance. Lower altitude would also give them the advantage of bringing the assault into Norway below radar range.

As Wohl worked on the final maps for the assault Mike began to think about Sevv's situation and how he might be able to get him away from the Gestapo, if he were still alive. He had a talk with General Rhue's aide, Captain Neilssen about the dilemma of the two men.

Neilssen replied,

"I expect a courier in from headquarters either tomorrow or the day after with some news about them. It is frustrating to be out of touch because of the radio blackout. But I know it's too risky to use it. So we have to wait."

Sevv and Johan were now imprisoned in Falstad Concentration Camp. They were separated upon arrival

there and placed in individual isolation cells. These cells were slightly larger than a man's body with a metal container for waste and a thin mat to be used as a bed. Ventilation came from a grill above the steel door. There were no windows so the cells were always in the dark. A little more light came in during the day from the ventilator opening.

Sevvy had been in several of these isolation chambers. Designed to soften a man's resolve and weaken his will to resist the intimidation tactics of the Gestapo. Finally if the man continued to hold out, many means of torture would begin daily until he broke. Sevvy had been through all of it before in Italy where he had been captured three times by the Germans but he always escaped.

He was concerned about Johan and how he was faring in these claustrophobic conditions alone. Johan knew a great deal about the invasion in May and if he should break, everything would be compromised. If the Nazis were to find out about the invasion they would be waiting on the coast ready to stop the assault. Sevvy wondered if Mike would want him to escape from his cell and kill Johan, given the enormity of what was at stake. He would have to be ready to act at any time and killing the Norwegian didn't weigh on his conscience. In war you did what had to be

done. Sevvvy was familiar with every aspect of war and decided that the major expected him to kill Johan.

As for himself he accepted what came along in combat. His skills as a professional hunter and his ability to live anywhere outdoors gave him an edge. His knowledge of animals of all kinds sharpened his instincts for escape. A wolf or a coyote seemed to slip away somehow when you were sure it was impossible. He'd had many experiences with animal cunning in his trapping days.

He had often studied the markings around one of his empty traps in order to figure out what the animal had resorted to in order to get free. Often he found a bloody paw still in the trap for a desperate animal will do anything to gain its freedom. He was of the same mind as animals and he had the driving self-discipline to gnaw off a limb to escape a trap or anything else holding him fast.

Applying this experience he could slither like a snake slip through openings that seemed impossible to breach and blend into any landscape. One of his escapes from a German prison in Italy had been through a small aperture between two boards on a barbed wire containment fence. After two days of observing every move the guards made around his area he had seen the solution. He'd spotted two

boards slightly wider than the others, and the location was the furthest away from the searchlights constantly illuminating the prison camp. A man could move in semi-darkness by slithering on the ground.

Sevvy had made his escape at ten o'clock in the evening when the change of guard took place and no one was watching the prisoners very closely. He had slipped the lock on the door and slithered to the fence. There he stripped off his clothes to reveal a body well lathered down with soap he had been cadging in the showers. Inching his way between the two boards he pushed against them with his well greased body.

Slowly the boards moved just far enough apart to allow his head to squeeze through. Moving like an animal in the dark and using every means of concealment he had completed an agonizing journey of a quarter of a mile. He had reached his chosen destination a grove of trees. Although he was naked and bleeding profusely from ribs and tears to his skin, he had managed to get free.

Here at the Falstad prison he immediately went to work to examine every inch of his cell for anything he could use to his advantage. Feeling around the boards on the floor he discovered a crack in a plank. Silently he worked out a large splinter of the board to be used as a stiletto or to pry

at something. He hid the wood in his clothing. The cell walls were narrow enough to allow him to walk up the walls feeling for cracks, holes or a weakness of some kind.

Next came the ceiling. With one leg on each wall holding him in place he crabbed his way up. Since it was the only opening in the room besides the door he inspected the ventilator which was a crude piece of light metal fashioned into a vent. Sevvv spent an hour in the position but the physical strain was too much to bear any longer than that. Tomorrow, he thought to himself, I will continue the work if I'm still alive. But he knew now the ventilator space was much too small for a man to slip through.

The other camps he had been kept in were military prisons. He had noticed when he was brought into this camp it was meant to contain civilians. Although he was in his army uniform and had his military ID he wasn't going to assume he would be treated as a prisoner of war.

They might very well decide to ignore his credentials and treat him as a civilian spy. If that was the case, he knew what inhuman tortures the Gestapo used to break a man. Whatever the experience was to be, he would only give them his name, rank and serial number. Death came to all in the end anyway. There wasn't a man on earth Sevvv had ever feared.

For now he stopped his work of becoming familiar with the small room. Sevvay lay down on the thin floor-mat to gather his strength for any opportunity to escape the camp. His inspection revealed several things to be studied things he might find a way to use to his advantage.

Tomorrow would more than likely be the day his interrogation by the Nazis would begin. He was hoping that his initial meeting with the Nazi officers would include Johan so that he could observe him and gauge his mental condition. When a man was under extreme mental stress there were many signs. Sweating, rapid eye movement, nervous tics, excessive clearing of the throat, nervous trembling of the hands, and so on. A good look at Johan might help him decide whether it would be necessary to kill him or not.

At 0800 sharp, his cell door swung open. A guard grabbed him by the arm and dragged him into the hallway. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of Johan being subjected to the same treatment. They were quick-marched down a long hallway to an office door at the end. One guard stepped forward and opened the door then pushed Johan through the entrance. Sevvay followed him. It was a richly decorated office with handsome furniture. On

the wall behind the commandant's desk was a full sized oil painting of Adolf Hitler. Seated at the desk was Reichskommissar Terboven, the iron ruler of Norway. He had on an elaborate Nazi uniform consisting of a black military jacket, brown trousers and brown boots. Flanking him on one side were two army generals in traditional gray uniforms with the wide red stripe down the trousers to signify their rank. On the other side were two officers of the Waffen SS, all in black with silver striping on the lapels and epaulets. They wore the hated swastika armband displaying the ugly symbol in black against a blood-red background.

To the side of the desk was a forest of movie cameras and microphones with about twenty men attending to the equipment. So it's to be a big splash propaganda event, Sevvie thought to himself without surprise. Two American soldiers captured in northern Norway was a new phenomenon. He glanced sideways at Johan who was standing next to him. Only tight lines at the corners of his mouth bore evidence of inner turmoil.. That's to be expected I guess, Sevvie thought.

Two wooden chairs were brought out for the prisoners. One guard nodded his head toward the seats for them to sit down. Cameras were studying them from every angle since

they were in uniforms rarely seen by Europeans living in countries outside of the combat zones.

The room was quiet, except for the whirring and snapping sounds of cameras. One of the generals was the first to break the silence.

“I noticed, Sergeant that you are wearing a shoulder patch of the First Division also known as the big red one. I’m quite familiar with your division beginning in North Africa, and lately in Italy. Solid fighting men as I remember it. Are you still attached to the First Division?”

Sevvy’s reply was instantaneous as he clearly gave his name, rank and army serial number. Then he stopped.

Behind him and to his left a voice spoke out.

“Herr General, anyone can steal an army uniform. These two men are Norwegians it shows in their appearance. I say these are two spies from the Linge group and they should be treated as spies and enemies of the Third Reich.”

Sevvy turned his head slightly and saw a man in a black suit and black tie sitting in a luxurious arm chair in the corner puffing on a cigar. Good morning Gestapo, he thought. I knew there was a stinking smell in here.

When asked for his identity, Johan also gave only the ID stipulated under the Geneva Convention. Terboven said,

“We are making some inquiries about you two men. If

you are American soldiers you will be treated as military prisoners of war, If not you will be executed along with your mother and father in Narvik who will die for harboring enemies of the Third Reich. I will not tolerate this cowardly resistance. For this reason ten men yet to be selected in the town of Narvik will be shot with you.”

Then he stood up abruptly and left the room with his officers following behind him.

Josef Terboven, commonly called the “iron fist,” ruled Norway by fear, intimidation, torture and executions. Sometimes brutal treatment was meted out to Norwegian women and children to drive home the point that they were under his rule. Retaliations of this kind came in the form of severe beatings, destruction of their homes and quiet executions performed deep in the woods behind the Falstad Concentration Camp. The bodies were then buried at the place of the execution in a common pit dug in the ground.

His absolute power in Norway had come about by applying pressure on Quisling the so-called prime minister and the puppet parliament. Quisling had been reduced to a mere token of a prime minister. Terboven compromised every public institution in Norway by having them infiltrated by agents under his command belonging to the

Nasjonal Samling, the Norwegian Nazi Party. Nazi methods of controlling Germany were just as effective in Norway. On every street in every town there were neighbors spying on neighbors. Norwegian Nazis found their way into leadership positions everywhere in churches, schools, hospitals and even the transportation system.

But Terboven took his orders only from Adolf Hitler. The fate of the two American soldiers would wait for word from Berlin. In the meantime he gave orders for continuous interrogation of the prisoners. Possibly one would break and solve his problem for him

Sevvy was never with Johan during the questioning. He was roused out of his cell at any hour of the day or night and hustled into a room with several chairs and a wooden table in the center. If there had been any cameras in the room it could have been mistaken for a movie set because of the forest of floodlights of all kinds standing around. Blinding hot white light would be focused on him as his interrogators stood back in the shadows firing a constant never-ending stream of questions.

His head would begin to throb after two hours or so of this treatment. But all he ever uttered during these sessions was his name rank and serial number. Often the Gestapo

worked in teams so the questioning went on for fourteen hours straight. Lights beating down on him harsh voices screaming at him and the excruciating thirst! He was never allowed any water to drink until a session was completed.

At the end of fourteen hours his tongue was stuck to his mouth as if it were held there with glue. His answers became a series of croaks out of his dry throat. He was seriously concerned about Johan. Was he holding up all right? Did his fellow-prisoner have the iron will and stoic attitude necessary to hold up under the pressure the way he was doing?

Only one time was Sevvv struck by a Gestapo agent, a sweaty, pig-faced man whose eyes revealed his sadistic excitement. After tripping over Sevvv's foot as he sat in a chair Pigface used this accident as an excuse to viciously backhand him so hard that he tumbled to the floor. As the agent came at him as he lay there two Gestapo agents intervened, pinning Pigface's arms behind him. The leader of the group got in close to him screaming,

"Dumbkopf! You know our orders come from the Fuehrer himself to treat these men as military prisoners of war! I should shoot you myself right now! Get this idiot out of my sight ! Lock him up in a cell and I will deal with him later!"

But before he was dragged out of the room, he bent over the prisoner to snarl some insult at him and Sevvvy promptly spat bloody saliva into his eyes. Pigface was squealing with rage as he was quick-marched out of the room.

Sevvvy felt his physical strength ebbing away from the endless hours of interrogation, dehydration and extremely poor nutrition. Now he was barely sleeping at all as he worked frantically on a plan of escape from his cell. He realized he had better act soon or he would be too weak to do anything.

If he reached a state of complete exhaustion he would never escape from the Nazis. He would be more likely to die from having his life-force bled out of him. Starvation, lack of sleep and the many hours of questioning would inevitably kill him. He had vital work to do, he thought feverishly, and he had to know whether or not Johan had been broken.

Mike sprang into action the moment he learned of the capture. He insisted on sending a message to Colonel Smith to alert him to the dangerous situation caused by this event. Both prisoners had important information about the coming invasion of Norway at the beginning of May. Johan didn't know about the helicopters; however, he had been briefed

on the mission itself and the invasion to follow. Along with the warning to SHAEF, Mike also asked for the colonel's orders regarding the prisoners. Were they to live or to be killed?

It took two days at sea on the fishing boat before Colonel Smith's orders were received in army code. Mike dreaded the possible orders about the prisoners. When he deciphered the message he was relieved to find that his warning was acknowledged by SHAEF. On the other matter he was surprised by an order to have a meeting with Milorg's general and the British SOE as soon as possible to plan an escape for the prisoners. But the message ended with an order to kill them if there was any doubt whether they had leaked vital information.

Captain Neilssen was advised to contact Milorg headquarters to set up a meeting as soon as possible regarding the rescue of Mike's men. Milorg responded immediately since they had already been alerted by Neilssen several days before. They had been waiting for Mike to contact them. He was informed they would meet in the evening at sea.

At seven o'clock a sub-chaser appeared out of the blackness of the night. Mike and the Milorg officers on the surveying team were transferred to the other boat and were

immediately led below deck to the crew galley area. Seated at the largest table in the room were several Milorg officers and two British SOE officers. There were introductions and the meeting began.

General Rhue began and for the convenience of his guests he spoke in English.

“We began monitoring the capture of your men as soon as we received word. Organization of a plan of action focused on the Falstad Concentration Camp right away. We are well acquainted with the Nazis and their thinking. At Falstad radio equipment is being set up for the prisoners to be publicly introduced to Reichskommissar Terboven and his gang. Their goal is to gain as much notoriety as possible over the capture of American soldiers.”

“To date, our informants inside Falstad have reported they have been treated as military prisoners of war. But with Terboven ruling the country their status could change from war prisoners to spies in an instant. If his Gestapo thugs have trouble pressuring your men into providing information about their mission then he will go to any lengths to break them.

“Don't be misled by the term 'prisoners of war' it means nothing to Terboven. Hitler must have ordered it for propaganda purposes since American soldiers being

captured in Norway is an oddity. Hitler is no better than Terboven if it becomes expedient to expose them as spies in order to justify executing them the Fuehrer will reverse his course. Your men are being interrogated day and night for many hours. They hope that at least one of them will break from exhaustion, starvation and dehydration. Most men's resistance is broken after two or three days of this treatment."

As the general explained the plight of his men, Mike felt he was getting confirmation of a real danger. He was sure Sevvu wouldn't reveal anything and if his situation became bad enough he would commit suicide rather than give the Nazis any help.

Johan was Mike's main concern. He knew very little about him except the information the other 99th Battalion officer, Captain Jens Ericssen, had provided. It was somewhat comforting to find out Ericssen was a close companion of Johan's.

He told Mike, "He is tough minded like all the men of the 99th. We have been training for three years to be an elite unit. We were trained in commando tactics, in mountain warfare and as ski troops. Our training also included psychological warfare and learning about the treatment we could expect from the Gestapo if we were

captured. I think Johan would rather die than give the Nazis any information. He's very much like your sergeant."

His assurances relieved some of Mike's doubts but in war you depended only on actions not words. It was best to stay on guard.

The meeting began with an overview of the Falstad Concentration Camp. It was a large prison camp holding political prisoners, citizens arrested for espionage, or sabotage, and many prominent Norwegians who had done nothing. They were Terboven's pawns in his game of iron rule. If there was a raid on a production plant of serious proportions by Linge or Milorg, he would announce the names of the Norwegian men of wealth and influence who would be executed. Although resistance activities continued executions or not, Terboven was effective to some degree in curbing the violence Milorg was willing to undertake.

No one had forgotten the Trondheim atrocity in October of 1942. Two German police officers had been killed in Majavatn, a village in northern Norway. Terboven was furious over Norwegian resistance and widespread civil disobedience. He used this incident as an excuse to begin executing citizens. By the time the slaughter was completed

thirty-four Norwegians had been executed and their names posted all over town as a warning to others to stay in line.

Milorg for those past atrocities and many others was reluctant to stage an all-out assault on Falstad to free the Americans and the other prisoners. Knowing the Reichskommissar as well as they did, they feared a retaliation of unheard of proportions. As it was, executions often happened to innocent people who had done nothing. This made them reluctant even to entertain such a notion as a full-force attack.

After the initial discussion of the situation, Mike asked for the room to be cleared of all officers except for General Rhue and the British SOE representatives. When all of the others had left, Mike said to them,

“One of two things has to happen where those prisoners are concerned. They both have information about the attack on Narvik as well as the impending invasion. One of them, Sergeant Severinsen has top secret information about this offensive which is known to only ten men in the entire army. I needed to tell you this in private so that as few men as possible know there is a top secret involved in the invasion.

“My purpose in giving you this background information is to impress on you the absolute necessity that these two

prisoners be either freed or killed. If our action fails and they remain in the prison we will be forced to kill them. And even if neither of them has told the Gestapo anything. SHAEF can't take any chances and I have my orders regarding what is to be done about them. I wanted you to know this before any escape plan is formulated."

The two British agents became pensive thinking about Mike's rather startling news. It changed their perception regarding the urgency of rescuing the prisoners. The general looked grave but his expression didn't change.

By dawn the escape plan was finished to the last detail based on Mike's explanation of how high the stakes were in rescuing the prisoners. Whereas in the original plan only one team had been proposed in the revised plan there would be three teams of five men each entering the camp.

A new feature was the addition of a large Milorg support group in hiding outside of the camp ready to move in if necessary. No one wanted a firefight. Entrance into Falstad Concentration Camp was simple for Milorg since some of the men in their army worked in the camp.

One of the officers in the meeting, Colonel Rassmussen, stood up and protested,

"I don't understand why we are making such a sacrifice

for two American soldiers! What about our own people imprisoned there? We know this raid will cause severe repercussions with the Nazis. It will be just the pretext Terboven needs to execute some more Norwegians. It is too great a sacrifice for two men. I don't agree with this plan at all. My unit is supposed to be engaged in the escape but I request a replacement unit on the grounds of my protest. I want no part of this!"

General Rhue told the colonel to sit down.

"For vital reasons I am not at liberty to reveal to you, those two men are worth a great deal of sacrifice. However, I will honor your request to withdraw from the raid and replace your unit with Colonel Johnsen's group."

He nodded to Colonel Johnsen to take Rassmussen's place at the table. The meeting continued without the dissenter.

At 2200 Milorg began to move into position around Falstad. The breakout was scheduled to go off at 2300 in order to allow time for the three inside groups to get into position to free the prisoners. Sevvy was unaware of the escape plan to be executed that night. He had figured out his own escape from his cell. It was very risky and if it failed he would probably be killed. So there was only one chance to get away since he hadn't been able to plan an

alternative. His area in which he was confined was too small to allow many ways of escape.

He knew the exact patrol routine of the guards in his section of the prison. Every night he listened at the door for footsteps. Even though he was without a watch he could still guess the time by the changing of the guards each night. Probably ten-thirty he figured. Sevvv wanted to wait for the change since the relief guard taking the late shift was probably an older man who would be easier to overpower physically. He had never seen the guards being in an isolation cell. He listened at the door to hear voices and footsteps forming pictures in his mind. He was ready.

Sevvv crabbed his way up to the ceiling near the ventilation opening. He braced himself up against the ceiling by using one arm and both his legs like some sort of giant spider. It was physically difficult to hold the position. Using the wooden splinter he had found earlier he scraped the metal bars of the vent as vigorously as he could. With any luck the noise would be loud enough for the guard to hear if he was within a hundred paces of the cell.

Holding this position, his muscles were beginning to tire. Pains like fire began to shoot through his arms. Then he heard the guard slide open the iron bolt of the cell door. Having no flashlight, he had to enter the room to see the

prisoner. Sevvvy waited until the guard had come all the way into the cell. Then he leaped onto the German's back like a falling anchor. Quick as a cat he wrapped his left arm around the man's chest from behind and with his right hand grabbed the man's hair and viciously yanked his head laterally down to his shoulder. Sevvvy heard the guard's neck snap, and then let go of the lifeless body.

The guard had been armed with a machine pistol. Sevvvy took it and peered out to check the hallway. No one was out there. Pressing tightly to the wall, he inched his way down to the cell where Johan was confined. He had come to a decision. Like it or not he was going to kill Johan before he escaped.

He slid the iron bolt back and opened the cell door. Johan was at the back of the cell standing against the wall. Sevvvy had his wooden splinter hidden in his hand. He intended to stick it into Johan's neck and rip open his carotid artery. If he managed it successfully death would follow in seconds.

For some reason, Johan didn't move toward him as he had expected but remained standing where he was. Advancing toward him holding the finger of one hand to his lips as a sign for Johan to remain silent, Sevvvy began to raise his other hand. Suddenly he was grabbed from behind

and a powerful forearm gripped his neck. Two men were holding his arms behind him. It was a shock for he had been certain there was only one guard on duty.

He had been right though. One of the men holding Sevvy whispered to him, "Relax Sergeant you're among friends. We're Milorg we came to get you out of here. Just follow us and stay close we know this prison by heart since two of us work here."

Cautiously the man loosened his grip on Sevvy's throat, hoping his explanation of the safe place he was in would keep him calm. Sevvy knowing that all of this was the major's doing didn't fight back.

They needed to get past three buildings to reach the rendezvous point where the barbed wire fence had been cut. Seven men crouched low and the Milorg officer in the group took the point. Crawling in some places making short dashes in others they successfully cleared two of the buildings. The third building was the most dangerous since it was nearest the perimeter fence. Here, floodlights played back and forth over the grounds.

Gathered at a corner of the building they worked out their timing to make the dash of twenty yards to the opening in the fence. They would go two at a time the

officer would be last and make the run by himself. The blackout interval when the searchlights were off the fence lasted thirty seconds. It could be done. There was absolutely no margin for error a stumble or a fall meant your life.

Johan was selected to go first with a young soldier for protection. Johan and Sevvv were undernourished and dehydrated from their days in confinement. Sevvv had nearly depleted the last reserves of his adrenaline in the killing of the Nazi guard. Their physical strength was diminished to such a degree any physical exertion would be difficult. Sevvv was in the second group paired off with another tough Milorg soldier. They would be carried out if it came to that.

With everyone set the lieutenant timed the lights with his watch then tapped Johan on the shoulder. The very second the blackout began Johan and the soldier took off across the twenty-yard gap between the fence and the building. Johan stumbled briefly near the fence but his companion grabbed him by the arm and catapulted him through the hole in the fence. With the lights coming from two sides toward them, they disappeared a second or so before the area was illuminated. One group was safe,

The remaining five men each made a mental note of the slight depression in the ground which had caused Johan to stumble. Sevvv and the other soldier were next to make the dash for freedom. They were off as soon as the blackout began. They made it across the gap in less time than the first group because of the toughness of both men.

One of the runners in the third pair deviated from the path by only six inches to his right. It was enough to make him trip over a rock and send him sprawling. His slide took him into the path of one of the searchlights leaving a long black shadow in the bright light.

As he stood up to run on he was cut down by a burst of machine gun fire from one of the towers. Immediately sirens went off in the camp. His partner never had a chance to get to the fence he too was cut down.

The lieutenant was trapped in his hiding place by the building. Then came the sound of vehicles headed for the area. At that point the Milorg unit hidden in the woods shot out all of the searchlights in the area. The officer wasted no time sprinting across the twenty yards to the safety of the woods. Milorg was covering the area as the five remaining men were hustled into a truck for the ride out of the Falstad Concentration Camp.

Milorg now tried to withdraw from the area as well. But the Nazis were coming up too fast to allow them a clean getaway. A fierce firefight erupted in the woods as Nazi soldiers entered the area. Milorg soldiers fought from tree to tree slowly withdrawing. Near a sunken road they reformed their line. The sound of the gunfire combined with the explosions of hand grenades reached a deafening roar. Thinking they were defeating the Norwegians the Nazis pressed ahead toward the road..

Then Milorg sent up a red flare. A soldier hidden in the trees twisted the handle on a detonator and the ground in front of the Nazis was torn apart by tremendous explosions. There were screams and shouts as many of the Nazis were blown apart.

Those who had not been hit directly by the blast were killed by the rain of rocks and debris generated by the explosions. Others were simply buried by broken tree trunks and dirt. There were only twenty Nazi survivors who were summarily shot by a Milorg squad before they pulled back to the sunken road..

There was no celebration over the success of the mission. Instead every one of the participants worried about the retaliation Terboven would launch. They wondered

what the price would be in terms of the number of executions for this defiance of the Nazis by Norwegian rebels. They had been badly humiliated by the escape of the American soldiers and then the crushing defeat suffered in a firefight. It was by far a more serious incident than the killing of the German police officers in Majavatn. The incident was minor in comparison to a raid on the prison. However thirty-four people were executed..

Chapter Thirty Eight

At midnight the Americans boarded a fishing vessel. It sailed without running lights close to the shore for several hours before heading out into the open sea. They were headed back to northern Norway and the Milorg station on the fjord where they had originally landed. A doctor was waiting to examine the two prisoners for any ailments they might have contracted from their arduous ordeal at Falstad.

Mike received a message from Colonel Smith delivered to him by the sub-chaser from Scotland affectionately dubbed the Shetland Bus. It was a long and detailed order sent in code. He was to remain in Norway as the American officer in command of the helicopter assault to take place on May 5. Two days were then allowed for the preparation of the main beachhead north of Trondheim by the assault force attacking from Norvik and Milorg troops moving in from the south. The objective was to provide an invasion site free of enemy resistance.

Milorg operating in the south would carry out their sabotage of Nazi coastal defenses on May 5 in coordination with the airborne attack in northern Norway. They were counting on confusing the Nazis for the two days needed to

secure the beachhead. All thirty-four thousand Milorg troops would be fighting around Trondheim while the ten thousand Allied forces held the line above the town.

Sevvy and the two 99th Battalion officers were to return to England to brief SHAEF with a detailed report of the intelligence information gathered by the surveying team. Then they would return to the 99th which had landed in England the week before. Sevvy was assigned to them as a scout for the coming invasion.

The forthcoming invasion of Norway had taken on a more urgent significance since the Germans had developed the jet bombers. Norway was being used to launch the air attacks presently laying waste to the American East Coast. It was a small country but important geographically for it was the country nearest the North Pole in Nazi hands. It provided access to the shortest route to the North American continent which could be reached by flying over the top of the world.

Heinkel jet bombers made the round trip with ease; however, this was possible only from Norway. For without the air bases there America would have been out of range of the bombers. The problem was the limited fuel capacity of the bombers which ruled out missions to America from

countries further south.

Along the east coast shipyards and other vital industries. were being seriously crippled by the bombing raids. .America needed to keep its industries producing military supplies. Plans for another invasion in southern France had been scrapped in favor of a much larger invasion in Scandinavia to deprive the Nazis of their ability to reach America with their jet bombers.

By the middle of April the English Channel was once more becoming crowded with ships in ports scattered up and down the coast. These were disbursed to prevent mass sinkings by the Mark XXI which was designed for coastal waters. It was incredibly maneuverable and fast. Elaborate mine fields in the Channel were only a partial deterrent. Mark XII submarines had the speed to travel underwater and keep up with allied vessels sailing in the Channel. Staying close behind the ships they entered harbors safely. Once inside they swiftly attacked enemy ships and then disappeared into deep waters to wait for their next target.

Throughout England army divisions and equipment were on the move to the embarkation areas. Along the west coast in the Irish Sea six aircraft carriers lay at anchor carrying

fifty helicopters each and the crews who would fly the birds into Norway. The trained soldiers to be transported in them would be moved across England to the west coast. They would head north from there passing the coast of Scotland en route to the assault.

On May 3, loading of the airborne troops began in a piecemeal fashion. One aircraft carrier at a time was loaded after which it would slip out alone hugging the English coast. By May 4, the six aircraft carriers had all been loaded and were heading north. Once they had rendezvoused off the tip of Scotland, they bore down on northern Norway at full speed. By dawn on May 5 the carrier squadron lay at anchor ten miles north of Narvik.

At dawn the first ten helicopters from each carrier took off from the flight decks and headed swiftly for the coast only two miles away. Immediately the next ten were brought up to the flight decks and launched. There was now a steady hum of huge propellers cutting through the air over the ocean. It was an inspiring sight to watch the first sixty helicopters flying low over the water before climbing in unison one hundred feet to clear the coastline.

Mike and the Milorg soldiers assigned to him had been working hard since May 3 to mark the landing areas for the

helicopters. They were using hundreds of smudge pots filled with oil to mark the areas because the light they gave off was dim. They were hard to spot at ground level but helicopters coming in several hundred feet off the ground could see them clearly.

The last of the pots were ignited only an hour before the first wave was due to come in for a landing. Then they heard the strange whirring sound of helicopter props beating the air as they approached. Mike thought he would be prepared for their arrival since he had ridden in one. It was a new experience completely to watch sixty of them appear over a small slope and come in to the landing area. Several of the Milorg soldiers had run away frightened by these bizarre things without wings landing near them.

The doors of the aircraft were pushed open and the troops inside dismounted in perfect order then broke off into small units. Officers headed for their pre-determined rendezvous points closely followed by their units. They were headed toward the coast north of Narvik. As soon as the helicopters were empty they took off for the carriers to bring in the next group of soldiers..

Mike was everywhere, making certain his men were at their stations to keep the pots burning for the next wave coming in. Then faintly in the distance from the direction

of Narvik they heard distant explosions as Milorg troops made their assault on the town. Airborne troops would soon be joining the fight. When Narvik was taken the combined commands would move down the coastline to Trondheim.

By early afternoon the helicopter landings were completed. Ten thousand fighting men trained to a fine edge and led by the 99th Battalion of Norwegian soldiers moved to the coast above Narvik. When the airborne troops arrived at the edge of town, Milorg officers came out to meet them.

A coordinated attack was launched in the afternoon quickly overwhelming the German infantry. Milorg took possession of the town. Time was of the essence now. Both forces had been trained for months to secure and defend the selected beachhead area where the main invasion force would come ashore on May 7. They moved south along the coast wiping out small pockets of German soldiers along the way as they advanced on Trondheim.

By the evening of May 5, a foothold was established on the coast where the allied forces would land on May 7. Trondheim was five miles south of them and they could hear firing off in the distance it was the main army of Milorg assaulting the town. At dawn the American airborne troops would move on Trondheim from the north pinning

the Germans between two fighting forces.

The airborne assault had been a smashing success catching the Nazis by surprise. At present the German army was in a state of confusion. Linge commandos and Milorg special squads had wreaked havoc on German coastal defenses on May 3 and 4. While their attention had been focused on the sabotage the main Milorg army had moved along the coast headed north to capture Trondheim. On May 5 the attacks began in Trondheim. To add to the confusion a message came in from Narvik about an American army division being landed in northern Norway and driving south.

Although the Nazis had an army of four hundred thousand men in the country they were of little use until they were given orders. By the evening of May 5 one hundred thousand German soldiers were on their way north to fight for Trondheim. The rest of the army was widely dispersed along the coast in anticipation of an invasion force.

Berman reinforcements for Trondheim arrived too late for them to retain control of the city. It had fallen into the hands of the Milorg army late in the morning of May 6 after a coordinated assault from the south and the north.

Caught in a trap, the German garrison in Trondheim surrendered to the allies. Milorg was alerted to the advance of the large German contingent on its way to fight.

American airborne troops went north of the city to protect the beachhead which would be used the following day by the allied invasion force. Milorg dug in around Trondheim ready to take on the Wehrmacht advancing toward the city.

As soon as Mike's assignment at the helicopter landing area was completed he went south with a Linge group to join up with the helicopter division. Colonel Smith had given him the choice of staying with the aircraft carriers at sea to wait for the arrival of the invasion forces, or joining in with the airborne troops who were holding the beach.

It really hadn't been necessary to give Mike a choice; of course he would be in the thick of the battle. It was now bred into him as a veteran to fight the enemy whenever he was needed. However he had another motive which was quite different from combat instinct.

He had a wild emotional urge to revenge the officers with whom he had served and who had been killed from North Africa to Anzio. If he survived to bring their "short snorters" to Berlin, he would make a list of all the combat

areas where he had fought to get there. This would be his own memorial to his fallen brothers.

May 7 was a sunny day with only a slight breeze. Near the coast loomed a large convoy heading for the open beach area north of Trondheim. It was a strange invasion in a way. There were no artillery barrages from the navy battle ships since there was no opposition on the beaches. Landing craft circled around to rendezvous, then headed for the shore as a coordinated unit. In all there were six landing zones on the coast. In each of the zones landing craft arrived simultaneously and the troops hit the beach running forward to secure the beachhead for the waves of soldiers coming in after them.

The landing was nearly completed when the first squadron of German jet fighters arrived to attack the convoy and the troops on the beach. Coming in over the convoy from the opposite direction were waves of allied fighters determined to take on the German Luftwaffe. Within an hour the area began to bear all the marks of a serious invasion. Heavy smoke rolled in from exploding rockets shot from German jets, bombs dropping and the return fire from the navy battleships.

Without any opposition to stop them, the army moved inland while tanks, artillery and flamethrower vehicles were being unloaded on the beach. Nearly one hundred thousand Allied troops had been successfully landed in Norway without opposition in less than a day. Tomorrow would see the invading force assembled and advancing south to engage the German army.

News of the invasion came in to Wehrmacht headquarters and orders were quickly issued for the disposition of troops to fight the allies. On May 8 came the first major clash of the armies south of Trondheim. German resistance was stiffening as the day of fighting wore on.

On May 9, the airborne division was assembled and shipped back to the aircraft carriers to begin the next phase of their assignment. Army commanders from the allied forces came aboard a carrier to lay plans for the use of the helicopter assault troops in the battle for Norway. Two hundred fifty helicopters and their troops were assigned to a number of divisions to be used for surprise strikes behind German lines.

A special unit of fifty helicopters, was given the important mission of attacking the Heinkel jet bomber bases and destroying the aircraft. It was a dangerous

assignment undertaken as a desperate effort to stop the bombing of America. In all, there were three air bases to be taken. The Allies assumed the Germans would have the bases heavily guarded by Waffen SS troops who were known to fight to the last man for the Führer.

A plan was formulated for a coordinated assault on the air bases. Allied fighter squadrons would attack the jet bomber bases just prior to the helicopter landings. Linge had helped plan the raid on the airbases because of their knowledge of the area. When they had been informed of the planned assault by members of Milorg the Linge commandos volunteered to stand in support. They would be raiding German defense positions in coordination with the helicopter assaults.

It was a solid offensive plan, but fortunately, it was never to be carried out. On May 10 with the battle of Norway in full swing, the Luftwaffe took action. All of the Heinkel jet bombers were flown out of Norway to bases in Denmark to avoid the loss of their valuable aircraft. It was still a victory of sorts since the jet bombers had been moved out of range of reaching America.

Probably the toughest resistance to the invasion came at sea. A large part of the German fleet was stationed in ports

around the coast of Norway. One of the largest sea battles in the North Atlantic raged for nearly a week. The Nazis had been unable to stop the invading army but they did some heavy damage to the allied fleet. They sank two aircraft carriers, three cruisers and a number of destroyers.

On the allied side they sank the last of the Bismark class battleships and put ten cruisers out of commission as well as a number of smaller craft. Then the allied fleet commenced to destroy all of the submarine docks along the North Sea coast. This was perhaps the most significant part of the victory at sea since these bases supported the super submarines operating in the North Atlantic.

It was certain that the fighting in Norway would last at least for two to three months. The large German army outnumbered the Allied forces and were now well entrenched in the defensive lines they had been constructing for five years. A stalemate somewhat like the one on the Valkyrie line in Europe was developing.

On a larger scale it was one more front the Germans had to defend in the SHAEF battle plan named "Operation Noose." The allies now had the Germans engaged in every direction in Europe. They intended to put the enemy in a stranglehold utilizing one important advantage and that was

the number of armies the allies could muster onto the battlefronts. Germany was limited in the number of men it had available to fight the allies.

Meanwhile the Nazis were trying to stop the ships from America bringing in vital supplies. All means to destroy the merchant ships were in full swing. Russia was almost entirely dependent on the allied merchant fleet to bring in the supplies needed to continue the war against Germany.

To supply the Russian army the merchant marine ships were forced to navigate the most storm-ridden area of the North Sea within the Arctic Circle. They had to run a gauntlet of Nazi attacks from the Luftwaffe, submarine fleets and war ships in addition to losing ships sunk by storms. Some convoys reached Murmansk with less than 50 % of the ships that left from the ports in Iceland.

Continued submarine success at sea could choke off needed supplies to the point where allied fighting strength would become ineffectual. If they successfully stopped needed supplies the Wermacht would eventually crush the allied armies.

PART IV

STALEMATE

Chapter Thirty Nine

Mike's mission in Norway was over when the six aircraft carriers carrying three hundred helicopters and the ten thousand airborne troops left Norway bound for Italy. The mobility and assault experience they had gained in the engagement in Norway would have a major impact on the fighting along the Valkyrie Line. The morale of the Allied army in combat there would be lifted when they learned about this new kind of warfare.

Mike arrived in London aboard a cargo plane carrying military personnel to England then returning to Norway with medical supplies. He went directly to his unit to report in to Colonel Smith. After a two-hour wait he was brought to the colonel's office for a debriefing session. When he had finished Smith told Mike in his serious and formal manner that he had earned a commendation from SHAEF for his excellent handling of the helicopter training program. He told Mike he had merited special mention for

his activities in Norway, This was high praise indeed from an officer who rarely commended anyone because in his opinion, “you are to complete an assignment as ordered, in a manner the army has every right to expect from its officers.”

In the outer office, Mike was stopped by Colonel Smith’s aide and handed a new set of orders. He was to report for duty in five days’ time. He was grateful for the leave, because his old wounds had been bothering him for several weeks and he was exhausted. When he arrived at the flat, he took a shower, then dropped onto his bed.

It seemed he had the flat to himself for now. Sam hadn’t shown up since his return. This didn’t bother Mike unduly; he merely assumed that Sam was with one of his many girlfriends. He contacted Barnes to let him know he was back in London. They had dinner in the evening at Burnes’ residence.

With an effort to keep his voice casual, Mike asked
“So, whatever happened to the black market investigation I told you about?”

“It was turned over to one of our men in the Provost Martial office. There has been some action but I don’t have all the details yet about how big the operation is.”

Barnes' answer wasn't very illuminating but he didn't want to press the matter.

Barnes offered Mike the use of his cottage in southern England during his leave and he decided to accept the offer. The idea of being removed from the constant explosions and emergency sirens in London naturally had great appeal for him. He left the following morning in an army lorry headed for the southern area of England. In the village near Barnes' cottage he received directions.

He was somewhat surprised when he arrived. Since Barnes was a wealthy man he had expected something rather grand. The cottage was set back from the road in a grove of trees and surrounded by informal gardens which provided beauty and privacy. From the front of the house it appeared to be smaller than it really was. Actually it was a long structure with three levels leading to a large terrace. Barnes provided his cook and the housekeeper to take care of the cottage and Mike during his stay..

During his time in the country he wrote a long report on his assignment in Norway. Writing it took up most of his time when he wasn't hiking in the countryside. He had almost forgotten what peace and tranquility felt like. It made him long for an end to this bitter war in Europe.

Mike had been back in London for two weeks when a captain from SHAEF showed up at his unit to see him. A non com pointed him out to the officer,

“Major Canyon, I have been sent here to bring you to see Congressman Bullock.”

This came as a surprise since Barnes hadn't mentioned anything about Bull coming to England. The captain drove him to an officers' club near SHAEF headquarters. Bull grinned when he saw him and promptly introduced Mike to the other committee members.

“This is one of our club boys from New York. We're going to get caught up on some personal stuff.”

Bull started his breakfast with a brandy. Mike declined.

Then Bull got down to business.

“Has Barnes told you how we're doing in Washington?”

“He's mentioned some things,” Mike replied, “I know you're an important man in Washington these days.”

“That's an understatement! We've got everyone by the short hairs,” said Bull snorting. “Those so-called party leaders didn't know what hit them. We play one group against another. One group is promised a big reward for their cooperation. Then we leak it to other groups there's a deal about to be made. And then we sit back and watch the

sharks go after one another. It's a hell of a show!

"Right now our boys are working in every important function of the government. We miss nothing of importance in DC. We don't go looking for any publicity. Our people are never mentioned in the newspapers or on the radio. Other people in the public eye take the heat."

Mike was startled to hear how far Joe Stanton and his political machine had penetrated into the power structure in Washington. He had mixed emotions about their success. On the one hand this cynical undermining of the democratic process disturbed him. It sounded like totalitarianism. But another side of him was impressed with the expert political moves they had pulled off.

Bull looked intently at Mike, and said,

"Joe is grateful for your contributions to the party. This black market thing,"—and here he broke off for a moment, looking around to assure himself he couldn't be overheard—"is the biggest scandal yet. We'll make some real progress in military government with this one."

Mike was anxious to know what had been done,

"Where do things stand with the people involved?"

"It's the reason I wanted to see you, to fill you in on the

situation. Our men in the Provost Martial office set up surveillance on all of the warehouses in London with the help of the CID. Sure enough within a few days goods began to move out of several warehouses near the Thames River in small lots. The people who were picking up the stuff were all civilians.

"They were followed around the city for several days as they made their deliveries. Penicillin and sulfa went to a number of civilian doctors. Most of the morphine was in the small glass vials used by combat medics. It was delivered to night clubs including the social club your pal Sam belongs to."

"It took several weeks for the delivery boys to lead us to the bosses of the operation. The authorities waited another week to be sure all of the members of the group had been identified. Then the CID quietly arrested everyone simultaneously so no one could be tipped off and escape."

Bull, suddenly looking rather nervous. He paused to sip his coffee. Mike tried his best to be patient but after sitting quietly for a few minutes, he finally said,

"Please go on."

The politician looked at him with sad eyes.

"When we found out who the top people running the operation were it was a real surprise to everyone. I'm afraid

your pal Sam was one of the key people. In fact he was the original Army contact for the London criminal gang marketing the stolen goods.”

Mike felt sick inside. He was deeply shocked.

“The reason he belonged to the social club was to make contact with the civilian members.”

And now Bull appeared to be in real misery. Full of apprehension, Mike asked him,

“What’s wrong? Who else at the club was involved.”

With a heavy sigh, Bull replied,

“Four politicians and your friend Rachel.”

Mike’s head reeled at the mention of Rachel’s name.

“Are you sure?”

“No doubt about it. She made several deliveries of morphine to the club herself. the CID confirmed it.”

Wishing he was anywhere else but here with Mike, Bull continued.

"And her close associate Johnny Cabot is dead. When the police moved in on them he and several of his gang tried to fight their way out. They were all killed. It seems Johnny was the top man in the operation.”

Mike wasn’t surprised to hear this about Cabot but he was full of concern for his lover.

“Is Rachel all right?” he asked urgently.

“She’s in custody at Scotland Yard. Now listen Mike, you can’t afford to be seen with her right now. Lots of people knew about your affair with her. If you show up to see her, you could become a suspect too. Then add your close friendship with Sam.

“And ,oh yeah, Charlie Morgan was the inside supply contact and you are buddies with him too. You are on thin ice until the CID is satisfied you’re clean. After they have been tried and convicted you can see them then. If you still want to, that is.”

Mike felt as if the earth had opened and he was being swallowed up. Bull asked him if he wanted a brandy. He nodded. His head was swimming and he couldn’t think. Bull put a hand on his shoulder and said softly,

“I know it must hurt a lot to learn people you trusted are criminals.”

Mike didn’t respond to his attempt to comfort him. He was staring into space. For a time, they sat in complete silence.

Finally Bull stood up to leave.

“Is there anything I can do to help you?”

Mike snapped out of his miserable reverie. He shook his head, and asked,

“What about Charlie?”

“The C.I.D. agents went to him first since he was the commanding officer of the supply depot. Charlie knew he couldn’t explain his part in the operation so he offered to cooperate. Right now he’s free because our men intervened. He’s willing to help the army all the way but he knows eventually he will be tried and convicted. If he makes good on his promise to help our people will let him off with a dishonorable discharge. He won’t serve any prison time. We’ll let him out quietly.”

“But I don’t understand how he got into this mess in the first place!”

“I read the transcript of the confession he signed for the C.I.D.,” explained Bull. “It was all about his beautiful young dancer and the exciting life they were leading together. He was sucked into the deal because her manager who Charlie was paying to keep her was one of Johnny Cabot’s men. His girlfriend was high maintenance and she started demanding more from him than he could afford.”

“Once he agreed to work with them on one deal they knew they had him. From then on he was forced to do what he was told. It’s sad to see a man like Charlie indulging his sexual fantasies and developing an obsession for a young beauty. I guess it was kind of a last teenage hurrah of an

aging man. What a pity. Well, I've got to get going Mike. If you need me for anything, get in touch with Barnes."

As Bull walked away, Mike was torn by mixed emotions. In a way because he had been the one to inform the authorities about the black market drug operation he felt partly responsible. Two men were ruined he thought were his friends, as well as Rachel who had supposedly been his lover. On the other hand they had been fully aware of the risks they were taking. If he hadn't stumbled upon the deal someone else would have discovered the operation eventually.

His feelings didn't end there. He was deeply hurt. They had used him as an innocent dupe. Brief flashes of anger seared his mind. After all he was a combat veteran with an admirable record and respected in military circles. Ideal for a bunch like this to latch onto as a screen of respectability for themselves. So maybe he was the one who was betrayed.

His thoughts about these three people turned cold. Cynically he thought I must be more careful of the company I choose in the future. He convinced himself Rachel had been laughing at him the whole time they together. But then what could you expect from a whore?

When he finished work he closed the flat settled the rent bill and moved into the officers' quarters near his office. He sent a corporal and two GIs to pick up his things at the flat. Sam's items were left with the rental office. He closed this chapter in his life firmly and fast. He never went to the private club again.

At an officers' club Mike attended he had adopted a routine each night of: a few drinks at the bar, dinner, an after-dinner drink with some of the officers, then to bed. Tonight began in this manner until he ran into Barbara at the bar. He hadn't seen her in nearly three months and she appeared to be genuinely glad to see him,

"How are you Mike? You look a bit strained. Are your injuries bothering you again?"

"No, just tired from work. Let me buy you a drink."

They sat at a table. He told her a little about his mission in Norway. He left out all the violent and ugly things he had seen and experienced himself. Instead he described the incredible beauty of northern Norway and the heroism of the Norwegians he had worked with.

Barbara looked at him closely.

"How's your beautiful girlfriend? Rachel, isn't it?"

Mike became uncomfortable at the mention of her name.

“Well, I haven’t seen her lately. I suppose she’s fine.”

Barbara was startled by his evasive answer,

“That’s a pretty casual remark for a man who was head over heels in love a short time ago.”

Mike flushed. He was wishing she would drop the subject. To force a change he asked her,

“What’s going on with you? Still at the hospital?”

“Busier than ever. They never stop coming all those casualties. It’s hard to keep your head at times.”

“I can imagine. I’m one of the guys who sends them out to get maimed.”

“Why don’t you have dinner with us?”

she asked him, changing the subject in her turn.

“I’m meeting a couple of girlfriends and their dates. You can be my date.”

Rather relieved at the thought of having some company, Mike accepted her invitation.

After dinner Barbara asked Mike to take a short walk with her. London was quiet at the moment but it was liable to change at any moment. The Nazis continued launching two hundred V-1 rockets every day and at least twenty of the silent killers the V-2 rockets.

Barbara broke the silence as they strolled along.

“I sense a deep sadness in you,” she said seriously. “It’s none of my business but I’d be glad to listen if you want to talk. It sounds pushy but then you know me pretty well.”

“There are just a few things I’m working through,” he explained. “I’ll be okay. I know your offer was sincerely meant. Thanks anyway.”

“I have to go, Mike. Thank you for joining me for dinner. For once we didn’t fight. It’s progress I guess.” She smile and turned to leave, then turned back.

“By the way, what happened to the social club you were visiting so often with your buddy, Sam?”

“I haven’t been there for months. I don’t have any idea what’s going on.”

“A bunch of us went there a few weeks ago. There was a police order posted on the door stating that the premises were now under police control. I thought you might know something about it.”

Mike shrugged. “I haven’t heard anything. Must be serious if the police have locked it up.”

Although he knew the closure he needed with the black market operation, he couldn’t tell her. The CID had a lid on it for now. Barbara left with her girlfriends after telling

Mike to call her sometime if he wanted to go out to dinner. Out of politeness he promised he would but he wasn't really planning to contact her. Socializing wasn't high on his list of priorities right now. Still, he liked her. She was easy to be around.

He was at work when the corporal who was assigned to him came into his office.

“Major, have you seen today’s newspaper?”

“No. What’s up?”

“Your friend Colonel Morgan is a front page story. There’s a bizarre picture along with the story.”

“What do you mean, bizarre?” he asked sharply.

The corporal handed him the newspaper, and Mike had to admit it was bizarre alright. There was a large photograph on the front page showing Charlie huddling with some young girl at the head of a bed. Obviously nude they had hastily covered themselves with a blanket. At the foot of the bed was an unexploded V-1 rocket. There was a gaping hole in the ceiling over the bed where the rocket had crashed through into the flat.

The accompanying article stated the rocket was still intact and armed. It went on to say by a fluke, the rocket

had crashed into the building and failed to explode. It trapped the couple in the bed. The rocket had destroyed the floor surrounding the bed. Only the space occupied by the bed had remained intact so the two of them were, so to speak, suspended in midair on the small ledge.

It went on to say the bomb squad didn't dare move the occupants of the bed for fear of detonating the rocket in the process. They were attempting to move men up from the floor below to disarm the bomb. As he finished the article Mike thought the situation would have been hilarious if the circumstances hadn't been so deadly. Charlie and a nude young girl exposed to all of London with nowhere to hide.

In spite of his hurt feelings over Charlie's involvement in the black market ring, Mike felt sad for him. This fiasco had occurred in addition to all of his other troubles. Mike kept busy at his office trying not to think about Charlie's predicament.

Late in the afternoon, a fellow officer stopped by his office and said,

"Colonel Morgan is your friend I believe."

"Yes he is. What's happened? Did the bomb go off?"

"The V-1 rocket exploded when the bomb squad tried to defuse it. Morgan, the girl and several members of the bomb squad were killed. I'm sorry, Mike."

Alone again in his office he felt a sense of loss. He had truly liked Charlie in spite of his sexual obsessions. He thought to himself it was in some strange way a blessing. His family had been spared the terrible disgrace of an army officer receiving a dishonorable discharge. Unexpectedly, Charlie's death also removed the mental block he had been consciously maintaining. Trying not think about the loss of three people he had thought of as close friends.

He realized his feelings for these people couldn't be silenced so easily. Injured pride surged through him when he thought about what a sucker he had been for them. Fighting against these feelings, he struggled for a balanced outlook. Certainly the criminal acts he would never fully comprehend, but what had driven Charlie to compromise himself was the easiest to understand.

Thoughts of Rachel were naturally the most painful. Despite her many warnings about her ambition to become a wealthy woman he had stubbornly passed it off. Too young to know what she really wanted. He had convinced himself she would change under the influence of his values. What a fool he'd been! Even after she had told him the truth he had refused to accept it. With the folly of rationalization he had tried to change reality to suit his own unattainable desires.

He forced himself to review their love affair. Rachel's words about the nature of their relationship came back to him. She'd told him what they had was a wild, passionate fling not meant to last—and of course she'd been right. He realized his pursuit of her and the presents he lavished on her were the acts of an infatuated schoolboy. He had been captivated by the woman's beauty not by the woman herself.

As uncomfortable as it was to admit this to himself her sensuality and her beauty were at the root of his desire for her. Then he remembered the times when he had been repulsed by her cold, cynical attitudes and the methods she had used to get her own way. It was like coming out of a long dream. He saw the reality of the affair more clearly now. It would require some time to reach a final conclusion.

Sam was a different matter altogether. He was sure Sam had used him to provide a smokescreen for his black market activities. With the exception of Rachel, he was never around any of the other players in the racketeering. Mike could understand now why Sam had always been so insistent about coming with him to the private club. It was all for the sake of appearances so he could show everyone

he was chummy with a respected officer decorated for bravery and commended for his leadership of the men in his command. What a perfect setup!

Mike felt nothing but loathing for this profiteering officer who stole medical supplies meant for the medics in combat areas. In his eyes, Sam was a traitor to his country and a disgrace to the uniform he wore. As far as Mike was concerned any sentence he received at his court martial couldn't be severe enough.

Meanwhile, Hitler had stepped up the rocket attacks on England and America to coincide with another of his threatening speeches to the free world. Again he made his offer to meet the allies for a negotiated surrender. He appealed to the civilians of the free world to rebel against their leaders and demand an end to the useless slaughter of their sons ad nauseum.

At the height of the rocket attacks in London word came in to Colonel Smith's command about a terrible disaster. A large allied military hospital area had been hit by two V-2 rockets. He was ordered to organize his unit to help with the evacuation of patients from the damaged buildings. Army trucks arrived to pick up the men,. A convoy was soon weaving its way toward the disaster area.

Streets near the hospital had been cleared of vehicles and pedestrians by the London police. When the convoy neared the area policemen waved them through the road blocks. A block away from the hospital the convoy halted. London firemen could be seen working desperately to contain the many fires set off by the rocket explosions. A fire captain met Colonel Smith at the head of the convoy.

They held a hurried conference and the men were ordered to dismount from the trucks. Medical personnel came over to brief the soldiers on the situation. Their job would be to search for survivors as the firemen worked ahead of them clearing away the wreckage in the damaged areas. They moved out on command to follow the firemen. The scene in front of them was terrible.

Much of the huge hospital complex had been destroyed by the two missiles. There were fires everywhere. Medical personnel were moving patients out of the wreckage dangerously close to roaring fires. A doctor moved over to Colonel Smith's command. They were broken up into working squads and moved to an assigned area of the hospital buildings.

When Mike and his men arrived at their assigned area, nurses put them to work immediately as stretcher-bearers. They moved the wounded to an emergency field hospital a

block away from the disaster scene. To Mike it looked like a combat area. There were already rows of corpses covered with blankets near the emergency tents. Army bulldozers and tractors came on the scene with the army corps of engineers to clear away the debris.

It was impossible to hear anyone talk above the roar of trucks, sirens, yelling men and the screams of the patients who were still trapped in the burning buildings. Heavy smoke obscured what little visibility there was on an already gloomy day.

At the outset Mike was everywhere directing his men as the nurses passed on their orders to him. He would have liked to be pitching in with the stretchers but the head nurse insisted he stay right there and lead his men. She was right of course. He was also somewhat relieved that he didn't have to strain his injured back carrying the wounded out of the area.

There were several thousand wounded soldiers housed at the hospital which made searching the buildings a huge task. No one stopped for anything; everywhere people were in motion. They were fighting against time, since it was impossible to contain all of the fires in the buildings. Patients still in the wreckage would be burned to death if they arrived too late.

Mike lost all track of time in the frantic pace of the search.

Blackout regulations did not apply in this situation. When it became dark, searchlights were erected at the scene so the rescue squads could work through the night. Near midnight all of the fires were finally extinguished and the firemen joined the rest of the rescuers evacuating patients.

Some time the following morning the search for survivors was over. Mike and his men were led to a large mess tent. Too weary to talk they gratefully consumed coffee and field rations. After chow the lieutenant in his group, who was sitting next to Mike having a smoke, said to him,

“Major, this is worse than anything I ever saw in combat. I mean, I never saw so many injured men before. I wonder how many of them survived.”

Long hours he had spent on his feet climbing around in the wreckage, took their toll on Mike's body and his old wounds were acting up badly. His pain was beginning to consume him, so it was a while before he answered the lieutenant.

“The only thing I saw in combat that came remotely close to this mess was at Kasserine Pass in North Africa. This is definitely worse. I could sure use a drink.”

Someone laid a hand on his shoulder.

“I might be able to oblige the major and you boys too. I have some medicinal brandy here. I’ve been ordered to dispense it to you.”

Mike turned and found himself staring at Barbara.

“Hello Mike. I guess you had as rough a night as the rest of us.”

Then she handed him a generous amount of brandy.

“I was wondering if you were all right,” he told her.

“I knew you worked at this hospital.”

“I was lucky. I was off duty at my quarters. I just happened to be several blocks away when the rockets hit.”

He could see that her face was strained. She had the exhausted look people have who are dangerously close to being drained of their entire supply of energy.

“Sit here for a bit Barbara. I can tell you’ve had a tough time of it too. I’ve seen soldiers after a long period in combat looking exactly like you do right now. You ought to lie down.”

Instead, she leaned in against him and put her head on his shoulder. He passed her his glass of brandy, still half full. She said, “I lost many friends in one day. Only four of my group survived. The rest of them were all working in the center section; it took a direct hit from one of the

rockets. There was nothing left to search for.”

Mike looked at her with deep compassion.

Then Barbara stood up and said to the group,

“There are cots set up for you in the tent over there about ten yards away. You men are to rest until later this morning, the trucks can’t move into this area right now so get some sleep.”

As she was walking away, Mike said to her,

“When things settle down again, why don't you contact me when you're free and I'll take you to dinner?”

“It's a date, Mike. I'll call you.”

She left the table and made her way over to another group of soldiers.

News of the V-2 rocket attack and the lives lost at the military hospital in London naturally made an impact on the American people. There many families who lost loved ones in the tragedy. When a famous band leader was announced as one of the people killed in the rocket attack, there was a wave of outrage and sorrow in America. He and his band had been entertaining the wounded soldiers at the hospital when the V-2s hit.

The majority of Americans, living in relatively safe conditions hadn't paid much attention to the daily suffering

of the English. Theyr were losing lives and homes every day (in fact, it is estimated Nazi air raids destroyed one million homes in London alone).

But the loss of a popular idol on a summer day on the grounds of a military hospital; was a shock. It vividly laid bare the cruel reality of the war in Europe and into the consciousness of the American people.

Far away from the daily menace Americans tried to make sense of the V-2 rocket attacks. They grappled with the concept of a missile travelling faster than the speed of sound with the same confusion as the Londoners. Victims were already blown apart before the sound of the weapon was heard. Death, in the form of the V-2, came streaking to earth unseen and unheard by the victims.

V-1 rockets, though just as deadly, did not strike the same chord of terror in the people. There were warnings as sirens went off giving some direction where the V-1's were located. When you were close enough to the flight path, you could hear the deep buzzing noise of the rocket engine. This was followed by a terrifying silence when it went into its glide to earth.

Although America was now being attacked by the V-3 rockets there were far fewer of them than the daily

saturation bombing in London. A national icon being killed by a Nazi rocket brought a deeper understanding of the terrible loss of lives and property going on in England.

The Nazis had created a new age of push-button warfare. The invention of rocket engines to carry explosives had permanently changed everything. Impersonal killing, far removed from the area being destroyed, was the new weapon. Ground warfare would never be fought again from fortified fixed emplacements. Instead, mobility, rockets of all kinds, and jet aircraft were the new reality. Here was the edge the Nazis had been counting on to win the war. Now they had one more year, at least, to bring all of the new weapons to full strength. It was the specter haunting Allied army commanders. It would take years to catch up.

Chapter Forty

Several weeks after their chance encounter at the hospital, Barbara called and announced,

“I’m free for dinner tonight if your offer is still good.”

“Of course it is! I’ll Pick you up at eight.”

Mike was forced to drive slowly through the streets on his way to pick up Barbara. Headlights on the jeep he was driving were blacked out except for a small slit at the bottom of the headlights giving off about as much illumination as a pen light. Moreover, new detours around bombed out streets created daily by Nazi rockets had to be navigated carefully in the city.

She was waiting on the street for him. As Mike opened the door of the jeep for her, she said,

“Don’t you love a date who’s ready on time?”

“Very unusual, You’re supposed to be late so you don’t appear to be too eager.”

“I don’t like those games. I’m happy to see you.”

They had dinner at an officers club near SHAEF headquarters. As they sat down at a table Barbara commented,

"This is my first night out in over a month. I really

needed a break away from the suffering around me.”

“You look recovered from the hospital ordeal.”

“Outwardly I suppose I do but I haven't entirely recovered inside, Mike. It was terrible attending a memorial service for the friends I lost. It had to be a memorial with a bronze plaque naming those who perished in the direct hit. The explosions were so bad, there were no remains to bury. Oh hey, get me a drink will you?”

Later on the dance floor Mike held her close. He caught the scent of her perfume. He was reminded of the night they had been trapped together in the air raid.

“Your perfume brings back the night under the bar, he told her. “It’s the same scent, I can tell. It seems like a long time ago.”

“I was thinking about it too. We seem to be fated to cross each other’s paths. What do you think?”

“I’ve wondered about it. They have been pleasant encounters for me for the most part.”

“Why thank you, Mike! Are you giving me a compliment””

Mike grinned sheepishly,

“Yes I am,” he admitted. “I know I've been rude to you at times but I'll work on my attitude.”

Over coffee, they had a long talk. She asked him,

“Have you seen the beautiful English girl since I saw you at the officers' club with my friends?”

“No. Something happened a short time ago.”

He knew his answer was vague, but he was hesitant to elaborate on his painful experiences. Barbara sensed the quick cover up so she changed the subject to her family and their lives in America.

After she had finished her narrative, Barbara sat in silence. Mike suddenly had a strong urge to confide in her. Seeing his inner struggle, she said,

“I’m sorry if I hit a raw nerve, Mike. Believe me, I wasn’t trying to pry into your private life.”

“It's alright, Barbara. I know you weren’t prying. I want to tell you about Rachel—with your permission, of course.”

She didn't object, so Mike spent the next hour telling Barbara everything about his relationship with Rachel. His confidences included the black market arrests. He swore her to secrecy since the military hadn’t made the affair public yet. He omitted the reason why it was being kept a secret. It would mean revealing his involvement with the politicians who were holding back on a public announcement. They were waiting for the right moment to get the most political mileage possible out of the arrests.

Barbara made no comment as he talked. She could feel the deep hurt inside of him. When he finished speaking she looked at him with a rueful smile.

“I’m not smiling because I’m amused. Your story brought back some memories of my own passionate fling, which completely changed my perception of myself as a woman. Since you have been so open with me, I’d like to share a little of me with you.”

Mike looked surprised at her frankness. She caught the look and gave him a mischievous smile.

“When I was nineteen, my life was a well-planned affair. I was in college, training daily for swimming competitions and travelling all over the country to swim meets. There was no time for a private life; in fact, I didn’t imagine I needed anything more in my life. I had my goals. To me, they were far more important than a relationship. At the time, I thought socializing would interfere with my athletic career. I avoided any close associations at college. Only my coach was close to me in any way, but it was only because we were working together.

She paused to look at Mike inquiringly. With a nod, he encouraged her to continue.

“In the summer of my junior year in college, I was

entered in the National Women's swim competitions. I was way up there in the rankings by then and it was like living in a fish bowl. Reporters were always after me for interviews and my coach was there to push my training, and on and on it went. My years of steel self-discipline carried me through the swim competitions. I placed second against the best swimmers in the country,

“I didn’t know I was paying a high price for my iron will. At the awards banquet I collapsed at the table. I came to in the hospital and the diagnosis was nervous exhaustion. The attending physician was a handsome man in his thirties. When I was discharged from the hospital he insisted I come to his office for consultation.

“At his office, he reviewed my case with me. You know about the swimming training, studies at college and my personal life. When he asked me about my social life, I didn't have anything to tell him. Then he grinned and said, “You’re an iron maiden.”

“I resented his remark and told him so. He only smiled at me and said, “I don’t see any time here for a beautiful young woman to have fun. You’ve probably never done a spontaneous thing in your whole life.’

“His impression of me made me angry and I snapped back at him, “I’m not an empty-headed pretty face, if that’s

what you mean!”

“No,” he said, 'it's not what I mean at all. I mean doing something—anything—just for the hell of it, like college kids do.'

“Oh, the partying college bunch! They're only wasting their parents' money raising hell in school. I don't see any meaning or purpose in their lifestyle at all.'

“The infuriating doctor kept on smiling at me. “But there is a purpose to fun. It allows you to get in touch with yourself. Don't you see?”

“No I don't.” I said. “Can I go now?”

Then the doctor grabbed me and gave me my first really passionate kiss. I was shocked at my reaction. I kissed him back with passion of my own. It was very unsettling.

“We made wild love right there in his office. It was spontaneous, natural and beautiful. It was fantastic. I was a virgin then. I had been out with boys before but it had been nothing like this hunger. Jim was a married man. He didn't try to hide the truth nor did he apologize for making love to me. We had a crazy, all-consuming, short-lived affair like your episode with Rachel. Funny thing he warned me about the nature of our relationship just as Rachel had warned you.

“I too thought I was deeply in love. So naturally I was devastated when he broke it off. But after a few months of agonizing over it I could see he was right. I was free from Jim but I was free in a much bigger way too. I knew myself. These changes made me into a feeling, vulnerable human being. I shudder to think of what I would have become otherwise.

They were silent for a time, relaxing and drinking coffee. Barbara finally spoke up.

“I haven’t shocked you, have I, Mike?”

“Oh no, Barbara. I thank you for telling me your personal story. You expressed my feelings with Rachel exactly. It’s nice to know I’m not unique.”

Sharing intimate details of their lives created a bond between Barbara and Mike. This was one more incident born out of proximity which would never have happened except in a time of war. In peace time this rich society girl would likely never have crossed paths with this middle class working man.

The Norway invasion had pushed the French invasion back in favor of depriving the Nazis of their access to the North Atlantic. Denying them airfields from which to launch the Heinkel jet bombers was of equal importance.

At present the jet bombers were kept on airfields in Denmark which was substantially further away from America than Norway. Adding fuel capacity to extend the bomber's range was a major challenge for the Nazis. Whatever the solution it would take precious time to solve the problem of adding a great deal of weight to the air frame without disturbing the aircraft's design.

Allied aeronautical engineers estimated it would take Germany at least six months to complete the modifications needed to be made in order to increase the amount of fuel the bombers could carry. Solving the problem meant the Heinkel bombers would resume their bombing missions on American cities from the air bases in Denmark.

In Europe a new offensive plan was formed. They would launch the first helicopter attack on a strong point in the German defense line. If successful it would drive a deep wedge into the Valkyrie Line. It would provide the allies with a jumping-off point to circumvent the deadly five-mile strip of barren land. It was now referred to as the "Dead Zone" by the allied army.

The helicopters flew in low, passing swiftly across the Dead Zone and landing several miles to the rear of the German defenses. Waves of allied fighter planes flew in to

provide air protection for the invading force and to attack German positions. Then a tremendous artillery barrage began hammering at the Valkyrie line. After over an hour of barrages the infantry and tanks headed for the Dead Zone.

Before the German defenders could fire on the oncoming army they found themselves being attacked from the rear by the helicopter assault teams. Attacking forces took advantage of the enemy's confusion and began rolling up German strong points. Defenders who chose to fight the Allies were subjected to the new flamethrower vehicles. After six hours of battle, British and American troops occupied twenty miles of the Valkyrie line.

Reinforcements and artillery were quickly moved in to secure the area. A German counterattack was defeated by the harassment from the airborne troops in their rear and waves of allied planes providing air cover. These air sorties were carried out by low flying medium bombers. Nazi jet fighter pilots found it difficult to shoot them down because they flew at treetop level.

After a week of bitter fighting, the allies controlled the section of the breached lines and the territory thirty miles to the rear of the position. But the German army had

successfully blocked the allies from moving their troops through the breach. The main result of the offensive undertaken with new weapons was to negate some of the advantage the Germans still held. More attacks on the enemy's defenses would be made to make more cracks in the Valkyrie line.

The Allies had gained an important offensive tactic with the use of helicopters for hit and run attacks. Here was the beginning of the cavalry in the sky which belonged exclusively to the Allies. Three hundred helicopters massed on a mission had produced great results. America would soon be sending more helicopters to the European theatre.

Near the end of June Barnes contacted Mike to inform him Joe Landon would arrive in London the following day. He went on to tell Mike he wanted to meet with him.

“What about? To give me news from home?”

“I think it’s more than that. You are to meet him at my home. He’s very pleased with the work you did to uncover the black market operation. I’m sure he wants to show his appreciation. The other reason he is coming over has to do with making arrangements to oversee preparation of the media announcement regarding the black market ring.”

Mike met with Joe Landon at Barnes' home. Joe's face lit up when he saw him. Grinning, he said,

"You look as lean as ever but tougher."

Mike was pleased to see him as well. Joe looked about the same to him. His gray hair and blue eyes in the deceptively gentle face hadn't changed at all. Mike moved to shake his hand but Joe stepped passed the outstretched hand and embraced him.

"Barnes has arranged lunch for us here so we could have some privacy. Help yourself to a drink."

When they were seated at the table to eat lunch Joe said,

"Give me a run-down on how you're doing."

"It would be boring. The army keeps me busy."

"It's what the taxpayers expect of you. I want to know how you are. Are you okay about the divorce?"

"Oh yes. It didn't take me too long to see the marriage never had a chance of working out. Thank you for handling the divorce the way you did. You made things pretty painless."

"Glad to do it. I'm happy you're over her. Tell me about this black market thing. Barnes told me there was a girl involved you're pretty crazy about."

Mike did most of the talking. Joe was quite obviously using his best attorney training to ask the right questions.

Mike didn't mind because he trusted Joe. So he opened up to him about the black market ring and the involvement of the three people he had been very close with. Joe could easily see through his attempt to hide his true feelings about their criminal activities. Mike spoke quickly with a casual off hand manner as if he was untouched by the betrayal of people he cared about.

Joe looked at him, then said thoughtfully,

"There will be more experiences in your life like this one. Don't be surprised when it happens. You're dealing with people who have their own motives and weaknesses. Take a long view Mike and know there are no hard and fast rules in human relationships. I'm telling you the truth about life. Change is the only thing in life you can count on for sure."

"You've matured Mike. You're no longer the young man I knew in New York. You've shown what you're made of in the last three years. And you've also told me what I needed to know."

Mike was a little puzzled by the last remark,

"You're like a son to me and you're certainly my good friend. I want you to be my partner and eventually my successor in politics in New York. There will be a lot of

things I'll need to teach you. Your first step toward the future is your promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. You're being transferred to Washington DC to work with the Army planning staff. It will give you an opportunity to become familiar with the leaders, and rest assured, they will get to know you too.

"This war will be over soon—don't ask me how I know—and this move will give you an excellent military background. You know, decorated war hero, an experienced military staff planner and so forth. You will become familiar with the military administration in DC and how it functions. It will all come in handy in politics."

Mike was stunned and he was looking doubtful. Joe saw the expression on his face, and asked, "What's wrong?"

"I want to finish my work here first. It's an important job, at least it is to me."

"Believe me, Mike, this war will be over soon, even though it might not look like it at the moment. Don't lose sight of your future. A replacement can be found."

His tone of voice almost sounded like a command.

There was silence at the lunch table for a few minutes. Joe ended it by saying,.

"I'm asking you to make your decision now. It's a big one. As my political partner, you could become the most

powerful man in America. I'll teach you all I know. I want to groom you to succeed me. It's important for me to know if we're a team or not."

Still Mike hesitated. Joe asked him,

"Something else is bothering you? What's the deal?"

"I have always appreciated everything you've done for me over the years. You set me up in business. I've always had you there to give me advice when I needed help. I'm sure we'll continue to do business when the war is over. But I don't understand politics and the political changes you and your bunch have made bother me a little."

"Oh? In what way?"

"Well, the set up Bull described to me-----to be very honest with you, I think it smacks of totalitarianism."

Mike was afraid he had incurred his protector's wrath with this forthright assessment, but Joe merely gave him a brief, mildly amused grin.

"Mike, what our party has done is no different than what any political group has ever tried to do in America. I know you are politically a little, shall we say, naive. So just let me explain. There has always been a central power bloc in our government with a few men calling the shots.

"A careful study would show you how Congress is operated by an informal coalition of middle-of-the-road

politicians from both parties. In other words on important issues both parties vote together. We can't control the process and we don't want to. What we have accomplished recently is just a shift in the power structure. You'll learn how things work if you come in with me and become wealthy in the process."

Mike stood up. He walked over to the window next to the fireplace. Each pane of glass had tape applied to it in an X-shaped pattern. If there was an explosion the panes would break. The tape prevented the glass from shattering into shards and flying inward to wound the occupants. There wasn't a window in London without the familiar X.

Mike looked at the back garden and the profusion of flowers blooming in the summer air. He listened to the far-off sound of anti-aircraft fire aimed at V-1 rockets flying into the city bent on destruction. It gave one a strange feeling. Nature's rhythms went on no matter what men might be doing to destroy each other. It was a dichotomy Mike had felt off and on throughout his time in war-torn Europe.

While he was taking a break to think Joe was digging into his brief case for a large folder. Finding it, he stood up and handed it to Mike.

“This folder contains your divorce papers and current reports on your business.”

“Thanks, Joe. It’s hard to tell you how grateful I am for your help with everything in New York while I was ducking bullets.”

“You can show your gratitude by accepting my offer. We would make a hell of a team. In ten years as partners there is no telling how far we could go. Don’t blow this opportunity, Mike. It won’t come around again.”

He knew Joe meant what he said about his offer. He would never ask him again. So it was now or never. In spite of his objections the picture Joe had painted for him was exciting. Once more he felt enthusiastic about a career as Joe's partner in national politics. It helped erase his doubts.

“Okay Joe, I’ll accept your offer on one condition. I stay in London long enough to complete the project assigned to me. It’s important and it’s a big secret. I can’t explain it to you. Trying to bring in another officer to replace me could set the mission off schedule by at least two weeks. We really don’t have two weeks to spare. ”

“How about the end of July? Will that do it?”

“Make it the end of August and it’s a deal.”

“Well hell, okay, I’ll go along with you.”

When he was alone again, Mike thought about their meeting. He had made a major commitment to Joe about his future. It was a little overwhelming but pleasant to imagine his prospects. He had been around the inner workings of politics for a long time so he was aware of the large price tag on the kind of power Joe was planning for him. Mike knew about the excesses inherent in political power that needed to be avoided. The enemies he would naturally acquire was also a part of the price.

Then his mind turned to his father, who would certainly disapprove of his decision to become Landon's protégé'. He felt sad about the gap growing up between them over his business choices. Moreover, several years of separation had brought out his love for his father. He thought maybe their separation had made his father see how unimportant their disagreements really were to their relationship. Mike could only hope so.

When the black market announcement was made and the story had been publicized, it was greeted with outrage by the public. Scotland Yard and the American military government received lavish praise for their work on the case. Barnes made sure Mike came out as the hero of the entire affair. Of course, the hero himself found all the

publicity embarrassing. At a news conference he tried to explain how Sevvv and the other enlisted men had done most of the leg work. These protestations did him no good they were taken for modesty.

In London, Mike had a new frustration to confront, the hero status he had attained for his work on uncovering the black market operation. First, the City of London bestowed a citizen's medal on him in a lavish ceremony. Then the British Army gave him a medal. Finally he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel by the American army.

He found the whole business supremely annoying so much so that he remarked to a fellow officer,

“You'd think we'd captured Hitler. This is downright embarrassing.”

Grinning, the officer said to Mike,

“Remember, this is good for Anglo-American relations. Some jobs are tougher than others, like having good press and putting up with the admiration of all of those sweet English girls.”

There was one thing in particular in all of this that bothered him. All of the officers in his unit had offered congratulations for stopping a serious drain on critical medical supplies, with the exception of Colonel Smith, who

had made no comment to him. Mike wondered how he felt about it but never managed to find an opening to bring up the subject at his brief and infrequent meetings with the Colonel. So he was left in the dark and the silence was uncomfortable. It was an unsettling situation.

Chapter Forty One

In Europe the armies continued to probe for an opening to defeat their enemy. Offensives were smaller in scale now probing for the weak spots. German armour was a serious threat to the Allies given the enemy's speed and ability to disappear in the labyrinth of the Valkyrie Line. Now in the middle of summer, the Nazis stepped up their offensive, never allowing the Allies to make further inroads after the success of the first helicopter assaults. In response to the helicopter threat the Luftwaffe kept a constant air presence over the Russian and American fronts. Production of jet fighters was now in full swing and once again they owned the skies over Europe.

Hitler was promising to attack America with a new class of rocket, the V-4. He claimed this new weapon could reach any point on the planet from Europe. Its explosive power was said to be three times greater than that of the V-3's now falling on America. His harangues always went on to pledge a complete destruction of America. And as usual, he said his patience was becoming thin. The Allies had better surrender now before he made a wasteland of the free world.

This news of a more potent rocket was unnerving. If as Hitler claimed, the V-4 really existed in sufficient numbers, it could give the Germans enough power to cripple the American defence industries. Such a reality would inevitably result in a Nazi victory.

Almost complete allied dependence on America for supplies was an uncomfortable truth. The current shipping crisis caused by the Nazi super submarines was bad enough, but a super rocket capable of reaching any destination in North America was a chilling concept. It would mean the West Coast of America could come under rocket attacks too.

There were many attempts to sabotage Nazi rocket production but so far none of them had been successful. Production facilities had been housed underground since August 1943 when allied bombers destroyed the above ground rocket manufacturing complex. Now their facilities were impervious to bombing. Moreover, they were too well guarded by SS troops to be vulnerable to sabotage.

Then there was the problem of attempting to locate and destroy Nazi rocket launching sites. It was impossible to harm the launching operations because they were mobile. The Wehrmacht had created a new branch of their army

called the "rocket troops" who were highly trained to handle the rocket launchings. Each unit was comprised of 30 special vehicles to transport the rockets and all of the needed equipment to set up and tear down a launching site in a matter of hours. Most of the rocket launchings came from heavily wooded areas making it impossible to detect the missiles.

The underground rocket production facilities called the "Dora Complex" were located near the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. It consisted of two huge tunnels where the rockets were assembled, and a number of side tunnels being used to move the rocket components into position.

About 12,000 slave workers assembled the V-1,V-2 and V-3 rockets underground. With typical Nazi efficiency to maintain production to a known standard, engineers calculated it required 12,400 man hours to build a V-2 rocket and 800 man hours to build a V-1 rocket.

It was a mad realm, completely under the control of the SS who kept up the production output of the slave workers. Their methods of persuading the workers to work faster were beatings of the slower workers. Hanging for those causing any kind of interruption to the constantly

moving assembly lines in the tunnels. Only the demands of the Third Reich meant anything to the SS troops. The miserable, starving denizens of this hell often worked below bodies hanging over their heads on steel beams. They were left there as an " incentive " to keep up with the required work.

There were quarters for the 12,000 workers at the Dora Complex and rocket production operated on a 24 hour basis. Two 12 hour shifts were used and the merciless tempo claimed the lives of an estimated 12,000 workers from starvation, malnutrition, murder, exhaustion and diseases. It was an evil hell hole devoid of any human emotion on the part of the hated SS troops.

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In America a Home Guard army had been created similar to the one in England. It was comprised of the young and the old, as well as disabled veterans. They took their training very seriously believing they could be defending American soil in the future. Outdated ideas of an isolated America immune from foreign wars were being quickly dissipated by the reality of the reach of global military weapons to anywhere in the world.

Without the comfortable safety net of vast oceans to insulate them from being directly attacked and invaded,

America was much less naive about the reality of world events. In the military it was a universal belief that if the Allies were ultimately to win the war, only a major blunder by the German army would keep it from dragging on for several more years or and possibly even longer.

Finally Mike was summoned to Colonel Smith's office. After the military formalities, the colonel pushed some papers across the desk.

"Here are the new orders detaching you from SHAEF. You are to be transferred to the army training staff in Washington DC and you have been promoted to lieutenant colonel."

It was a flat statement of fact without any of the usual congratulations and compliments. Mike was puzzled. He read the orders through quickly and sat there expectantly, waiting for his superior officer to say something further. But there was nothing except an awkward silence.

Finally Mike said to the Colonel,

"These orders give me thirty days to report for duty in Washington. Is there anything you want me to do before I make travel plans to the States?"

"No major," he replied, deliberately addressing him by his old rank rather than his new one.

“The unit is functioning fine. Your command has been taken over by Captain Blaine. You will note in those orders that you must obtain a medical release before you leave England. Please make arrangements to be examined as early as possible.”

Mike was uncomfortable now. Colonel Smith had always been the formal, regular army type of officer but his demeanor went beyond formality. His manner was visibly col. It had reached a level that Mike could no longer ignore or explain away. He had never liked the colonel but he had respected him and thought it was mutual. But now he wasn't so sure. He could not recall any assignments he had messed up. So on an impulse, he said,

“It has been a privilege to serve in your command, Colonel Smith. I hope my service has been satisfactory.”

From the look in the colonel's eyes, Mike's words had sparked anger. “Your handling of the training assignments has been excellent. As far as your other activities here are concerned, I will say that your conduct has been reprehensible.”

His words stung like a whip.

“Sir, what have I done to make you so angry?”

“Your handling of the undercover work on the black

marketing of military supplies involving army personnel was self aggrandizing and amateurish, You deliberately ignored the proper chain of command.

"I have thought seriously and carefully about bringing charges against you for your court martial. You have been spared only because the English public has made a hero out of you. I can't risk adversely affecting Anglo-American relations. It is clear to me busting you down in rank would do more harm than good."

Mike reeled from the colonel's vehement attack on his conduct. He couldn't see in what way his actions had been wrong. "Sir," he replied, "The circumstances were most unusual. What do you think I should have done in the situation?"

"This matter was clearly in my jurisdiction. As your commanding officer, I should have been told immediately of any suspicions you had about an officer in my command. As it turns out, my own aide was a major figure in the black market ring. Yet you left me in the dark without any warning of his suspected connection with the criminal operation. You had no right to suppress the information while you and Sergeant Severinsen played amateur detective. You have violated several rules of official

conduct by aborting the chain of command. And all court martial offenses, I might add.”

“But sir, I had no way of knowing for sure who was involved in the black market operation. There were suspicions but I felt the less others knew about the information the better the chance we had of investigating without tipping off the people involved.”

“In your judgment Major, was your commanding officer included in your suspicions?”

“Well, no sir, but since your aide was suspected, I was afraid he would overhear something if I informed you of our discovery.”

Colonel Smith stared at him with contempt.

“You reserve officers have no respect for the Army. It was perfectly clear you had a duty to inform your commanding officer, who in turn, would have alerted the Provost Martial. It is their job to investigate criminal activities in the army. In contradiction to your duty as an officer you took personal charge of the investigation without any official sanction for your acts.

“Then you turned over your findings to some political friend of yours, who has used the incident to further his political aims. Does that sound to you like the actions of a

responsible Army officer? No sir! They are the actions of a man who is interested in furthering his own selfish objectives and those of his political friends. And you wonder why I want to court martial you?”

The Colonel's mention of his political friends made Mike uncomfortable. At first he had wondered how the Colonel knew about his political ties, but then he realized he was a career regular army officer. There was no telling what his connections might be in Washington. Mike made a move to stand up, thinking their conversation was at an end. But the Colonel motioned for him to stay seated. Oh man, Mike thought, there's more!

The Colonel continued.

“I'm sure you are naively unaware of the damage you have caused to the careers of a number of people.”

“I don't know what you mean, sir.”

“Twenty officers have been discredited by your actions. The repercussions of this scandal caused a major shake up in the Military Police and the Provost Martial office. I'm a career officer and the indictment of my aide has cast a shadow on my own military record. Instead of a promotion to brigadier general and command of a combat division, I have been ordered back to the States. I'm being assigned to a minor command on the West Coast. This incident will

never be forgotten by my superiors. There is now very little chance of further advancement for me in the Army.”

Mike became angry and defensive now. It sounded as if the Colonel was blaming him for everything that had happened as a result of the scandal. He said,

“I thought the West Point Honor Code included reporting any cheating or misconduct at the Academy even if it involves your best friend. To be frank with you, sir, I didn’t know who to trust with the information I had discovered. Clearly, the Army code you were taught has no exceptions when it comes to wrongdoing. Why was I supposed to tell you about my suspicions involving your aide when I did not have any concrete proof? As I said, I had no idea who to trust.”

“The West Point Honor Code hardly applies here. I was your commanding officer and it was your duty to bring the affair to my attention for handling through the proper channels. You civilians in the Army have careless disregard for military rules and you believe they can be ignored when it pleases you. The Army doesn’t operate that way, major. Whether you agree or not, the rules must be followed or there wouldn’t be any Army. That is all, major.”

Mike knew he had made a powerful enemy. It hadn't occurred to him that his actions had caused a chain of repercussions touching the lives of a number of Army officers. He was paying his first price for party loyalty.

As ordered, Mike reported to the military hospital for his final physical examination prior to his release from the European Theatre of Operations. He was resigned to the certainty of spending a day or so in the hospital as the medical staff ran tests and probed at his body. And they didn't disappoint him. There were many long hours of waiting at one laboratory or another with the intervals in between punctuated with painful tests. Each evening he was exhausted and sore from the day's ordeal. This routine dragged on for three days, and Mike, impatient to be released, grew more and more irritable.

On the evening of the third day, he was dealt a crushing blow when the doctor in charge informed him he was to be held at the hospital for a minimum of six weeks.

"What in the hell is so wrong with me that I need to be in the hospital for six weeks?" he demanded to know.

The doctor remained singularly unperturbed by Mike's outburst.

“You have been flirting with a stay of many months in a hospital for a long time, major. I have studied your medical history. On numerous occasions you have been reluctantly released for duty because of pressing military emergencies, but that no longer applies, does it? Now you are ours and you will remain here until we have repaired the damage caused by the wounds you sustained at Anzio. By the way they should have been seen to a long time ago. You will note I am in full charge of your case. There are no appeals from my decisions. So relax and help me get you back on your feet.”

Mike was glaring at the doctor defiantly. Ignoring the poisonous look he continued smoothly,

“You are scheduled for the first round of surgery in the morning. We intend to clean up the junk yard of shrapnel located close to your spine in a series of operations which will take about a month. Then, if the surgeries are successful, you will be released from my tender care after several more weeks of physical therapy. You apparently want to get out of here as quickly as you can. So, with that goal in mind, it would be a good idea to cooperate with us. Cooperation gives you a better chance at an early departure from the hospital.

The nurses will be in here shortly to prep you for tomorrow's surgery. See you in the morning, Major."

The doctor left abruptly, giving Mike no chance to argue with him. He was unaware of the man's skills. A neurological expert who had become something of a legend in military medical circles, Colonel Cordova had been a combat surgeon since the landings in North Africa. His miraculous gift became known as he saved the lives and limbs of hundreds of soldiers.

He was finally pulled out of the combat units and sent to England to work wonders as a neurosurgeon for the many complex injury cases streaming in from Europe and the air bases throughout the war zone. Not only was he a calm man and a tireless worker, his grasp of the medical history of his many patients and of what action to take to heal them appeared to be unerring.

Dr. Cordova began his cleanup of the pieces of steel lodged in Mike's back. He had formulated a master plan of four operations to reach the most delicate areas where several of the largest pieces of shrapnel were lodged, almost touching Mike's spinal cord. If one of these were to shift and sever the spinal cord, it would mean instant death for Mike.

Each operation had to be thoroughly evaluated before the next phase could be undertaken. If all went well he would be free of the threat of death or complete paralysis for the rest of his life. As he had no idea how fortunate he was to be in Dr. Cordova's care, he continued to be impatient and grumpy. Of course this had no effect whatsoever on the doctor who completely ignored his moods.

Chapter Forty Two

On the third day after his first surgery Barbara came to visit him. “I see you have finally been cornered long enough to be taken care of properly,” she said with a smile. “And the nurses have told me how grateful you are.”

Mike was happy to see her, only Barnes had been there.

“You really are a welcome sight,” he told her, “sarcasm and all. Most of the people I know in London have been shipped off somewhere else since the training unit was disbanded. So I haven’t had any visitors. Fill me in on what is happening in the free world.”

“Only if you promise to remain cheerful. I’ve heard what hospital confinement does to your disposition.”

“I promise.”

“Well, then I’ll stay. I brought you some mail stacked up in your office. Apparently they thought you would return in a few days. Someone finally learned you were in the hospital, so in the future they will forward the mail here. Dr. Cordova had other plans for you I see. “

“Do you know the doctor?”

“I certainly know of him. He is kind of a legend in medical circles. I have worked around some of the patients he has operated on. You have the best Mike. Since you are

Dr. Cordova's patient, it means your physical condition is much worse than you told me. He doesn't work on routine cases. You're lucky to have him."

"Cordova doesn't tell me anything! He comes in, checks my chart and then moves on."

"He's probably working on twenty surgery patients at a time and he's all business. I know nurses who have worked for him. They all agree doctors don't come any more efficient. I would assume you are in danger of paralysis, or worse, from your wounds for Cordova to be called in on your case. Has he said as much to you?"

"No, but he did tell me I am scheduled for four surgeries over a period of one month. He let me know in no uncertain terms who was in charge and I have to be a good boy."

"I hope you behave, Mike. Dr. Cordova is working miracles here. So don't make it any tougher for him."

Barbara's information about Dr. Cordova gave Mike some much-needed insight into his condition. He obviously had to take his injuries more seriously. On reflection it became clearer to him how hard he had pushed himself. Various doctors over the last few years had not been issuing idle warnings.

“Thank you for filling me in about Cordova. I guess I finally have to believe what the doctors have told me.”

“At last, some small evidence of acceptance from you. It’s about time!”

“Now who's being sarcastic?”

She laughed and left the room.

Barbara became a regular visitor and she was filling an important role in his life. Over the next few weeks she was there whenever she had some free time from her duties. Her visits were a great diversion from the pain and discomfort. Each operation was incredibly taxing. It seemed as though he barely recovered enough to have the strength to endure the next one.

Chapter Forty Three

In another part of London a man had entered the aristocratic surroundings of an English manor house. He was a powerfully built, squat individual with small eyes set below a protruding forehead. His face was marked with scars from barroom brawls and knife fights. There was a groove on his left cheek from a bullet. Most people who encountered him on the street after dark became nervous in his presence and gave him a wide berth.

And yet, oddly enough, he appeared to be actually ill at ease in the luxurious home. He hastily handed his hat to a waiting butler; who gingerly accepted it and placed it on a stand. The servant led him down a long hallway, stopped at a door, announced him, and made a hand gesture for him to enter the room.

He walked into the study whose oak-panelled walls were covered from floor to ceiling with bookshelves. At a desk near the rear of the room sat a man who would have been widely recognized by English citizens and in high circles in Washington DC, though not by the masses. In spite of the fact that he was a powerful political leader in England, he preferred to remain unknown.

He gestured for his visitor to be seated near the desk. His guest, visibly uncomfortable in the surroundings, complied.

“Would you care for a drink, er, William, is it?”
the host inquired.

“I goes by Billy,” the visitor answered nervously. “And well, ah, I guess I would.”

“Fine. Help yourself.”

When Billy was again seated with his drink, Wodehouse got down to business.

“I asked you here for several reasons,” he said. “For one, I know you want personal revenge on the American major who wrecked our most profitable black market operation. I know he was responsible for the death of your brother. Secondly, it wouldn’t do to allow an informer to live, would it?”

Billy nodded in vigorous agreement with Wodehouse, who continued.

“We must kill this American as an example to others who might be tempted to expose us. Especially those who are picked up by Scotland Yard and want to make a deal to save their own skins. So the American’s assassination will deliver a clear message to everyone. The killing must be violent and executed in such a manner that it will leave no doubt about his death being quite deliberate.”

Billy nodded again in agreement. He said,
“It will be a pleasure to take care of the major personally. Johnny was killed because of him. Do you know where the American is now?”
Wodehouse replied, “He is in an army hospital in London.”

He gave Billy a piece of paper.
“My contact informs me the major is undergoing a series of surgeries to remove shrapnel from his back. In his present condition he certainly can't run away from you. How you dispose of him is your business but make certain the cause of his death is clear to everyone. And you will be amply rewarded of course.”

This last brought a ferocious grin to the thug's face.

“There won't be any doubt about that, sir. The job will be done within the week.”

Billy then stood up abruptly and nodded to his host. At the door he retrieved his hat and left the house.

As he headed for home, Billy was already formulating his approach to killing Mike. First, he would visit the army hospital to become familiar with the layout of the place. Then locate Mike and to decide on the best way to make an undetected exit. Billy was sure there wouldn't be any problem. After all, no one was expecting any trouble.

Since the exposé' leading to his brother's death in a gun fight with the police, Billy had been a fugitive. He moved frequently used a variety of identifications, and changed his appearance regularly. He might be dressed as a dock worker or a plant employee, a salesman, or whatever seemed to be effective at the time.

Wodehouse' summons had interrupted his plans to leave London for a safe place in Ireland. But he couldn't ignore the invitation to visit him at home and he was certain Wodehouse wanted him there to discuss killing the American. Actually, he was the only person the police were still trying to find. They wanted him for questioning, simply because he was Johnny's brother; they had no idea of the major role he had played in the black market ring. Billy was aware of Scotland Yard's ignorance. He intended to hide until the matter became a closed record in the file and the police forgot about him.

He didn't mind postponing his plans to disappear if it meant a chance to kill Mike. He had already decided to find him and kill him someday. Here was his chance to do him in now. The major embodied many things Billy despised: a snitch, a do-gooder, a respectable member of society. To top it off, he'd murdered his brother. Billy had to kill this man. The reward was an added bonus, but he would have

agreed to it just as willingly without money. It was personal, and nothing else would do.

Mike was recuperating fairly well from his multiple surgeries. The fifth and final operation was the worst of all. Dr. Cordova had followed the approach he had planned out beforehand to eliminate the two largest pieces of steel. Once all the other shrapnel had been removed, he had a clear path to the point closest to the spinal cord. It was a delicate business to extract the two deadly pieces of shrapnel without doing damage to the spinal cord.

The operation had lasted for three hours and in the end two jagged chunks of steel were lying on the instrument table. Almost as dangerous as removing the shrapnel was closing the deep incision in such a way that the layers of flesh were sewn together in the exact position they had been in originally. A mistake could put stress on the spinal cord with results almost equal to the damage the shrapnel could cause. Only a period of waiting and healing would reveal whether the surgeon had performed another miracle.

Mike had been in the hospital for a month now. It didn't seem to him as if he had any chance of being sent back to the States in the next two weeks. Dr. Cordova explained to him, first a healing period was required, followed by gentle

physical therapy to strengthen his back. He had groaned silently when the doctor had told him about the period of healing which meant further confinement to his bed. He now respected Cordova though, so he kept his grumbling to himself.

His one bright spot in his hospital stay was Barbara's visits. They were becoming friends and she filled many long hours with conversation and lively card games. She had written letters for him when he had to lie face down on the bed. Letters to his father had been stiff and formal in the beginning but Barbara persuaded him to drop his guard a little and let his father know he loved him.

To his surprise his father responded to his letters and wrote back he would welcome a closer relationship with him. His hospital stay was a grim ordeal for the most part, but some good was coming from it as well. Mike had no idea that a major change in his life was about to occur.

The day after his meeting with Wodehouse, Billy slipped into the Army hospital complex. Mingling with a group of civilian workers who maintained the grounds on the base he wasn't noticed. Although the complex had original hospital buildings built in the 1920's, most of it was now

comprised of wartime prefabricated construction. There was a central hallway, long and straight like a spine, with hospital wards at intervals opening off the hallway at right angles. Billy entered a hallway from an emergency exit door and moved quickly to a linen room. After checking carefully he found the room empty. He helped himself to a set of the white uniforms worn by the enlisted medics.

The hospital's corridors were bustling with activity: Personnel were moving back and forth and patients were being wheeled around on gurneys and in wheelchairs. It was a perfect cover for Billy to make his way to the central directory. He quickly noted the location of the surgical wards and headed there. Once he had located Mike he could plan on the killing and his escape from the complex.

Pushing a laundry cart, he made his way along the surgical wards. He knew the nurses' stations would provide a list of patients housed in the ward. He proceeded from ward to ward pushing the cart and glancing quickly at the lists of patients when he knew he was not being observed. At the fifth ward he received an unexpected gift. As he approached he saw an open door to a private room. The card read, "Lt. Col. M. Canyon." He could hear a conversation going on inside the room as he moved closer.

“Well, Colonel, you’re making good progress with the exercises. I’ll be back tomorrow at two o’clock for another session, sir.”

“Don’t do me any favors! You never show me any mercy at all! If you want to know the truth, sometimes I think the therapy is worse than the surgery.”

The therapist laughed, “See you, Colonel.”

Billy stood in the shadows near the nurses' station before making a move to leave the area. Once he had satisfied himself the hallway was clear for him, he left the same way he came. Now he walked around the area near the hospital ward checking it out for an easy route out of the building after he had killed Mike. Inspection completed, he smiled and told himself, tomorrow I’ll gut him like a hog,

Mike had never been much of a reader. But since he now had a lot of time to kill, he had begun to read books on a variety of subjects. He was reading when the time for his early afternoon physical therapy session arrived. The therapist in his white uniform entered the room. Mike glanced up from his book.

“Well, here he is,” he joked, “ready to dish out more agony.”

The man in white, who was turned the other way picking out some towels, did not reply. Mike realized this man wasn't his regular therapist.

"Where's Max?" he asked. "Taking a day off?"

There was still no response. As Mike started to raise his head for a better look at him, Billy whirled around and grabbed him in a powerful headlock with one arm, in his other hand was a heavy hunting knife.

"Here's a present for you from my brother!" he snarled.

Mike's training as a boxer took over; he instinctively raised his free arm and hit Billy in the throat. Momentarily Billy loosened his grip on Mike as he fought off the terrible pain in his throat from the blow. It was long enough for Mike to be able to square his body to his attacker. Sharp pain was flashing in his spine as he struggled to find leverage in the soft bed while his assailant stood on the floor. He threw another punch at Billy. It landed on his ear but he shook it off and the knife flashed.

Spinning away from the knife that was bearing down on him, Mike was able to move his head slightly to one side. The blade slashed his cheek and neck. His fast reflexes allowed him to reach the floor on his knees. Billy came at

him instantly and lashed out with the knife almost severing Mike's jugular vein. But in the meantime, he was able to stand up as his attacker slashed at him. He threw a punch hitting Billy flush on the jaw.

Billy fought to keep his balance. An Army nurse screamed from the doorway then attacked him from behind getting a firm grip on his right arm. Billy moved away from Mike to face his new opponent. With a mighty push he knocked the nurse to the floor. As she struggled to regain her feet he swung the knife at her, catching her left shoulder. It opened a wide gash all the way down to her elbow. The nurse dropped her arms staring at the gaping wound in shock.

Three more nurses arrived in response to the commotion and began to scream at the sight of two people bleeding copiously onto the floor in the middle of a room in chaos. Billy bolted for the door knocking the nurses aside and disappeared through the emergency exit located adjacent to the ward entrance. It was almost five minutes before anyone thought to call the military police. This gave Billy enough time to slip out of the hospital grounds unchallenged.

Mike was stunned. His room was suddenly full of medical personnel helping the wounded nurse and checking on him. A medic took over to clean the wounds in his neck then placed a compress on the area to stem the bleeding. His knife wounds were largely superficial and the cuts not very deep. He was struggling to make sense out of the attack. It had all gone by in a flash but he knew his adversary was not someone he had ever seen before. And, by the way he had used his body in the struggle, he was obviously no amateur. He had nearly succeeded in dealing Mike a solid stab wound, which would surely have been fatal, had it not been for his quick reflexive action..

There was chaos in his room. A doctor was firing questions at him as he checked the work the medic had done. All of the nurses involved were talking to the military police. In the midst of the bedlam, he said to the doctor,

“Wait, wait, please slow down! First of all, I’m not seriously injured. I don’t know who that maniac was. I was due for physical therapy and got attacked instead. At the moment I can’t tell you what’s been going on here.”

“Colonel,” the doctor said as he calmed down, “I will notify Dr. Cordova so he can check for any possible injuries to your back.”

Mike was unable to tell the military police much about the incident. In the blur of the fight for his life, he couldn't even give them a good description of his attacker.

Dr. Cordova examined his spine several hours later.

"There's some tissue damage around the area of the incision but I believe you're a lucky man. It will heal."

A captain from the military police was the next to visit.

"We found your therapist Max after a long search around the hospital. He was stuffed underneath some sheets in a linen room. He'd been tied up and chloroformed. He'll be fine except for a painful headache but that will go away. Do you have any ideas about who would want to slit your throat or hire someone to do it for him?"

"Not really but it may have something to do with the black market ring I uncovered a while ago. My attacker mentioned his brother and said he was paying me back for some reason. He was definitely an Englishman."

"Maybe those clues will help Scotland Yard identify your assailant."

Mike was transferred to another surgical ward. Once he had been cleaned up and was resting in bed, Dr. Cordova gave him a shot.

“I’ve just administered a mild sedative,” the surgeon explained. “There is a military policeman outside the door so you can relax now. Get some rest.”

As soon as he heard about the attempted killing of Landon’s protégé, Barnes wasted no time in organizing protection for Mike. Army CID agents and Scotland Yard detectives were brought in to find his assailant.

Dr. Cordova was infuriated over the many visitations his patient was receiving from the authorities. He confronted several agents to explain why Mike should be left alone to rest after the attack. His protests were ignored however and the interrogations went on until they were finished. Mike's room was now guarded around the clock by the military police.

A week later Barnes came to visit accompanied by a Scotland Yard detective. Sergeant Blakely began his report by bringing Mike up to date on the investigation to find and arrest participants in the large drug ring.

“We’re sure your assailant was Johnny Cabot’s brother, Billy. Our informants on the street said he went into a rage when told Johnny was killed in a shootout with the police. I believe you said earlier you had met Johnny through Rachel Jones?”

“Yes, I saw him several times at the private club.”

“We have been searching for his brother Billy ever since the black market operation was discovered. He's as bad a lot as Johnny was. There isn't any evidence to connect him with the operation but we still want to question him. Until you were attacked we had supposed he had left England.

"The vicious manner of the attack with a hunting knife is Billy's style. He meant to carve you up and mutilate your body. The method matches several other killings we are sure he committed in the past. He prefers killing in a violent manner instead of using a pistol. You sir, must be a very strong man yourself to fend him off the way you did.”

“I'm not strong Sergeant, but I'm damned fast when you're trying to kill me.”

“Mike,” Barnes said, “you have to be moved out of this hospital to a tight security area where Billy can't find a way to get at you. We'll slip you out of here secretly tonight, he'll probably never find you.”

The inspector cut in. “Colonel, we suspect there is more than just a personal vendetta involved in this attempt to kill you. Billy's action lends weight to our belief more people are involved in the black market operation. If we are correct your murder was planned as an object lesson to others who might have ideas about telling what they know in order to save their own skins.

Mike knew something about professional killers from his experience in New York City, where stories about the actions of such men frequently made the headlines. He was positive Billy fit the description of a professional killer who could be very resourceful in finding his intended victim. From now on he could be assaulted any time and anywhere.

“Why can’t I leave for the States right now? It seems to me being out of England is the simplest and best solution to guarantee my safety.”

“Dr. Cordova won’t release you. He informed us, rather bluntly, you need to heal for at least another two weeks. He also said flying on a military plane for the many hours it requires to reach America is more than your body can stand right now. Such a journey would risk undoing his surgical work. If that happened it would either kill you or leave you permanently paralyzed. I’m convinced the doctor is right. A trip is out of the question, don’t you agree?”

Mike nodded. “I have great respect for the doctor’s skills. And I certainly don’t want to risk being paralyzed. So what do you have in mind for me?”

Barnes replied, “Our embassy here in England has a country estate outside of London used to house high-ranking diplomatic officials who require security protection. Since 1942 the American army has been using it

as a tactical headquarters under tight security. It is heavily guarded the woods are booby-trapped and there are intrusion alarms concealed all over the property. There is a guest cottage on the grounds which will be perfect for your needs. We are assigning a CID agent to live there with you for added insurance.”

“I suppose Dr. Cordova has made detailed arrangements for my medical care.”

“You are right there. A doctor and a therapist will be there daily to take care of you. Sequestering you is top secret. Only a few people will be aware that you have left the hospital. Hopefully Billy will be caught trying to enter the hospital complex again searching for you. Then all of this elaborate planning won’t be needed.”

“Amen to that.” Mike replied. “But all of these precautions seem a little exaggerated to me. This is a military hospital I’m in, so a guard at my door should be enough. I know security around the complex has been improved because of how easy it was for Billy to get in and out of here. It made the military police realize they needed to tighten things up. Shouldn’t that be good enough?”

"This hospital complex is too large to be guarded to the degree we know is necessary for your safety."

“I suppose you’re right, Sergeant. My manly pride got in the way when I heard about being so heavily guarded like I was a fragile child.”

“You’re a combat soldier, Colonel and I know you have developed skills to help you stay alive. Use them now. Even though you will be in a tight security area don’t let your guard down. Billy is smart and he is determined to get you.”

Chapter Forty Four

Every possible precaution was taken when Mike was moved out of the hospital at midnight. There were military police hidden everywhere as he was moved into an Army truck with the top and rear entrance covered. Although the truck moved slowly he was in considerable pain throughout the trip to the estate.

As they were carrying him toward the cottage he managed to get a quick glimpse of the estate. Off in the distance was the silhouette of a large manor house. Most of the property within his view was thick woods. Several armed guards were visible and his army experience told him there were many more around he couldn't see. It certainly appeared safe enough.

The cottage itself had a rustic setting and looked to Mike as if it were several hundred years old. As he was carried inside and onward toward his bedroom he saw roughly plastered interior walls with large wooden beams supporting them showing through at intervals. Overhead was a beamed ceiling, quite low, giving the house a cozy feeling. His room was just off the kitchen toward the front of the house and there were two more bedrooms behind his.

The kitchen opened out to a large informal area which served as a combination living and dining room.

Two staff members were there to take care of the cooking and maintenance of the cottage. Jeffery, the manservant was a jolly big man and the medics immediately knew who was in charge of the house. He led them offering little comments now and again, as they carried Mike on a stretcher into the bedroom.

“Easy, mates!” he said. Or “Have an eye for the chair.” Or “This way then.”

When he was finally settled in his special hospital bed, Mike got a good look at the manservant.

“I’m Mike Canyon. Please call me Mike.”

Jeffery beamed at him.

“Most pleased to make your acquaintance sir. My name is Jeffery. I will take care of anything you require, sir.”

“Call me Mike.”

“Yes sir.”

After quickly checking the bedroom to make sure everything was in its proper place, Jeffery disappeared.

It was late and Mike had no difficulty sleeping. Some time later he came out of his slumber to the sounds of a door closing and footsteps on the floor.

Barnes entered the bedroom with a young man.

“This is Frank Remington from the CID,” said Barnes.
“He will be here to guard you around the clock.”

Remington was young, about twenty five, Mike supposed, tall and lanky, with friendly blue eyes and a wide grin.

“Pleased to work with you, Colonel,” he said. “This is certainly better than some of the lousy assignments I’ve been on.” He had an irreverent manner. Mike took an immediate liking to him.

Barnes turned to Remington and said,
“Why don’t you unpack your things? I’d like to speak to Mike.”

When they were alone Barnes said to Mike,
“I have a present for you.” He pulled a cloth bundle from his coat jacket and unrolled it to reveal a snub nose .38 caliber pistol.

“When we warned you to keep your guard up, I was dead serious, and so was Sergeant Blakely. This may come in handy but I hope you never have to use it.”

“It’s a welcome gift,” said Mike with a smile. “I feel more comfortable with a weapon.” Then, lowering his voice a little so that Remington would not be able to hear him, he added, “That CID agent Frank is a little different;

obviously he's not impressed with my rank. Who is he?"

"Frank's a character all right but he was highly recommended for this assignment. The CID has a hard time with free spirits like him and yet they told me Frank has more courage than most. He loves a challenge and he has cracked some tough cases for them where others had failed. His unorthodox, creative methods drive his superiors crazy—that, and his unmilitary attitude. His work on the black market case gives him a special interest in this assignment.

"When they announced that the case was officially closed he was angry. He upset his agency, the Provost Martial people and Scotland Yard because he insisted everyone hadn't been caught yet. He tried to persuade his superiors to give him special permission to continue the investigation. I suspect he will pump you for information on your work, hoping to find a clue. Anyway, he's a good man. I feel comfortable having him as your body guard."

Mike replied, "Frank is probably right. As large as the operation was, it's possible some people involved are in a position to keep their participation one step removed from scrutiny. I'm not sure the authorities were right to close the case. Especially since Billy's attempt to kill me and Sergeant Blakely's remark about the possibility of making

my murder a warning to others. So Frank has allies in his thinking.”

“I have to go, but I’ll be back in a day or so,” Barnes said. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“What could I possibly need? I have a body guard, a butler and a cook. Can you think of anything more?”

“Sounds ideal to me.”

Chapter Forty Five

On the first day of August, a military conference took place in London to discuss the current state of affairs. Although the invasion of Norway had been successful, headway in the southern area was meeting stiff resistance from the Nazis. They had much at stake in occupying the country. Access to the North Atlantic was first and foremost.

Although the battle at sea during the invasion in May had crippled the German navy it didn't seal off all access to the North Sea. Due to the heavy fortifications constructed in Norway the Nazis were effectively repulsing allied offensives. Unless the allies could find a way to seal off support to the Wehrmacht in the country the siege might go on for years.

There was the loss of the jet bomber bases which were vital to Hitler's demonstration to the free world that he could attack any place on the planet. Without the daily bombing of strategic industries in America his campaign to force the allies to surrender had lost strength. It was not public knowledge about the possibility jet bomber raids on America resuming if the Nazis solved the fuel capacity problem.

Fortress Europe was in a stalemate. Neither side could loosen the grip of the other. Attacks and counterattacks on both sides were a constant reality which was becoming all too similar to the terrible trench warfare of World War I. Although the Allied summer campaign had improved their strategic positions, it was far from the success they had hoped for.

In the meantime, the Nazis continued to become stronger in terms of the futuristic weapons being used so effectively against the very heart of England and now the east coast of America. V-1, V-2 and V-3 rocket attacks continued daily without any way to defend against them or stop them. There was no progress toward destroying underground factories turning out rockets, tanks and jet aircraft at an unprecedented rate of production.

Another equally important factor to the allies, was Nazi control of the oil fields in Europe which made it possible to keep the war machine going. Hitler's boasts of a new generation of jet bombers and rockets reaching anywhere on the planet were now taken seriously. By the end of the conference, they had reached the conclusion, unless there was a miracle, the war in Europe would go on for years.

There was growing fear, given the present military situation, Hitler might win the war after all.

The struggle was draining allied resources at an undreamed-of rate. Every ton of cargo landed in Europe carried a high price tag because of the ships being sunk in the North Atlantic by the formidable fleets of German super submarines. It was a grim picture and Hitler's old line about a united people in Europe was having an effect. Some of the men from other European countries were now volunteering to serve in the German army.

On the east coast of America, rocket attacks were becoming so frequent they were accepted as routine. Only the most essential services were being performed in the major cities. There had been a vast relocation of people away from the coast. New York City now gave the appearance of being an abandoned metropolis. Fortifications and shelters were everywhere in evidence.

Many famous buildings had been destroyed, but the Empire State Building stood unscathed like a monument to America's determination to overcome the peril and eventually triumph over Nazi Germany. Casualty lists coming in from Europe showed the terrible price the country was paying to remain free

Chapter Forty Six

After a week in seclusion, Mike was getting restless. His health was coming along nicely with the daily physical therapy routines. Dr. Cordova visited one day to check on him; he was pleased with Mike's progress. He changed the therapy program to once a week, provided that Mike did the daily exercises. There was a certain feeling of freedom to being left on his own after weeks of Cordova's disciplinarian regime.

Barnes came to see him at the end of the week carrying with him a letter from Stanton bringing him up to date. Again, Barnes asked him if there was anything he needed.

"Yes there is. I didn't expect to be asking you for anything but could you arrange to bring Barbara Randolph for a visit? I'm bored and I miss her company."

"I'll check with CID and see if they will allow it. They're in charge of your safety, Mike, but if they agree to let her come along with me, of course I'll arrange it."

"Lay it on thick about Canyon's need for company."

Several days later Barnes returned with Barbara in tow. She was bursting with questions about his health. He didn't

have to lie to her about feeling better, his appearance had improved greatly since he had left the hospital.

“Mr. Barnes is a resourceful man,” she told him. “After he got through talking to my supervisor, I got permission to stay with you for four days. He said there is a bedroom I can use while I’m here.”

The news lightened his mood.

“Good! Now I’ll have a chance at winning back some of the money I’ve lost to you playing gin rummy.”

One evening Barbara, Frank and Mike sat in the living area of the house with the windows open to let in the fragrant summer air. Jeffery was serving them an after-dinner brandy. He made small comments.

“Are you comfortable, sir? What else can I do for you?”

“Everything is fine, Jeffery. You must have served in the military at one time; you’re so disciplined!”

“Yes sir, I was in the army during World War One. I served in France from start to finish. We thought the Hun was through for good by the end of the war. They’re a stubborn lot. It didn’t take them long to find another Kaiser to lead them. Queer people, the Germans. Talented, industrious, yet with a peculiar need to use military might to attain their dreams. Don’t you find that odd, sir?”

“Yes I do, Jeffery. It’s as if they have a national inferiority complex and need to prove their superiority over their European neighbors. I can’t figure them out.”

Barbara commented, “There are a lot of class, national and racial hatreds tied up in this war. Almost like a social convulsion of an entire continent. I find it all very frightening.”

Frank jumped into the conversation.

“Well, I’m on the best assignment I’ve had in this whole war. Let’s talk about something more cheerful. You know all of the GIs who passed through here at least met some English girls and went to dances and shows. But not me! This CID job has kept me away from all the fun stuff.

"On one assignment I posed as a prisoner in an army stockade. I was in there for months gathering information until one prisoner got wise to the fact I was a CID agent. I never did figure out how he was tipped off. From then on every time he saw me he would yell, ‘Hi Sid, how’re you doing? It is you, isn’t it Sid?’ ‘Sid’ is prison slang for CID agent. So this guy was warning the other prisoners I was CID. They had to pull me out of there fast before the prisoners killed me. I never did get the information I was sent in there for. So it’s been a tedious war for me. You

spend weeks watching people looking for some bit of information. Very unglamorous.”

“I heard you’re good at the job though,” Mike replied.

“They never tell me. Mostly they’re on my case all of the time to conform to their rules. Hey, I’m feeling lucky tonight! Are you two ready for a beating at gin rummy?”

Later, after Barbara had gone to bed, Frank said,

“You know, I’ve been making my commanding officer angry by refusing to let go of the black market case. Now this attempt to kill you proves to me there are members of the group still at large. Now CID is organizing new investigations. Too bad it had to almost cost your life to get some action.”

“What made you so sure this business wasn’t finished?”

“I was in on the arrests of the two politicians belonging to the social club where most of the dealing was going on. I spent a lot of time studying their backgrounds and I found connections they had in common. Not only belonging to the same political party, which was obvious, but their business interests, their daily routines, and their social affiliations.”

Mike offered no comments on what he was hearing. Frank took it as a sign of interest.

“All of these common ties point to a top boss. I learned

by studying their activities. One man shared these activities with both of the politicians, it is Percy Wodehouse. I know it sounds crazy and you're giving me the same look I get whenever I say something people think is preposterous."

Mike was surprised by his conclusion.

"Sorry Frank, you're right. I did give you a look."

Frank shrugged he wasn't particularly upset.

"No offense taken. I knew how you'd react."

"I'm actually stunned Frank. He appears to be a wealthy man and one of the most powerful leaders in England. Why would he need to amass a fortune of illegal money? The risk is so great. It's hard to imagine he would chance losing everything if he was caught."

"Your question about his having more to lose than he stood to gain puzzled my superiors as well, so they dismissed my suspicions. Maybe the answer is the old story of greed and power. Men do become obsessed over various things it proves they're only human and not immune to temptations."

"Yeah, I see your point. Being around politics in my investment business, I have witnessed some of these obsessions being uncovered. In the light of reality the risk taken for the gain often appears to be the actions of

someone who is mentally unbalanced. Wodehouse may have an obsession of some kind driving him.”

“One inspector I worked with from Scotland Yard believes I’m right about Wodehouse. He knows a lot about his activities. Being an Englishman he’s familiar with the man’s career. The inspector is doing some confidential investigating on his own using the information I had gathered on the politicians.”

“That’s really big stuff Frank. If Wodehouse is the top boss his arrest would cause a tremendous upheaval in the government here.”

“I know, Mike and I hope I’m wrong!”

Chapter Forty Seven

Nearly within the hour of transporting Mike secretly to a more secure place Wodehouse knew about the movement through his sources. He was quite familiar with the American embassy's country estate. He had been there many times for conferences with visiting dignitaries. He summoned Billy to his house again.

After he had painstakingly gone over the diagram of the estate he had drafted for Billy to consult for planning, he said, "This time it will obviously be more difficult to get close to the colonel. As you can see the thick forest is a certain death trap. Your only way in is through the front gate. There are no alternatives given the degree of security around the whole estate."

Grinning at Wodehouse, Billy said, "It'll be simple."

"What is so funny? Why do you think it will be so easy?"

"I know this place. I have a cousin who's a greengrocer. The embassy house has been a customer of his since 1941. I even helped him a few times for a lark. It's a fancy place, so I was curious to see the layout. I thought maybe I'd rob it someday if I was ever desperate for money. You can consider the job done."

With that said, he left as abruptly as he had the last time.

On the third day of Barbara's visit Mike was allowed to leave the confinement of his bed and walk around the cottage on crutches or use a wheelchair by himself. His favorite spot was by the front window in the living area. From there he could see the beautiful formal garden near the manor house which was alive with blooming summer flowers.

Late in the afternoon, Barbara sat there with him.

"They will probably send you home in another week," she said. "From what you told me about Joe Landon's plans for you, I'm sure you'll be an important man in Washington. Mr. Landon will see to it. Are you prepared for the big changes soon to happen in your life?"

"I'm certainly willing to find out."

"What Landon has in mind for you is all about big power you know. My family has been a part of the political power scene in America for many decades. I'm familiar with the price one has to pay for a share of the power. There will be many temptations Mike. There is a danger of personal corruption. Your private life will be sacrificed for the party. I've seen politics affect several members of my family."

"Please pardon my butting into your affairs, but you are very dear to me. I can't help expressing concern for you.

Since I've gone this far, I might as well ask you the big question. Is it the potential for personal power that excites you? Or, are there other considerations? I wouldn't think it was money; you seem to be doing fine in that respect. You can ignore my outburst if you wish. You needn't answer."

Mike trusted Barbara and he respected her opinion on matters somewhat unfamiliar to him. He took a moment to think about her comments before he answered.

"I know you're trying warn me because we're good friends and I don't take offense. You're asking the same questions I have been wrestling with myself. I owe Joe a lot without him I wouldn't have a successful business. I've done some soul searching and I've found I have a strong desire to be a leader.

"Quite candidly, I know the power Joe wants to help me attain will have a large price tag on it. I've been around the inner workings of politics for a long time and I hope I can avoid the kind of excesses you mentioned a moment ago. Not many men are ever given an opportunity like this one. I need to try it."

Barbara looked at him solemnly.

"My father taught me not to interfere in the personal choices other people make. It's a wise philosophy. Only, I

want you to know I'm always going to be your friend. For life. No matter what.”

Mike was moved by her words. His feelings for her had grown stronger with time. Right now all he could say was,
“Thank you.”

Barbara changed the subject.

“I think it’s time for a cocktail before dinner.”

It was early in the morning when the greengrocer truck pulled up to the front gate of the estate where Mike was being housed. Both of the guards at the gate knew the truck and its driver. One guard called out,

“Good morning Mickey! I see you have a helper.”

“He’s my cousin. He’s been here with me before. Billy takes pity on me now and again. He’s along for the heavy lifting.” Mickey replied.

One of the guards looked Billy over.

“I remember. You were here with Mickey last year.”

Mickey and the guard always had some light banter about sports before leaving for the manor house. After a few minutes of chatting they broke it off with a laugh. The guard pressed a button and the gate swung open. They waved goodbye to the guards as they drove on.

While he was driving the truck, Billy was looking

closely for a smaller road Wodehouse had showed him on the diagram. The road he wanted led to the cottage where Mike was staying. He spotted the side road ahead and immediately jumped into the back of the truck. Mickey was startled by the move.

“Hey Billy, are you anxious to go to work? What are you mucking about with back there?”

From a sack Billy pulled out a submachine gun, a pistol and two hand grenades. He moved quickly forward and struck Mickey on the side of his head with the pistol. As he shoved his unconscious cousin out of the moving vehicle, he said, Sorry mate. I can't have you involved in this.”

He steered the truck onto the narrow lane leading to the cottage. When he was within thirty yards of the house there were several loud explosions coming from the direction of the front gate. Sirens sounded on the grounds and the roar of trucks starting up. Billy had slipped two time bombs next to the guardhouse while Mickey was talking to the guard.

Frank and Mike responded to the sound of the explosions and rushed to the front window of the cottage. Frank drew his revolver and yelled into the kitchen to the other people cooking breakfast,

“Everyone get into the pantry and stay there!”

Barbara, Jeffrey and the cook quickly obeyed.

Standing at the front door, Frank looked outside for any signs of danger. Spotting the truck through the bushes as it bore down on the cottage, he began firing at the windshield, hoping to kill the driver and make the truck swerve out of the way. But the truck continued to hurtle straight toward the front window.

Mike turned around to head for his bedroom at the end of the hallway. He was desperately limping along to retrieve the pistol Barnes had given him from under his pillow. It was an agonizingly slow walk with his hands on the wall for support.

A moment before the collision, Billy jumped out and began running. The truck hit the window spraying fragments of glass and wood into the living area. There was a deafening explosion when Billy threw a hand grenade through the gaping hole in the wall of the cottage. Shrapnel and the force of the blast at close range hit Frank and sent him sprawling into the corner. Frank raised his pistol to shoot Billy but the gangster was quicker. Several bullets hit the CID agent in the chest.

Billy moved through the room and then down the hallway to the bedroom Wodehouse had indicated as being occupied by Mike. He shot the lock off the door and rushed in. At this precise moment Mike had reached his pillow and pulled the pistol from under it. Before he even had a chance to raise his weapon, Billy aimed at him and began firing, spraying the bed with machine gun bullets. Then he pulled the pin on his last grenade.

There was blood all over the bedclothes from the wounds Mike had sustained from the burst of machine gun fire. Billy glanced at the bed and Mike appeared to be riddled with bullets. He lowered his weapon and smiling triumphantly, he looked down at the bloody mess, savoring the moment. Johnny had been revenged!

Mike managed to roll over and his snub nose revolver spat flame as he pumped six bullets into Billy's chest. The killer was dead before he hit the floor, but as he fell, the grenade rolled out of his hand. Jeffrey rushed into the bedroom with an old shotgun. Mike yelled at him as he lay on the bed,

Grenade! The grenade! It's live!"

Instantly, Jeffrey grabbed the bomb and hurled it through the bedroom window. Then he hit the floor, hoping to

avoid injury. He was hit with some shrapnel as the grenade exploded in midair. The blast hurled him across the room.

There was a sudden eerie silence. All Mike could hear at the moment was a loud ringing in his ears from the explosion. His back was warm and wet with blood from the gunshot wounds he had sustained, he passed out. Barbara appeared in the doorway with her arm around the cook who was sobbing hysterically. Then she saw Jeffrey crumpled up on the floor and Mike lying face down the bed bleeding from his wounds.

“Oh God! They’re dead!” Barbara cried out.

First on the scene was the officer of the guard who had careened down the hill in his jeep nearly turning it over in the process. He entered the bedroom, which now resembled a scene on a battlefield. It was nearly torn apart from machine gun bullets and the explosion of the hand grenade. He rushed to the bed and felt Mike’s wrist for a pulse; it was there, but quite weak. Blood continued to flow from four bullet wounds in his back. Then he inspected Jeffrey who lay crumpled up on the floor. He was alive, there was a deep wound in his right shoulder where the shrapnel from the exploding grenade had struck him.

The officer immediately contacted the manor house with his walkie-talkie to call for medical help. Then he led Barbara and the maid away from the bedroom scene to the part of the kitchen that was still intact. Then suddenly, vehicles pulled up outside and there was a great deal of yelling as the cottage was invaded by armed guards. With a Thompson submachine gun at the ready a major came through the gaping hole where the living area had been. Major Denton inspected the house and shook his head in wonder.

Frank was the other dead man in the house. He had his revolver in his hand where he lay. They found two spent bullet shells in the weapon indicating he had been trying to shoot Billy even as he went down riddled with bullets. Major Denton looked down at him, and said solemnly,

“A brave man. He died doing his duty.”

Barbara was in the ambulance with Mike as he was brought back to the military hospital. Her face was wet with tears as she looked down at him and held his hand.

“Oh please don’t die on me, Mike,” she begged. “I love you so much.”

Mike hung on the brink of death for two days after the surgeons had removed the bullets from his back. Two

bullets had punctured a lung requiring a dangerous and delicate operation to repair the damage.

Barbara was constantly at his side hopefully watching and waiting for him to come back to her. On the third day he rallied and opened his eyes to see Barbara's worried face peering down at him. Weakly he whispered,

"If I'm dead, it's damned nice of you to join me."

Barbara wept great tears of gratitude. She was finally able to leave his hospital room for a badly needed rest.

Two weeks later, Dr. Cordova examined Mike thoroughly. "I don't see any damage to your spine from the incident, Colonel," he said when he had finished. "I think you are now fit to travel. From what I've been hearing about your role in exposing a drug ring I'd say the sooner you leave England the better."

After an extensive investigation by the Army and Scotland Yard, they concluded there were members of the black market operation who were still at large.. The joint investigation group decided it was too risky for Mike to remain in England. It was quite likely the black market members yet to be arrested would make another attempt to kill the man who brought down their lucrative operation. There was no doubt now that Mike had to be sent home.

Two days later Mike was in an ambulance, accompanied by Barnes and Barbara who insisted on seeing him off to the States. The ambulance was escorted by four jeeps carrying military police. Barnes said to Mike,

"I'll be very relieved when you take off. You have had two close calls and we don't know if there will be a third try. This is confidential, Percy Wodehouse was arrested."

Mike replied, "So Frank was right all along. Wodehouse was the big man running the operation."

"Scotland Yard got a break when one of their inspectors spotted Billy and followed him to Wodehouse's home several days before this last attempt to kill you. The inspector was able to hear their conversation through an open window in the study. When Billy left the house he spotted the inspector as he was moving away from the window. A criminal like him knew how to leave the area and lose the inspector."

"Billy was a wanted man, so the inspector's report about his meeting with Wodehouse gave Scotland Yard probable cause to search his manor house. Three documents were found in his study recording deliveries and collections of the stolen supplies. In addition, there were records revealing the names of the rest of the ring. Wodehouse must have been sure of himself since the records were so

easy to find.”

“What great news!” exclaimed Mike. “It’s too bad Frank isn’t around to hear his work on the case was brilliant.”

At the airfield there was a short wait before Mike’s plane would be ready to receive the badly wounded soldiers being sent home for more medical attention. Mike asked Barnes to let him have a few minutes alone with Barbara. Mike spoke softly to her.

“It is hard to put into words how grateful I am to you and how much you mean to me.”

Her eyes turning misty, then she held his face in her hands and searched his eyes.

“Mike, my timing with you has never been good. I know how much Rachel meant to you. But I can’t let you leave without telling you I’m in love with you.”

Mike wasn’t stunned by her declaration but he was moved. He replied,

“I couldn’t be more honored than to hear you say you love me. It is true about Rachel; I’m still sorting out my feelings about her. I’m not sure yet what it all meant, but I do know how much you mean to me. I suspect my feelings for you are much deeper than friendship. Will you give me some time? I don’t want to lose you. At least we can say

there was no passionate infatuation to confuse the deep and wonderful bond we have.”

Barbara's tears streamed down her cheeks as she replied,
“I’d wait forever for you, Mike.”

They held hands for a long time. She waited beside the transport plane as they boarded him. She waved a last farewell as the plane taxied for takeoff. Barbara continued to stand there until the plane was a small speck on the horizon.

EPILOGUE

Tech Sergeant Andersen was very excited. He had been a B-17 bomber mechanic for three years in England, and today was a big day for him. Finally, he was going to see a B-29 Superfortress. Rumors about the super-bomber with its pressurized cabin, large size, and bomb carrying capacity had been circulating for months. Now a squadron of them, the first in the European war zone, was arriving at his air base.

He and his ground crew stood on the apron, searching the western horizon. Then they heard the distant rumble of the bombers and watched as the squadron flew over the airfield in formation. One by one the huge airplanes circled into the flight pattern and landed on the field.

The ground crew marvelled at their size as they taxied past the B-17 bombers. By comparison, a Superfortress was twice the size of the Flying Fortress made so famous for its role in the war in Europe. At last the B-29's were parked in a row near the ground crew. Tech Sergeant Andersen rushed up to the fuselage of the lead aircraft. He looked up at the name painted underneath the cockpit window. What a funny name, he thought to himself "Enola Gay".

