

scramble across on logs, others he had needed to ford up to his thighs. As he unsheathed his notepad, the thought that he could have stumbled onto Japanese submariners replenishing their drinking supply from this seeping shore made the whole place more creepy than ever to him.

What Prokosch was saying furthered the feeling. "Raft rats, I call them. If I ever catch them at it and they give me any trouble, I'll put Tom to working on them." He patted the stock of his Thompson sub-machine gun.

Ben took due reportorial care over if. "These rafts, Sig--ever laid eyes on them yourself?"

Prokosch indicated Not yet. "Just signs. The buggers can't resist taking a crap on dry land, for sure. Find piles around the creek mouths." His expression registering offense at that, he petted the dog again. "Rex here smells out that stuff and any drag marks that look like where a raft came in and so on. If the signs look fresh enough, we call in the depth charge boys from the air base at Port Angeles. Done it a couple of times already."

"Have you." Ben groped for any certainty in this. If ever there was a coastline that would breed phantoms, it was this murky Pacific Northwest one. But Prokosch must be able to tell human crap from bear shit, mustn't he? Or was all this just classic jumpy nerves of an isolated sentinel? By any sum it was more than a notepad-carrying visitor bargained for. How would Tepee Weepy react to the story of a Supreme Team member in hide-and-seek with Japanese naval forces, genuine or imagined, in America's own backyard? There was one way to find out. "Any luck?" Ben inquired as he scribbled away.

“Never know,” the sentry blunt as the coast he walked. “The flyboys think they spotted an oil slick after they bombed like hell one of those times. Could have been a decoy or from a sunk tanker.” He kicked some sand as if his next thought might be hidden under it. “Those tin fish are out there, though. We got a report a while back that a Jap sub came up in broad daylight down in Oregon. Fired a few shells onto some beach. Just to prove they could, I guess.” The contemplative Coast Guardsman scanned out past the curling white sets of breakers to the vaster ocean as if mildly daring the enemy to try that on his patrol route, then turned unblinking eyes to Ben. “About time to head for the hut. Ready for a hike, Lefty?”

SB

It was work every step of the way, trying to fathom Sig Prokosch those next days on the challenging coast. Trudging the hours of patrol with him, Ben would catch himself yearning for Jake Eisman’s wisecracks or even Dex Cariston’s highflown sparring. Somewhere between shy and offhandedly mum, Sig went his route like a man who had left his conversation at home. Questions to him had to be doled out, circled back to, followed to conclusions somewhere down the road, and there were times Ben felt he would have better luck talking to the dog.

Gradually, though, the thickset guard gave out glimpses of himself unsuspected in four years on the football field and in the locker room. Sig liked to cook; at the hut it invariably fell to him to prepare any meal fancier than fried Spam with canned pineapple atop. He was a twin, a truly startling thought; his

sister was a missionary in the Yukon Territory. *If she's anything like him, the natives will convert just to see what's on her mind.* The Prokosch family came from Devon, one of the depot towns sprinkled out of an atlas in the last century when the Great Northern Railway needed names for its stops in the middle of nowhere across the top of Montana. The wrong side of the tracks of Devon at that, Ben divined: the father had always worked as a common section hand, riding a speeder on the rails across the prairie to wrestle creosoted ties into place and disgorge brush and muck from clogged roadbed culverts. A modern coolie. Sig with his accounting degree aspired to one of those American human cannonball advancements in a single generation, a desk job at the railroad home office in St. Paul. Ambition, incentive, a path in the mind with sufficient byways: little by little, the personality practically buried under that gray Coastie uniform began to assume shape as Ben made notes. Yet something kept nagging about Sig's enlistment in the Coast Guard and Ben could not get at it. Phrase it every which way, no clear answer could be drawn as to why someone from one of the most landlocked towns imaginable had chosen to turn into a beachpounder.

Until it emerged that Prokosch had a girl waiting for him back home in Devon. Inasmuch as Sig would have been a serious contender in an ugly contest, this constituted news. It also prompted in Ben a sense of relief that he was not sure he could defend, that the not particularly imaginative man at his side had chosen, with marriage aforethought, to put in his military time away from the front lines. Back at East Base in the farewell round of beers at the Officers Club, Jake Eisman had leaned back and shrewdly observed, "Benjamin, you're maybe

just as glad some of us are stationed stateside.” How deny it? Given overseas members of the Supreme Team, if any of the others could do a safer duty, so much the better. Obituaries were the dregs of writing; if he never had to write another one it would be soon enough. Now Ben took a fresh look at Seaman Prokosch and asked, “What’s this wonder woman’s name?”

AUTHOR

This brought a bashful dip of the head and the smitten intonation:

“Ruby.”

When Sig spoke it, the word glowed as if it were her namesake gem. Love and the salt taste of absence, old as Odysseus, thought Ben as they tromped onward up the beach with the punctual waves always at their side. Wide open at the heart now, Sig poured forth the life he and Ruby were trying to plan in the time to come; that touchstone of all soldiers, after the war. Look that in the face long enough, and you begin to question the current sorry state of things. Sig at length reached the point where he brought out:

“Been going to ask you something. You get around in the war. You know about those balloon bombs?”

Ben merely nodded, to see where this would go. As if in some final desperate frenzy, Japan on its side of the Pacific had begun launching slim long-range balloons with explosive devices attached. The aim was to set the forests of the western United States on fire. Some of the balloons, weirdly like miniature paratroopers, had drifted as far as the Rockies. No great damage had been reported as yet, but the devices were worrisome if, as intelligence estimates had it, they were launched hundreds at a time.

just as glad some of us are stationed stateside.” How deny it? Given the toll on overseas members of the Supreme Team, if any of the others could be hoarded to safer duty, so much the better. Obituaries were the dregs of writing; if he never had to write another one it would be soon enough. Now Ben took a fresh look at Seaman Prokosch and asked, “What’s this wonder woman’s name?”

} Should this be:
How to deny it?
1

Sig indicated the oceanic sky. "We spot any coming, we're supposed to shoot them down, ha." His gaze dropped to the watery horizon and stayed. "Maybe Animal will get first crack at them--Marines are supposed to take the lead, aren't they." A considering tilt of the head. "Kind of funny to think of him at the other end of this water, somewhere." Ben noticed he did not include Danzer, on destroyer duty in what was equally the Pacific, in this musing.

Reflection evidently over, Sig fixed his attention back toward Ben. He for once looked bothered. "They tell us the Japs even have their little kids in school making those balloons. Think that's so?"

"I don't really doubt it."

Sig's expression changed for the worse, which was saying a lot. "There's no limit to what people will do, I guess."

Just then they were coming to a creek mouth, and the Irish setter tugged at the leash.

"Rex thinks he's got something," Sig murmured as he swiftly unslung his Tommy gun. In the next motion he handed Ben the ^{.45 pistol} ~~weapon~~ from his holster. "Just in case."

Ben took in the situation uneasily. Where the brown-colored creek snaked out of the forest, vegetation proliferated. The dense greenery, too thick to see into, could handily hide a rubber raft and a raftload of touchy Japanese. The American jungle: he had never expected to be going into combat here. Sig showed no such concern.

AU

Weapons ready, the pair of them stayed out of sight as best they could behind driftlogs and approached the verge of the overgrown patch, led by the stalking dog. The question ran in Ben's mind, what armaments would Japanese submariners bring to shore with them? Probably a hell of a lot more than one Tommy gun and one pistol. As he and Sig edged in, far enough apart not to be raked by a single burst of gunfire, the bloody path above the Bitoi River came back to him full-toned as a film on a screen. In New Guinea the cover for ambush had been tall boonie grass; here it was salal, brush, fir forest. He tried to creep silently through the undergrowth that crowded the flow of water, watching the twisting creekbank ahead for any movement. Sig, with the dog now alertly obedient behind him on the leash hooked into the web belt, was in view one moment and then wasn't. Ben braced, reminded himself to blaze away with the pistol rather than sight in--the .45 would knock an enemy down if it so much as nicked him--and parted the last underbrush into a glade of grass.

Sig was standing there peering at the beaten-down vegetation. "Deer," he called over and shouldered his Tommy gun. The dog wagged, awaiting praise.

It was when they resumed their line of march on the other side of the creek, raft rats receding back into the hypothetical, that Sig's line of thought circled around to:

"You got somebody like Ruby?"

"I do." Ben was surprised both by the question and his own answer. By any reading of law civil or military, Cass was anything but that definite in his prospect. And the war was not nearly done with either of them. Yet, for the life of

webs

him, he could not have replied other than he did. "She'll be in Seattle when I get there."

"Good for you."

So it went, those days of pounding the beach side by side with Prokosch. Bit by bit Ben absorbed the feel of the continental coast, the inevitable linkage of the Pacific to national destinies. *The ocean named for peace now rims the widest war in history*, his piece would begin. *The circumference of war takes in even those who lived farthest from the muster of the surf.* And Prokosch himself he liked in the way you like an oddball cousin met up with at a family gathering. Let him be vigilant against raft rats, quite possibly more imagined than real; it put a human boulder into place out here among the shore rocks, Ben could attest to that. For once he felt he was writing about duty without bloodshed hanging over it like a red cloud about to burst. Prokosch's modest odyssey, a saltwater watchman on watch, suited the coastal subject with the ease of a hearthside tale. So he thought.

"Lefty?"

On the last day, patrol nearly over, the hut within welcome distance, Sig had halted. He kicked at the sand, a sign Ben recognized. Then came out with it:

"I want to get up north. The Aleutians."

The grimness of a chronicler whose storyline had abruptly veered off the page took Ben over. *You and Jones. That makes two of you out of the entire human race, maniacs for the Ablution Islands.* He knew that a rain-quiet snuggery in which to read the Bible was not Sig's reason. He asked anyway:

"Why there instead of here?"

“Better chance to actually see what a Jap looks like before the war is over,” Sig reasoned thinly as if still rehearsing this. “Instead of just their turds.” He looked at Ben with gathered determination. “Sea duty on a patrol frigate, is what I’m thinking. Wondered if you could help any on that?”

“There’s real war up there,” Ben argued. The newsreel of the Japanese bombing of Dutch Harbor, smoke boiling above Alaskan soil, brought that home to America; he wondered if it had missed Prokosch. “Coast Guard service, though, that’s still considered home waters, right? Won’t bring you any overseas points toward discharge.”

“Naw, it’s not that.” The unblinking gaze stayed on Ben. “I want to get back at them some for the other guys.” O’Fallon, Havel, Friessen, Rennie. Three fellow linemen and everyone’s favorite backfield teammate. The preyed on those were left. The mortal arithmetic that nullified reality this to people.

Two men and a dog, they stood there in the surf sound, its grave beat upon the shore. Finally Ben said, “Sig, I don’t have that kind of pull.” Fully aware of his unsureness whether he would use it in this instance if he had it.

“You ever get some, Lefty,” came the stolid reply, “keep me in mind.”

AUTHOR

“Naw, it’s not that.” The unblinking gaze stayed on Ben. “I want to get back at them some for the other guys.” O’Fallon, Havel, Friessen, Rennie. Three fellow linemen and everyone’s favorite backfield teammate. The outsize loss that preyed on those were left. The mortal arithmetic that nullified reason. The war did this to people.

Two men and a dog, they stood there in the surf sound, its grave beat upon the shore. Finally Ben said, “Sig, I don’t have that kind of pull.” Fully aware of his unsureness whether he would use it in this instance if he had it.

“You ever get some, Lefty,” came the stolid reply, “keep me in mind.”

Is there a word missing?

The outsize loss that preyed on those who were left.

233

234

8

CN

“I hate it when I’m late. What’s on the menu here besides you, Good-
looking?” Scooting in across from him in the booth, Cass shot him a smile with
the teasing little slot between the teeth like a central promise of mischief later.

Ben just sat there taking her in. The crush hat, pilots’ cachet in its rakish
touch of crumple and scuffed visor brim; only veterans of the air were permitted
to wear it without the loop band in the top that way. Her hair casually cut to mid-
length but nice as ever. The army-tan tie knotted just so, spacing the twin silvers
of captain’s insignia on her collar tabs. Standard-issue trenchcoat worn against the
Seattle damp, over her light khaki dress uniform, both trimly tailored to the snug
body he knew so well. This was essential Cass to him, managing to look both
proficient and snazzy, and the smile added to it as she eyed him back. “What are
you so busy grinning about?”

“You. And how baboon lucky I am to be with you.”

“Hey. I’m not so sure I’m a lucky charm.” Shedding the crush hat and coat
with dispatch, she took in the weathered waterfront atmosphere of the eating
establishment. “More like a busted-flush flier trying to wind down.
drink?”

AUTHOR

“You. And how baboon lucky I am to be with you.”

“Hey. I’m not so sure I’m a lucky charm.” Shedding the crush hat and coat with dispatch, she took in the weathered waterfront atmosphere of the eating establishment. “More like a busted-flush flier trying to wind down. What’s to drink?”

I'm not sure what ⁽²³⁵⁾
"busted-flush flier"
means. Please clarify.

“Beer by the pound.” He indicated the generous golden schooner in front of him.

“Mmm, tempting.” A little beat of deliberation before she said: “I need something stiffer than that, though, after fighting off the MP’s.”

“That’s not funny, you know.”

“I know.”

No, the military police were not a kidding matter. Besides v
 “fighting them off” meant. Where did this come from, Captain Star
night together for who knows how long, and something already is in the way.

Resolutely he flagged down a gray-haired waitress built along the lines of an old workhorse, who creaked off to fetch a scotch for Cass.

“So tell me,” he could not keep the apprehension out of his voice, “what introduces you to the MP’s?”

“The uniform,” she answered bitterly. “Those idiots didn’t know what a WASP is.” Recounting it riled her up to the degree of combustion the military policemen must have faced. “They stopped me down the street. I don’t know what they thought, that I’d rolled some soldier for his getup or I was a streetwalker ready to play games or what. It burns me up, Ben. I’ve been in this damn war as long as anybody, and so have plenty of other women. And we still get chickenshit treatment like that. Why should we?”

He took a chance and gawked off in the direction where it had happened.

“I hope there’s not a couple of MP’s bleeding in the street out there.”

“Beer by the pound.” He indicated the generous golden schooner in front of him.

“Mmm, tempting.” A little beat of deliberation before she said: “I need something stiffer than that, though, after fighting off the MP’s.”

“That’s not funny, you know.”

“I know.”

No, the military police were not a kidding matter. Besides whatever “fighting them off” meant. Where did this come from, Captain Standish? Only one night together for who knows how long, and something already is in the way.

Resolutely he flagged down a gray-haired waitress built along the lines of an old workhorse, who creaked off to fetch a scotch for Cass.

How about:

} Besides whatever “fighting
off the MPs” meant.
^ ^ ^ (verbalism)

It raised her mood. "Close," she laughed. With a mock air of insouciance she touched the captain's bar on her collar. "It ended up I had them calling me 'sir.'" ^{hair #}

Relieved, he signaled for another round of drinks in tribute to that. With lifted spirits, they locked onto what the rest of the evening promised. The waitress decided they were worthy of menus, and they teased each other into ordering oysters. Angels on ~~H~~orseback, he picked out, how could he pass up a chance at something so grandly named? She would go him one better, she growled in her best poker-player guise, ~~O~~ysters Rockefeller. The shambling restaurant was situated above the harbor, tacked on to the arcade and stalls of the public market, and out on Puget Sound ferryboats found their way back and forth with navigation lights that shimmered on the water. Seattle these nights had a military bearing, sailors in from the Bremerton fleet, soldiers unwinding from training at Fort Lewis, pilots from anywhere, and he and she for once sat comfortable as could be in the anonymity furnished by the surround of so many uniforms like theirs. The rouseful smells of things grown in the earth and things harvested from the sea clung to the old set of structures hosting the market. The two of them imbibed it all, wanting to be nowhere else and in no other company. Why can't it be like this, they shared the thought without having to say so, on and on?

Catching up on their weeks apart, Ben told of his time with Prokosch on coastal patrol. "I hope to hell he's imagining those rafts," he finished up, "and keeps his finger off the trigger. He's kind of like a jumpy sheepherder with a lot of gun. Spending all his time with himself can do funny things to a guy."

Cass in turn recited the latest twists and turns of keeping Lieutenant Maclaine in the air. "Last time up to Edmonton she was next thing to an ace, and this time we had to go on instruments and she was ready to quit by the time she found the ground. That's Della for you."

He sat back, reflective. "So you have one you're trying to keep in the war, and I have one I hope never gets near it."

"There are times life doesn't cooperate worth a damn. How's that, newspaper guy?"

"I'll pass that right along to my father for filler. Guess what, we pay off in angel morsels." He speared his last oyster wrapped in bacon and held it across for her, and she leaned in and royally ate it off his fork. They traded a gaze of love well-flavored with lust. Or was it the other way around?

"Christ, Cass, I'm glad you showed up." The mention of flying blind in Canadian weather reminded him he hadn't asked her about getting here. "Any trouble cutting loose from East Base for this?"

"No, I flew a hospital ship over," she tossed it off along with a gulp of scotch.

The startled expression on Ben said if that wasn't a definition of trouble, he didn't know what was. An aircraft flown back to the factory with something internally wrong was called that because the hospital was where you might end up from flying it. He helplessly studied this woman he wanted so bad it made his ears ring and who came with all manner of peril attached. First the MP's, now this news. He always had to be aware Cass was a good deal more complicated than

anyone gave her credit for. However, he would gladly do without further surprises along this line tonight. "Don't give me that look, you," she fended, trying for innocence. "I'm not the one who cracked up a floatplane in high-and-dry Canada, am I. The hospital crate didn't give me any trouble. The engine didn't conk or anything."

He resisted saying what a good thing that was, inasmuch as P-39s had the reputation of gliding like a brick. "I'm no authority," he grveled out, "the only damn thing they let me fly is a mahogany desk. But I don't want you risking your neck for me, Cass."

"Look who's talking." She said it lightly enough, but there was stiff meaning behind it. "If I remember right, you're the one with the scar--"

"The wound was only skin deep, that isn't anything like--"

"Don't give me that, hero. Skin is deep, when it comes to a bullet. You got that scar from following your football buddies around to places where people mainly get shot at. And you're about to do a bunch more of it."

"Only partly. The next one I go to is having as nice and safe a war as anybody can." Omitting, the one after that isn't.

If Cass was reassured by the semi-alibi, she didn't show it. Cocking her head, she looked across as if needing to memorize him. "So how long do I have to get along without you?"

"Until summer sometime," he came out with it. "Teepy Weepy keeps feeding more stuff between the Supreme Team stories. I'm going to be all over the Pacific."

Cass smiled differently. "Next you're going to say, 'Write to me.'" hair #

"Took the words right out of my mouth, grabby," Ben put his own best face on it. "I'll be a moving target, but letters--" M

She reached over and flicked a blunt-nailed finger against one of his knuckles hard enough that it smarted. "I'd just as soon you didn't call yourself that."

Shaking the sting out of his hand, he made a bid for truce. "Before I get any deeper into trouble, how about we have another drink and I show Madame to our room?"

Playing along, she leaned her arms way out onto the table of the booth and propped her chin on her hands before purring: "And will the accommodations be up to Madame's expectations?" a

"I'll have you know," he gave back haughtily, "the hotel room, the last one available in Seattle, is actually larger than a closet. By a foot or two, at least. It even has a special feature. A Murphy bed." A

She hooted. "One of those that folds down out of the wall? Genius, what's to keep it from folding back up into the wall just when things get interesting?" #

"Murphy the bed has experience longer than a flatfoot's lunch hour," he gave it the tough-guy treatment, "at such matters as this. The first time Murph lays his mattress-button eyes on the likes of you, he's gonna say, This is a lollapalooza I could happily fold away with forever--" M

"See!"

“^I--but she is too classy to do that to. No, I’m gonna keep my frame on the floor for her, just to show my respect. The second I seen her I says, Murph, this dame takes the icing--”

“That’s Captain Dame to you and Murph,” she snipped in, “or I’ll call my buddies, the MP’s.”

“^I--and like I was saying, it ain’t many femmes in the land of Murphy that’s also an officer and a gentleman, in a manner of speaking. No, I tell you, Murph the bed has seen his share and then some, and this woman is like the royal jewels shined up. Like the Taj Mahal in a skirt. Like--”

“Like a lunatic about to be with the guy for the last time in a blue moon,” she took over the formulation, voice husky.

“That, too,” he conceded wistfully. “Let’s make this drink a quick one.”

Out in the night the ferries came and went, shuttles on the dark loom of water. The port city in its nightspots and unbuttoned privacies settled to the business of such places down through time, harboring lovers and warriors.

Why have I never been able to stand Danzer? Let me count the ways. On the team, there was no love lost between the Dancer out there at right end grabbing glory with his jersey clean and the rest of the linemen beating their brains out throwing blocks for him with never any thanks. The only good word he ever had in the huddle would be for Moxie. "Good call, Stomp," I can still hear it, as if a Stamper-to-Danzer pass play didn't take the other nine of us to make it work. Jake used to say Danzer was so stuck on himself he had gum in his fur.

That was football, only a game, supposedly. Games have any number of outcomes, though, personal scores that are not settled. If the ground of chance that brought us together had been in England, no doubt I'd be remembering a cricket match with Danzer in the whitest pants—and it still would be called a game and count as eternally as if score was being kept in the Door

(SB)

AUTHOR

"You're sure this is the only way to get there, Chief?"

Ben arrived alongside the USS McCorkle to find a chasm of disturbed gray-green seawater between it and him, with canyon walls of ship steel on either side. Consistently the swell of the open ocean lifted the destroyer, across there, atop a foaming crest while wallowing the oil ship he was aboard in the trough of the wave. The ships then would dizzily trade elevations. Between the rising and falling hulls stretched the pulley rope that was supposed to carry him across. The line looked to him as thin as spiderspin.

That was football, only a game, supposedly. Games have any number of outcomes, though, personal scores that are not settled. If the ground of chance that brought us together had been in England, no doubt I'd be remembering a cricket match with Danzer in the whitest pants[!]—and it still would be a game and count as eternally as if score was being kept in the Door

SB

“You’re sure this is the only way to get there, Chief?”

515
Lullaby
AUTHOR

Should this be: (242)
as if the score was
^
being kept

That was football, only a game, supposedly. Games have any number of outcomes, though, personal scores that are not settled. If the ground of chance that brought us together had been in England, no doubt I'd be remembering a cricket match with Danzer in the whitest pants[!]_m and it still would be called only a game and count as eternally as if score was being kept in the Doomsday Book.

SB

"You're sure this is the only way to get there, Chief?"

This is spelled
] Domesday Book in
^ Webster's.

242

“The motor launch might get crushed between if we tried that, sir,” the oiler’s bowlegged chief petty officer replied, unflappably tugging the breeches buoy into place around Ben’s hips like an oversize canvas diaper. “Not to worry, lieutenant. We’ll haul you across in a jiffy and you’ll get a real nice reception on the Cork-- the mail sack is following you over. Ready, sir?”

“No, and never going to be, so let’s get it over with.”

Legs sticking out of the canvas sling and arms tight around the ring buoy that the sling hung from, he was sent bobbing into mid-air, dipping with the teeter[↑]totter rhythm of the ships, the line with its dangling above the viciously sloshing water but not that far above it. The sleek grey hull of the destroyer loomed nearer and nearer until he began to be afraid the next toss of ocean would splatter him against it like a lobbed egg. Then there was a powerful yank from the crewmen handling the haul rope attached to the pulley and he spun up over the side of the hull into a sprawling descent onto deck.

A helping hand came down to him, and an unmistakable dig along with it.

“Welcome aboard, eminent war correspondent. You’re just in time for the invasion of Europe.”

Great start. Looking at my reflection in the Dancer’s famous shoes.

Unharnessing himself from the apparatus, Ben got up off his hands and knees and sought his footing, the deck of the destroyer livelier than that of the slow-rolling oil supply ship the past many days.

Legs sticking out of the canvas sling and arms tight around the ring buoy that the sling hung from, he was sent bobbing into mid-air, dipping and soaring with the teetertotter rhythm of the ships, the line with its dangling human cargo above the viciously sloshing water but not that far above it. The sleek gray hull of the destroyer loomed nearer and nearer until he began to be afraid the next toss of ocean would splatter him against it like a lobbed egg. Then there was a powerful yank from the crewmen handling the haul rope attached to the pulley and he spun up over the side of the hull into a sprawling descent onto deck.

In Webster's and
Prairie Nocture (p. 118)
and Mountain Time (p. 119).
(243)

Meanwhile Danzer stood planted like a yachtsman in an easy breeze. Even though both men knew it did not fit their acquaintanceship, he had put on for general show his languid smile, as if about to say something then disdaining to.

Already irked--What was that Europe crack about?-- Ben gave back the briefest of handshakes. "One of us has his oceans mixed up, Nick. I was under the distinct impression this is the Pacific." Without taking their eyes off the new arrival a number of sailors went about rote chores around them, their faded blue work attire a contrast to Danzer's khaki uniform, crisp in every crease.

Elaborately considerate, Danzer drew him away from the rope-and-pulley rig. "Stand aside, Ben, here's the real cargo." The mail sack came zinging down the line to the cheers of the sailors, followed anticlimactically by Ben's travel pack. "Come on to the wardroom and catch the broadcast of how the war is being won for us."

He realized Danzer wasn't just woofing him. There in officers' country it was standing room only, those who were off-duty awakened by the news and joining the morning watch in listening to the transmission piped in from the radio room. The entire compartment fell silent as General Eisenhower's crackling voice, half around the world on the Atlantic side of the globe of war, addressed his cross-Channel invasion force. "You are about to embark upon the great EDITOR/AUTHOR which we have striven these many months... In company with our brothers-in arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine... The tide has turned. The free men of the world are marching together to victory..." Ben furiously scribbled down snatches of it,

He realized Danzer wasn't just woofing him. There in officers' country it was standing room only, those who were off-duty awakened by the news and joining the morning watch in listening to the transmission piped in from the radio room. The entire compartment fell silent as General Eisenhower's crackling voice, half around the world on the Atlantic side of the globe of war, addressed his cross-Channel invasion force. "You are about to embark upon the great crusade toward which we have striven these many months... In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine... The tide has turned. The free men of the world are marching together to victory...." Ben furiously scribbled down snatches of it,

cf. spacing

I've included a transcription of Eisenhower's address from www.military.com.
Is the punctuation okay? (244)

[Login](#). Not a member? [Join now](#)[» Get the Military.com Toolbar](#)

[Home](#) | [Benefits](#) | [News](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Shop](#) | [Finance](#) | [Careers](#) | [Education](#) | [Join the Military](#) | [Community](#)

Search for Military News:

60

FORUM

[Forum Home](#) | [Headlines](#) | [Early Brief](#) | [Opinions](#) | [Discussions](#) | [SoldierTech](#) | [Benefit Updates](#) | [Defense Tech](#)

Eisenhower's D-Day Message

Military.com | June 05, 2007

Listen to the Message**Transcript of the message sent just prior to the invasion:**

Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! You are about to embark upon a great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers in arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi

tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened, he will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man to man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our home fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessings of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

~ Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower

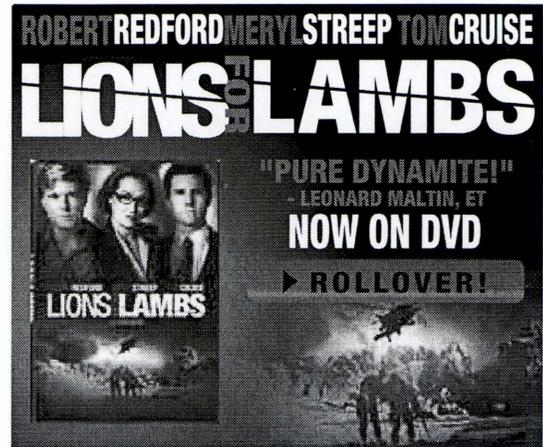
More D-Day Coverage:

- [Soldiers' First-Hand Accounts of D-Day](#)
- [The Leaders of D-Day](#)
- [How D-Day Unfolded on June 6, 1944](#)
- [D-Day Veteran Recalls Historic Day](#)
- [Good, Better, Best D-Day Movies](#)
- [D-Day Battlefield Maps](#)
- [D-Day Slideshow](#)
- [Newsreel: D-Day Invasion](#)

Sound Off...What do you think? [Join the discussion.](#)

Copyright 2008 Military.com. All opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of Military.com.

advertisement
 ROBERT REDFORD MERYL STREEP TOM CRUISE
LIONS LAMBS
 "PURE DYNAMITE!"
 - LEONARD MALTIN, ET
NOW ON DVD
 ▶ ROLLOVER!

**WHAT'S HOT »**

[Widow Battles In-Law Over GI's DNA](#)

[Missing Marine Spotted at Kansas ATM](#)

Def Tech: [Flying on Hydrogen](#)

Daily Shock: [Feeding the Guns](#)

Benefits: [SGLI Premiums Reduced](#)

Podcast: [Petraeus Testimony Preview](#)

Fitness: [High Blood Sugar and Diabetes](#)

[Ace the ASVAB; Get Your Choice](#)

advertisement
 advertisement

needing to do something while history was dispensed without him. *D-Day somewhere on the coast of France and I'm out here with the albatrosses. Thanks a whole hell of a lot for the heads-up, Tepee Weepy.*

In the wardroom's explosion of speculation that followed the Allied supreme commander's brief pronouncement, Danzer murmured aside to Ben: "A gentleman's C, on that pep talk by El Supremo?"

You're the one who would recognize one. "You were spoiled by Bruno," Ben came back at that. "Half-time dramatics don't sound that good with real blood involved." This was not a time he wanted to be standing around trading smart remarks, however. Like a change in the weather sensed in the bones, he could feel the time coming when the dateline on what he wrote would read SOMEWHERE IN EUROPE. "Moxie's ack-ack outfit is in that invasion force," he thought out loud, "you can about bet."

Did he imagine, or did Danzer draw back a little in surprise at those words? Ben shot him a curious look, but the Dancer was elusive there in his naval crispness. He still was as lean as when he lined up at opposite end from Ben and as apart. "You knew he was stationed in England, didn't you?"

"Merry Old Moxie," Danzer said as if that constituted an answer. "You're bunking in the sick bay. I'll show you to it."

Nicholas Edwin Danzer. Ned when he was growing up in Livingston, but Nick as soon as he hit Treasure State University and figured out what rhymed nicely with slick. His family has the Paradise Gateway Toggery, outfitter to

moneyed tourists on their way to Yellowstone Park. The snappy Stetsons. The gabardine slacks, men's instant fittings by a male tailor right there on the premises, women's by a female one. The specialized cowboy boots with walker heels, which takes the nuisance of cowboying out of them. How it all must have rolled into the cash register, and out of that, the vacation home up the Paradise Valley, the fishing trips with the Governor, the high school football camp at the Rose Bowl while most of the rest of us were teenage muscle sweating through summer jobs at a dollar a day. Born with a silver shoe horn in his booties and he took advantage of it. Give Slick Nick the benefit of the doubt, allow as how it was okay for him to be the clothes horse of the locker room and a mile around, for that matter. The more-wised-up-than-thou attitude he wore, that was not okay.

It was Vic, rest his soul, who shut him off at the mouth. Sooner or later it might have been Jake or Animal or, I like to think, me, but Vic drew first honors. That day Bruno had run us ragged in practice, all of us were out of sorts, and Danzer made the mistake of pushing past Vic into the showers with "Move it along, Tonto." Vic hit him in the chest with the base of his fist the way a person would bang hard on a door and that finished that. From then on, Danzer's attitude still showed but he kept it buttoned.

And here he is, supply officer on the destroyer U.S.S. McCormick, on station probably a thousand miles from the nearest Japs. As cushy an assignment as there is in a theatre of combat, however he snagged it. He makes Dex Cariston look like an amateur at foreswearing war. For once, I wish I had less knowledge of the person I'm supposed to write about.

But that's not how it is, or ever going to be, with the Dancer. I know him right down to his shoe size. Or in his case, to his shoe polish.

The story galloped among the former teammates, after Animal Anselides picked it up from a troopship navigator who went through officers' school at Great Lakes with Danzer. Inspections were ferocious in the terminally picky commander stalking through the squad bays handing out gigs-- demerits--^M for specks of dust imaginary or not. Always with one exception. Danzer's shoes dazzled the man, as well they should have; shiny as black glass, sheerly flawless as obsidian. It reliably drew Danzer an approving nod and a squint at his nametag, and everyone knew that the good regard of the commander was the one sure route around wading the chickenshit that customarily awaited an officer candidate. Danzer's shoeshine secret, whether he bribed it out of some crafty yardbird at Great Lakes or more likely devolved it from making those fancy boots gleam to best advantage in the show window of the Toggery, was to press the polish into the leather with a spoon made hot by a cigarette lighter, buff it, melt some more polish in, buff some more. It wrecked the shoes for wearing--^M Danzer had to hop into an ordinary pair when inspection was over--^M but could not be beat for display.

"Better have another pork chop, Ben. I had to practically buy out the hog farms of Queensland to get them." The gloss on Danzer these days shone up from the capacious plates the officers of the McCorkle ate off of. It had the reputation of a ship that fed exceedingly well.

"No thanks. My stomach still wants to be back on land."

AUTHOR

But that's not how it is, or ever going to be, with the Dancer. I know him right down to his shoe size. Or in his case, to his shoe polish.

The story galloped among the former teammates, after Animal Angelides picked it up from a troopship navigator who went through officers candidate school at Great Lakes with Danzer. Inspections were ferocious in their barracks, a terminally picky commander stalking through the squad bays handing out gigs-- demerits--for specks of dust imaginary or not. Always with one exception.

] Style in Webster's

Which he knew would take another week yet, before the destroyer put in at Brisbane. And Slick Nick can keep on with the war effort by bargaining the Aussies out of groceries.

Supply and demand were immaculately matched in Danzer and this ship, he had already determined. By whatever flick of fortune in the chain of command, the vessel was something like a palace guard to the commander-in-chief in the Pacific, General MacArthur, headquartered in the Australian port. Or as those less kind put it, driven into exile there by Japanese triumphs. MacArthur's war thus far had been an early series of ghastly defeats-- Bataan, Corregidor, then the entire Philippines--now somewhat assuaged by amphibious invasions that had rolled back the enemy from New Guinea and a handful of other strategic map spots strewn down the South Pacific. The McCorkle's war this far along consisted of patrol duty and support chores here in the conquered waters central to MacArthur's realm. Ben didn't think he could get away with writing it, but the Southern Cross in the night sky was a constellation of extreme luck for the crew of this ship.

"Lieutenant Reinking? I can't resist telling you"--this was on its way from a redheaded officer so young and junior in rank that he practically shined--"I read one of your pieces in JWP at Northwestern. The one where they held the wake for your teammate in a bar."

Ben wished the junior ranker had resisted speaking up; there were too many faces in that messroom plainly ready to savor morsels beyond any found on the plates. "Kenny O'Fallon, that was," he reeled off to try to get rid of this.

“Butte knows how to give a person a sendoff.” He sent a knotted look back along the table. “What’s JWP?”

“Journalistic Writing Practice,” the young admirer reddened as he said it. As he spoke, a white-jacketed mess attendant went around the table pouring coffee and dealing out fresh forks for pie. The Navy’s ways made Ben feel at sea in more ways than one. Except for whoever was on the bridge the dozen or so officers all ate together at the one long table in obligatory lingering fashion, which meant the talkers got to talk endlessly and the listeners got to listen eternally. Cliques showed through the crevices in conversation; this nonfighting destroyer mostly was officered by a mix of merchant marine retreads, such as the gray slump-shouldered captain who sat at the head of the table regarding Ben without pleasure, and ninety-day wonders (example: Danzer) turned out by officer candidate school. All meal long, Ben had to behave like an anthropologist tiptoeing between tribes.

Right now, with more pluck than sense the redheaded one-striper was back at what he had read in college:

“I’m trying to remember, in that piece. Your football buddy, your and Lieutenant Danzer’s--he was killed out here in New Guinea, wasn’t he?”

Ben sat there struggling to measure out a more civil reply than No, shavetail, that was another dead one of us.

He was aware of being worn to a thin edge by the time he reached the destroyer. Ever since shipping out of Seattle in what seemed an eon ago, he had

filed stories from latitudes of the Pacific theatre of combat. The Pacific conflict was a strange piecemeal war, fought from island to island, mapping itself out more like a medieval storming of castles, if the castles had been of coral and moated by hundreds of miles of hostile water and defended by men committed to die for their emperor rather than surrender. Out here, a war correspondent's movements from one jungle-torn place to another were like continually journeying into the black fire of nightmare. He had seen things it took all his ingenuity to put into words that TPWP would let pass into print, and some that would never surface in civilized newspapers.

The dirt road at Rabaul, the dust carpeted with excrement, where the retreating Japanese had evacuated their hospital patients in some manner of forced march, the sick and wounded defecating while they walked like cows with the drizzles.

Constant corpses, the accumulations of death on every fought-over island, decay and flies always ahead of the burial squads.

The pilot who fell to earth--New Guinea again--near enough the American forces that a patrol was sent out to recover him.

Ben was with them when the spotter plane dropped its flare bomber had failed to come out its dive and they thrashed through the search of the pilot. No one had seen his parachute open for sure, nor lead man practically fell in the hole the body made in the jungle floor, three feet deep. Then and there Ben had been seized with a stomach-turning fear for Cass, the altitudes at which she did her job a deadly chasm as constant as the sky over

CAPS

AUTHOR

Constant corpses, the accumulations of death on every fought-over island, decay and flies always ahead of the burial squads.

The pilot who fell to earth¹--New Guinea again¹--near enough the American forces that a patrol was sent out to recover him.

Ben was with them when the spotter plane dropped its flare where the dive⁼ bomber had failed to come out its dive^{of} and they thrashed through the jungle in search of the pilot. No one had seen his parachute open for sure, nor did it. The lead man practically fell in the hole the body made in the jungle floor, three feet deep. Then and there Ben had been seized with a stomach-turning fear for Cass, the altitudes at which she did her job a deadly chasm as constant as the sky over

n. wds

] Change okay?

250

him after that. No remedy in sight. He had tried to shake that feeling in his gut--^l_m he had enough of those already--^l_m but the thought of life without her refused to quite go away. It was going with him throughout this ocean of war, a hue of loneliness always accompanying him now, like another depth to his shadow.

SB

Solitary in the company of the destroyer officers, he at last came up with a response to the question that had pasted O'Fallon's fate onto Friessen's. "No, you're thinking of another teammate of ours. We've lost more than our share."

Danzer had been watching throughout, ^agrey-eyed as a stone visage. He showed no sign any of this fazed him. "It's strange how war has imitated life," he said as if mastering the philosophy for them all. "The middle of the line has taken the hits. Ben and I had the luck to be the ends." Smiling to take the edge off mortal matters, he knocked on the wood trim of the mess table.

"We're jealous of Danzer, you know," one of the older officers said in a joshing tone, if that's what it really was. "You're here to make him famous back home, and as dog robber he already gets to be the first one off the ship when we hit port."

"You wouldn't want the burden of being Slick Nick," Ben answered the officer oratorically enough to draw a laugh. Danzer joined in.

"Still, it's an interesting morale device, isn't it," the executive officer spoke up briskly. The exec was a Naval Academy man, and chafing at this becalmed post in his career climb if Ben did not miss his guess. "Giving people a

periodic glimpse--not that your talents can be entirely captured at any one time, Nick--of someone all throughout the war. Rather like time-lapse photography."

Before the executive officer could hold forth further, Ben put in "Right now I'm the one lapsing," barely covering a yawn. "If you'll excuse me, gentlemen"--he tried to intone it without irony and could not be sure he succeeded--"I'm going to have to hit the sack."

SB

The one advantage of bunking in the sick bay was privacy, which he craved in the crowded confines of the ship. *Just me and the aspirin and the sawbone's slab.* Those and the unsettling sense of being cast backward in time.

Wels

Hands under his head, he lay there on the berth and mulled. It had been, what, nearly a year since his impatient period of mending in a similar medical compartment on the ship off New Guinea. The swollen thoughts of that time returned to him, as haunting as they were contrary. A main one, borne back by the dinner episode: why couldn't Carl Friessen have come out of the hand-to-hand combat on that bloodslick trail with just enough sacrifice of flesh to retire him from the war? The million-dollar wound, shrapnel in the back, a stray bullet in the lower leg, that sent a soldier home for good. His own ^(encounter with a bullet) seemed to him the two-bit variety, scarcely deserving of a Purple Heart or anything else, yet the twinge in his shoulder was a message of what might have been. At the time he was disturbed with himself for wanting any of the Supreme Team out of the war; Friessen, Vic, the others were in it of their own choice and who was he to wish carefully

AV

calibrated harm to any of them? With what he knew now, he should
 down the heavens in support of such wish.

AUTHOR

That and ten cents would buy a person a dime's worth of d
 life, wouldn't it. He swung up off the bunk, determined to leave the mood there,
 and crossed over to his typewriter on the cubbyhole desk. First, though--another
 habit back from that other sick bay stay/a year ago--he flicked on the radio tuned
 to Tokyo Rose. As ever, the sultry voice was there, alternating between taunting
 American soldiers all over the Pacific and playing the likes of "Tuxedo Junction,"
 the rhythm that began swelling out now. The Japanese were good at such
 propaganda, he acknowledged; the German counterpart, Lord Haw Haw, sounded
 like P.G. Wodehouse construing Bertie Wooster. Swing music outdid a drone any
 old night. Something to keep in mind, would-be scriptwriter, he told
 tuned the sound just low enough to be background, and settled to his

AU

rom

AU

AU
part

AUTHOR

His things were laid out on the slablike medical table and he
 for fresh paper and rolled a page into the typewriter. He took his time at this,
 which would have astounded Jones or anyone else back at East Base who had ever
 seen him put a typewriter to work. On TPWP pieces he wrote as fast as the keys
 could tolerate, never needing to glance down--one of the blessings he owed his
 father was those boyhood sessions at the training typewriter in the Gleaner office,
 with bunion pads hiding the letters on the keyboard. But nights on his movie
 script, which were many, he deliberately slowed to a sculptor's pace, letting the
 imagination feel its way toward the shape of trueness. The scene he was working
 on took place on the Letter Hill. The character based on Purcell was the last player

CAP:

calibrated harm to any of them? With what he knew now, he should have called down the heavens in support of such wish.

That and ten cents would buy a person a dime's worth of difference in this life, wouldn't it. He swung up off the bunk, determined to leave the mood there, and crossed over to his typewriter on the cubbyhole desk. First, though—another habit back from that other sick bay stay ^a/~~a~~ year ago—he flicked on the radio tuned to Tokyo Rose. As ever, the sultry voice was there, alternating between taunting American soldiers all over the Pacific and playing the likes of "Tuxedo Junction," the rhythm that began swelling out now. The Japanese were good at such propaganda, he acknowledged; the German counterpart, Lord Haw Haw, sounded like P.G. Wodehouse construing Bertie Wooster. Swing music outdid a drone any old night. Something to keep in mind, would-be scriptwriter, he told himself. He tuned the sound just low enough to be background, and settled to his routine.

His things were laid out on the slablike medical table and he reached over for fresh paper and rolled a page into the typewriter. He took his time at this,

Should this be:

] in support of such
a wish ? 253

AU

rom

AU

AU
pref

] Should this be
tuned or turned?
^

to reach the whitewashed rocks--Camera: the slope below him appears steep and endless, he tapped onto the paper--and others of the football team sagged against the stone emblem trying to catch their breath. His fingers resting on the keyboard, he tried out dialogue in his inner ear, trying to catch words out of the air. It was a pursuit that enabled him to stand the slow, slow passage of military hours, the way some other man in uniform somewhere might endure the duration by nightly reading in War and Peace, and upon finishing it, starting over. (He made a mental note to find out what Danzer did to pass the time, if he did anything.) It was an abiding mystery, the script, that promised to reveal itself only in the measured workings of his mind and his fingers. And it was something Tepee Weepy could not reach.

SB

He lurched through the next days at Danzer's side, listening over and over to him regulate a cook here, a baker there, a storeroom swabbie down in some gloomy chamber at the bottom of the ship. All of it about as exciting as the derring-do of the corner grocer. 'SUPREME TEAM' MEMBER BATTLES ENEMY WITH BISCUITS, he could just see the headline. Tepee Weepy would be thrilled to the gills with this piece. Sure it would. As military service went, what he was reporting on aboard the U.S.S. McCorkle amounted to the essence of quiescence.

Meanwhile the long lean destroyer itself was never at rest. The Cork was aptly nicknamed, bobbing with every bit of weather. Yet that was the only discernible peril it faced. There were moments, staring out at the methodical ocean, when he pined for a genuine storm to shake matters up into something he

could write about with some life to it, before snapping back to his senses. Think about it, Reinking. Throwing up your guts doesn't help you do your job. Just ask Dex.

So, it seemed like just another helping of the idly floating Cork's routine when Danzer turned to him over dessert one dinnertime and announced for all to hear: "You can't deprive us of your company this evening, Ben. It's movie night."

Well, why not? he figured. Let's see if Slick Nick supplies popcorn and soda pop along with the main feature. He trooped into the wardroom with the topside contingent and the petty officers invited up from below and tight quarters watching *Compromised* with Edward G. Robinson : chewing up the scenery and each other. That soapy drama, however a chance of staying with him after what flickered onto the white metal wall at the end of the room first. He should have known Danzer had something of the sort up his sleeve. The short reel, Your USO On the Go, blared into action standardly enough, jaunty Italian music as the blondest of Hollywood blondes entertained the troops on a woodsy stage somewhere near the Anzio beachhead. The announcer had just begun to boom in when someone in the wardroom spoke up:

"Nick, I could look at Betty Grable's prow every night, but we did see this last week."

"Our guest didn't," Danzer grandly dealt with that from his presiding spot near the projector. "Humor us once-upon-a-time athletes for a little bit, if you'd be so kind."

AUTHOR

Well, why not? he figured. Let's see if Slick Nick supplies popcorn and soda pop along with the main feature. He trooped into the wardroom with the topside contingent and the petty officers invited up from below and sat there in tight quarters watching Compromised with Edward G. Robinson and Bette Davis chewing up the scenery and each other. That soapy drama, however, did not stand a chance of staying with him after what flickered onto the white metal wall at the

I can't find Compromised
] in my ^{movie} reference guide or
on Amazon.com. Perhaps
Kid Galahad (1937)? (255)

Ben tensed, glad his face could not be seen in the dark. Oh, goddamn.
Here comes the load of crap. Slouching down in his seat in a way he had not done since he was a kid captive to the screen back in Gros Ventre, he took in Bob Hope rattling off jokes and the McGuire Sisters spunkily harmonizing. Then the soundtrack music trumpeted off in the direction he was expecting and dreading, and here came the voice like hail on a tin roof, resounding back from the season of the Twelfth Man into the darkened compartment.

"Hello and a hurrah, for you fighting men and women everywhere! This is Ted Loudon with your USO sports report. Once again, the United Service^s Organization and the man at the mike, yours truly, are in your corner as we bring you the events of--"

Loudon had the knack, Ben had long ago divined, of spreading himself like a weed. Newspapers, airwaves, celluloid, the so-called sportscaster was everywhere but the backs of matchbooks and that was probably next. Ben set himself to endure another kaleidoscope of clichés, still trying to figure out Danzer's purpose in thrusting this in front of him. There's no football this time of year. Is he just throwing Loudmouth at me to see what will stick? Meanwhile in close focus there on the wardroom wall, Loudon himself was grandiosely shepherding an over-the-hill heavyweight boxer onto a hangar stage at the big air base in Newfoundland. In the space of the next breath, he was spouting his way through Opening Day of baseball season, replete with himself among the wounded troops in the box seats at the Washington Senators game.

AU

rom

set c

Then the projector beam gave a wink of light between scenes, composed itself into gymnasium bleachers full of cheering soldiers, and onto a basketball court surged a pair of teams, one wearing no jerseys and the other wearing beards that reached to the chest letters on theirs. *"For the troops at Fort Dix gathered in the USO fieldhouse, it's basketball, down to hide and hair!"* Ben jolted up in his seat. *"Yes, folks, it's the Carlisle Skins versus the House of David! These barnstorming teams have entertained America from coast to coast, playing a brand of ball that their ancestors would not recognize but they have adapted for their own."* Eerily he watched five fleet ghosts of Vic Rennie racing up and down the hardwood floor, the Indian team in just its trunks running and shooting like boys let loose. For their part, the big bearded men on the other team set up passwork plays of geometric grace. In between the pure basketball there were stunts of showmanship nonsense, as one of the bearded giants held the basketball in one hand over his head and a couple of the shorter Indians jumped and jumped and couldn't come close to reaching it, then in the next sequence the Indians sped upcourt passing to one another so swiftly through the windmilling House of David players that the ball seemed to be in two places at once. It was all circus to Loudon, who in his patter managed to ignore superb run-and-gun plays to concentrate on exaggerated pronunciation of names like Hunts at Night and Buffalo Scraper, and for that matter, Perlmutter and Rosenthorn. Numbly Ben blocked out all of that he could, summoning instead the intrinsic memory of Vic with his hopes set on the Skins, on the playing career beyond football that would

rom

web

AU

rom

AU

take him anywhere but Hill 57. Until his leg disappeared from under him. And then his life.

I get it, Danzer, you bet I do. Luck looks after those with shiny shoes, not the ones in mocassins. You've got the recipe for cynical.

The instant the lights went up at the end of the main show, Ben ducked out. He didn't know what the movie night protocol was, coffee and cookies and conversation afterward or what, but he didn't care, he simply wanted time alone. Sleep was nowhere in the picture, he was too worked up. No sooner had he closed the sick bay door than he was across at the radio to flip on Tokyo Rose for some distraction. *Might as well make it a full night of propaganda.*

He settled to the cubbyhole desk and his typewriter as the Rose of Tokyo pleasantly promised doom ahead.

"Poor American boys. Your ships go up in flames every day and your planes are shot from the sky every hour of that day. There are too many islands where your death waits for you, while slackers at home sit out the war. Go home, G.I.s, before a bullet brings you the sleep that lasts forever." Out wafted the eternal strains of Brahms' "Lullaby".

"Sweet dreams to you too, Rosie," Ben mocked back but kept the music as he twirled a half-finished page of script into the typewriter. A warm awareness different from other writing nights kept coursing through him. As much as he hated to admit Ted Loudon could possibly amount to any kind of inspiration, that rapidfire voice worked as a goad, evoking the Golden Eagles stadium, the cleft team poised to charge onto the football field, the gilded season that led to so much

rom

Av

rom

Av

webs

else. They probably didn't teach that in Journalistic Writing Practice. His fixated gaze at the waiting white space was just beginning to find the forms of words when a rap on the door broke the trance.

Oh, goddamn came to mind one more time, and he went to answer the knock hoping it would be any other of the officers, even the lecture-prone exec. Naturally it was not.

"You scooted out of the wardroom before I could catch you, Ben." Danzer stood there in the passageway as crisp as the cutout of a naval recruiting poster. "I thought we ought to have a chat, old lang syne and all."

"It's your boat, Nick." Ben gestured him in.

Gliding by, Danzer assumed a seat on the bunk and turned an ear as he did so. "Blotting out the war with Beethoven?"

"Brahms."

"Same difference?"

"Hardly. 'Beethoven's is music to move the universe, Brahms' is to move the heart.'" Ben reached over and clicked the radio off. "Sorry. I picked that up somewhere and it's always stuck with me."

"You were the word man among us and that hasn't changed," came the response from behind the held smile. "Our old friend Loudon hasn't lost his touch either, has he."

"Nope. Bullshit stays green for quite a while."

That did not appear to be the reaction Danzer had been counting on. He scrutinized his host briefly, then leaned forward, hands steepled together as if

aiming a prayer. "I hope this isn't stepping on your toes, Ben, but I wanted to make sure you're coming along all right on your article. Two more days until we're in Brisbane, and you're off to wherever's next. It would be on my conscience if I haven't provided everything you need."

Ben studied the slick source of those words. You're a provider if there ever was one. Danzer, monarch of the cold storage locker and master of the cooks and bakers and servers; the story that really interested Ben was how he had cozied himself into this slot in the American logistical empire. Some alliance of convenience made back there in shiny-shoe OCS? Some influential Yellowstone tourist, togged out by the Toggery, who knew someone on MacArthur's staff? Pull was involved somewhere, Ben would have bet his bottom dollar. There was nothing wrong with being a storekeeper. What rankled was Danzer being Danzer, his every pore exuding the attitude that he was entitled to a free pass through the war.

"Well, Nick, I'll tell you. It's a little tough to make the commissary sound like a knife at Japan's throat. I'll come up with something along those lines, though. Breadknife, maybe."

That drew a chuckle of sorts. "I'm the first to admit, patrolling MacArthur's backyard is a tolerable tour of duty. There's a nice amount of leisure." Danzer pronounced it as if it rhymed with pleasure. "But don't forget it's a long war for me, too. They also wait who only stand and serve." Ben could tell it was not nearly the first time that line had been trotted out.

webs
Think
webs

“By the way, how did you like the show, over all?” Danzer switched to, as though it was considerate of him to ask. “Loudon’s loud mouth aside, the bit of basketball was interesting, wasn’t it? I thought you would get a kick out of it.” *Is that what you thought. Somehow I doubt it.* Danzer steadied his gaze on his reluctant listener. “I never had anything permanently against Vic, you know. If his idea in life was to play shirts and skins, I’d have been glad to see him do it,” not quite saying *on the side of the redskins, naturally.*

“Life never did cut Vic a break,” Ben answered shortly. *Or the other three who lined up with us in that stadium.* He did not want to go over that territory, the team’s lives taken by the war, in the clammy companionship of Danzer. “Moxie’s all right, by the way. I checked. His outfit’s dug in high and dry in a lucky pocket at Normandy, not much resistance.”

“Is that what that was about, the code traffic ahead of the captain’s morning messages,” the other said blandly. “The skipper thinks you have more radio priority than Roosevelt.” He thought to tack on, “Good for Moxie,” before bringing the conversation to where Ben saw it had been aimed all along.

“I have a bit of news of my own,” Danzer delivered it with relish on the side. He looked off around the room as if gathering his statement. “I know where our buddy Dex is and the reason why.”

Ben felt a lurch the ship was not responsible for. He shifted in the chair as he eyed his now truly unwelcome caller.

“Is that so. You’re busier than you look, Nick.”

Danzer spread his hands. "This fell in the family lap. A boot representative"--it took his listener a moment to translate that to traveling shoe salesman--"we deal with has a line of work wear he thought might interest the Forest Service. Just right for smokejumpers, you know? The Cariston stores are one of his accounts too, so imagine his surprise when he paid a call to Seeley Lake and spotted Dex in there with the conchies. The rest of the conchies, I think it's safe to say."

Knowing what the answer would be, Ben grimly asked anyway:

"Are you spreading this around, back home?"

"Word might get out, I imagine. You know how these things are. People have no idea the heir to Cariston Enterprises is taking the yellow road through the war otherwise, do they." The offhand manner in which Danzer said it made Ben realize he had underestimated the man's disdain for the rest of humankind. He was the sort whose contempt you couldn't tell from the wallpaper. It was always there in back of whatever he said or did.

"That was one of your pieces I did happen to see, on Dex"--Ben stared back while Danzer delivered this straight at him--"and 'conscientious objector' did not leap out at me. At any rate, it might not reflect on him any too well, do you think? What with the rest of us putting in our tour of duty."

I get the message, you manipulating bastard. Make you look good or you and your Toggery bunch smear Dex and me along with it for covering for him.

Silently Ben wrung the neck of the words he had just heard. Tour of duty. That's what Danzer was doing with it, all right, touring duty like a cynical sightseer for

every spot of advantage it might offer him. The pampered tourist of the war who knew how to keep on pampering himself. The gleaming face confident it would never know doom until its allotted threescore and ten years, or more. For several seconds he did not trust himself to respond to Danzer, because the response he most wanted to give was to knock some teeth out of that smile.

“Nobody’s perfect,” he at last managed to keep it to, too much at stake not to, “but I do my goddamnedest to give everyone I write about a fair shake.”

“Then I’ve been speaking out of turn about Dex and all, haven’t I,” Danzer provided with the grace of one who had won. “A man’s best is all he can do.” Showing every appearance of being pleased with that bromide, he made as if to go, but paused when the paper in the typewriter caught his eye. He cocked a look at the ragged margins of the typing, as when he had deigned to notice the classical music. “Writing poetry in your spare time?”

“If you have to know, it’s a screenplay.”

“Is it.” Danzer seemed to weigh that information. “As I suppose they used to ask of Shakespeare, what’s it about?”

None of your goddamn business. Something contrary sparked in the back of Ben’s mind, and he gambled it on out.

“Purcell. The twelfth man. Football as we knew it, Dancer, war by another means.”

Danzer’s expression slipped several degrees of control. Ben thought he saw bleak surprise in those flinty eyes, something buried threatening to come out.

“It’s about an accident of nature, then,” the chiseled voice quickly recovered, at least. “Two of them. That freak kid himself and what happened to him on the Hill. I’m surprised you can’t find anything more worthy of your talent, Ben.”

You think you’re surprised. Purcell does the trick on Slick Nick: that’s a surprise.

Sitting there gratified at discovering a way to get under Danzer’s skin, Ben still was finding it murky territory to try to explore. True, in the famous 41 season Purcell became the most glorified scrub there ever was, but still a scrub; he made the team only posthumously. What was there about the raw kid from nowhere to upset, even now, the receiving end of that impervious passing combination, Stamper-to-Danzer? “Stomp and Dance, the touchdown prance.” Ted Loudon always went nuts over that, he had plugged it into his column all season long. *You had your share of fame, Danzer, did you want Purcell’s leftovers too?*

Something had colossal staying power from back then, but what? The time since had changed the mortal balance in too many ways that Ben had seen, but not in this case. The Dancer was still scoring plentifully in the game of life, the Twelfth Man was still dead. Whatever grasp the specter of Purcell had, let Danzer squirm under it, he decided.

“Don’t judge my script too soon, Nick,” Ben flicked the page resting in the typewriter. “Maybe it’ll turn out to bring back valuable memories for you.”

Danzer regarded him stonily for ^amoment, then in turn tapped the radio where the Brahms had been. "Do you know your trouble, Ben? You let your heart be moved too easily. Dex. Purcell. The list doesn't stop there, I'm sure. You're the type lame puppies and roundheeled women sniff out, would be my guess." That last was flicked lightly enough, but the lash was unmistakably there. "Whatever it is, you let it get to you too much."

"Is that what's wrong with me?" Ben acted surprised, although he had to work to hold it to that. *The sonofabitch can't know about Cass, too. Can he?* "And here I thought it was an old pain from football acting up."

Danzer smiled that sterile smile as he got up to leave. "Those last on and on, don't they. Good night, Ben."

(SB) (c/sc) (p. 269)
 "GENERAL QUARTERS. ALL HANDS, MAN YOUR BATTLE STATIONS."

He woke up fighting mad at Navy games in the middle of the night and trying simultaneously to put on a light and his clothes.

Country club Sunday sailing sonsofbitches. If that captain thinks he is going to give me something to write about besides Danzer's pork chops by pulling a drill, he has another think coming.

(#) (wels)
 The squawkbox in a corner of the ceiling still was blating the alarm when the compartment door flung open and the medical officer hustled in. He made a face at the clutter on the operating table. "I need that cleared," he said matter-of-

factly, and with the sweep of an arm began gathering Ben's belongings and dumping them under the bunk.

"Hey!" Half-dressed, Ben lumbered across the room and protectively scooped up his typewriter and its carrying case. "What's all the rush?"

"A submarine is trailing us," the medico recited as if it were knowledge. "You need to put your gear on and get out on deck, fast"

AV MOD

Feeling like he was in a severely bad dream, Ben in haste donned the helmet and life jacket he had been given and tumbled out of the sick bay into a passageway full of tousled sailors pulling on battle gear of their own. The general scurry conveyed him out onto deck, where the crew members spilled toward gun mounts and fire control hoses and other stations to which they were assigned. Pandemonium? Expertly drilled response to the worst of alarms? He couldn't tell which. The one thing he knew for dead sure was to stay out of the way, and he ducked off clear of any doors or deckpaths to let all the traffic pass. For whatever crazy reason he took notice of the full moon over the bow of the ship, like a searchlight barely on. In a rolling motion that made him stagger to keep his balance, the destroyer could be felt surging to a new speed and heeling in a fresh direction at the same time. He tried to think where in the maze of the ship Danzer's battle station might be, cursing himself for not having paid any real attention to that. Bolstering against the steel side of the superstructure while more figures in helmets pounded past, he was nearly knocked over by a crewman skinning down a ladder. He grabbed the man, recognizing him as one of the mess attendants. "Where's Lieutenant Danzer?"

factly, and with the sweep of an arm began gathering Ben's belongings and dumping them under the bunk.

"Hey!" Half-dressed, Ben lumbered across the room and protectively scooped up his typewriter and its carrying case. "What's all the rush?"

"A submarine is trailing us," the medico recited as if it were common knowledge. "You need to put your gear on and get out on deck, fast."

Feeling like he was in a severely bad dream, Ben in haste donned the

Is this okay as
"medico"? Or should
it be "medic"?

“Chart house, should be, sir,” the man stammered and raced off to pass ammunition.

Staying wary of anyone else plunging down the rungs from overhead, Ben climbed in spurts toward the bridge of the ship. There he slipped into a warren of tense officers and lookouts with binoculars pressed to their eyes. That frieze of unmoving figures glued to the night horizon could not have been more different from the scramble below. In the low level of light everything looked sepulchral. Out beyond, it was a perfect Pacific night, the water trembling under the stars. Catching himself on tiptoe as he tried to see everywhere at once on the moonlit ocean, he realized the futility of that; long before he ever could, the binoculars would pick up any deadly white streak that was the wake of an oncoming torpedo. Too late then anyway. This thing can't outrun one of those. The captain peevishly snapped out orders, and the orders went down the line of command into the nerve system of the ship, to what effect Ben couldn't discern. The destroyer was zigzagging, dancing with an invisible devil, but was that enough? He had to hope the McCorkle's^{FCM} evasive action was as unreadable to a sub captain at a periscope as it was to him.

Not reassured by the scene on the bridge, he backed out to hunt up Danzer and found him in equally ghostly circumstances in the busy chart room, the combat analysis center. The dim greenish light etched ashen shadows beneath the battle helmets and into the hollows of cheeks. Here the executive officer was in charge, leaning over a translucent tabletop where the careening course of the destroyer was being plotted and exchanging aggravated questions with the

strained-looking young communications officer and other distressed types crowded around the massive table. From what Ben could catch it amounted to an argument over whether to cut and run or turn and fight, and he didn't like any of what he was hearing or seeing. Faces that had not shown a worry in the world in the wardroom now appeared aggrieved, unsure. One person or another around that table swallowed hard too often. Fear not sliding down easily. Not ever. Now he had his own sudden taste of that lodged in his throat, the apprehension of dying in company such as this, unavailing, insufficient. How'd they get us into this in the first place? Among other things, a destroyer was a submarine-hunting machine. How had this one managed to become the hunted?

Danzer was off to one side, near the forward bulkhead, looking removed from the intense debate at the plotting table. Ben edged around to him. Danzer's duty station there, he deciphered, must have been to maintain the battle status board with code-~~names~~[#] and whereabouts of other U.S. ships in the fight. The problem with that was that there were not any, none nearer than somewhere around the Australian port in one direction and New Guinea in the other. Just the Cork and the enemy. Different war than it was a couple of minutes ago, isn't it, Nick.

Reaching Danzer, he whispered: "How are they going to shake us loose from this?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Danzer whispered back, and for once sounded nervous.

"What's a Jap sub doing way down here? Who spotted the thing?"

“Who do you think? I was officer of the watch.”

“No crap? You saw it?” Ben began surreptitiously scrawling in his notepad, trying to hear what was being said at the plotting table and listen to Danzer at the same time. Here of all things was the heroic piece on Slick Nick. If he stayed alive to write it.

“It’s dark out in case you haven’t noticed,” Danzer muttered sarcastically. “Sonar picked it up. Can’t you hear it?”

The pips registered on Ben then. PING ping. PING ping. Until that moment, the pulsations of sound had gone by him as some piece of the destroyer’s equipment that might contribute to raising hell with the submarine. was identified as the pulse of hell coming the ship’s direction, the p sounded louder.

Ben peered at the stiffnecked supply officer anew. If Danzer turned out to be the Paul Revere of the South Seas, the only thing to do was to write him up that way. “What then?” he resumed the under-the-breath interview urgently. “You got on the horn and ordered general quarters? On your own?”

“No, that’s not by the book,” Danzer said between his teeth. It was remarkable how nettled a whisper could sound. “There’s a standing order to call the captain.” Which in this case meant waking him up with maximum bad news. Danzer’s drawn expression suggested it was an experience that stayed with a person.

AUTHOR

Wils

c/sc

The pips registered on Ben then. PING ping. PING ping. Until that moment, the pulsations of sound had gone by him as some piece of the destroyer's equipment that might contribute to raising hell with the submarine. Now that it was identified as the pulse of hell coming the ship's direction, the pinging sounded louder.

This seems to refer to the specific place.
Capitalize? Hell
269

Just then the exercise in exasperation around the plotting table broke up. “We’re not shaking the bogey at all,” the exec was saying, striding for the bridge. “We need to tell the skipper our only chance is to go at it.”

Hearing that, Ben banged Danzer roughly in the vicinity of the collarbone for luck--he only later realized it was the old shoulder-pad slap the team traded before the game started--and bolted out onto the wing of the bridge to watch.

Sea air rushed by, there on the steel promontory into the dark. A mane of moonsilver flowed back from the destroyer’s bow; and a matching tail of wake behind it. As his eyes adjusted, Ben could just make out the long narrow deck below, armaments jutting ready if they only had a target, faces of the gun crews pale patches foreshortened by helmets. Whatever discussion the executive officer had with the captain did not take long. The ship cut sharply to one side and kept on leaning like a skater fashioning a circle. Standing there witnessing the might of a fully armed vessel turning on its nagging foe could have been thrilling, Ben was duly aware, except for the distinct chance of being blown out of the water at any second. Drowned like a kitten in a sack. He tried to swallow such prospects away, down a throat dry as paper. The lack of any least sign of the enemy out there in the total surround of ocean seemed to him the worst part. On land he had been shot at by experts and never felt this much fear.

Determinedly not watching for a salvo of torpedoes except for moments when he couldn’t stand not to, he strained instead to follow the burst of action at the McCorkle’s stern. He could just see the shadowy figures of the depth charge crew crouching ready, their barrel-like explosives neatly racked for firing. At

some chosen point in the attack maneuver--he wondered whether it was decided by hunch, or some definitive echo out of the sonar equipment; on this ship, it likely did not come from combat experience--the commands were hurled out:

“FIRE ONE!”

“FIRE TWO!”

--The firing kept on, each charge sprung into the air like a fat ejected shell, out away from the ship, then to sink to the depth that would detonate it. Nothing happened for long enough that Ben began to suspect duds. Then he felt the shudder up from the water. Asten, explosions bloomed white in the darkness. Knowing this to be one of the sights of a lifetime, he watched with an intensity near to quivering. Not often is it given to you to stare away death, see it go instead in search of your sworn enemy. There in the destroyer's wake, the geysers of destruction blew and blew. It was impossible to imagine anything human surviving in that cauldron of concussions.

Poor bastards. They'll never see the surface again. On the wing of the bridge, existence seemed benignly extended, stable as the feel of steel underfoot. Forgiving the Cork and its lucky-star crew all their sins of leisure, Ben raced back into the chart room to see how they marked the sinking of an enemy submarine.

He could have spared himself the effort. The jammed room was as still as a funeral parlor except for the pinging.

“It's still there, sir,” the sonar operator called out, perhaps in case anyone's hearing had gone bad. In the greenish gloom, Danzer's face was a study in trepidation.

The executive officer at last spoke up. "Something's fishy about this. They can't shadow us that close after we blew up half the ocean floor." They must have taught logic at Annapolis.

Once more, the exec went calling on the captain. This time, their conference produced a marked slowing of the vessel. All hands stayed at battle stations as the sonar deepfinder was reeled in for inspection. Ben was scribbling like mad, when the sonar technician took a look at the sonar end of the cable and sourly gave his diagnosis:

"It's all chewed to hell, messed up the signal. A shark must have got at it."

Ben waited until general quarters was called off, waited while the decks emptied of cursing sailors and sheepish officers, waited as the medical officer vacated the sick bay, waited until he was alone in the soundless compartment. Then he put his hands to his face and laughed into them until he had to gulp for air.

Chortles were still coming like hiccups when he sat up to the typewriter in its restored spot. He was at full speed on the keys by the time the rap on the door came.

Danzer stepped in looking dazed.

"If it isn't the famous officer of the watch," Ben greeted him. "I guess next time you'll roust out the sonar tech ahead of everybody else, huh?"

With visible effort, the caller let that pass. He squared up as much as he was able and began: "I'm in a bit of a spot. The captain sent me to ask if you'll be

Author

The executive officer at last spoke up. "Something's fishy about this. They can't shadow us that close after we blew up half the ocean floor." They must have taught logic at Annapolis.

Once more, the exec went calling on the captain. This time, their conference produced a marked slowing of the vessel. All hands stayed at battle stations as the sonar deepfinder was reeled in for inspection. Ben was there, scribbling like mad, when the sonar technician took a look at the sound head at the end of the cable and sourly gave his diagnosis:

} Is "deepfinder" 272
okay? Or could it be
called a "depthfinder," too?

writing anything about" ^l~~m~~ Danzer looked as if he would rather bite off his tongue than say it--^l~~m~~ "what happened tonight."

Ben couldn't help but grin and tap the typing paper in answer. "The case of the submarine that never was, you mean? Can't you see the headline? THE HUNTING OF THE SHARK. Beware the frumious Bandersnatch next, Lieutenant Danzer."

Danzer's face was a funny color, as if the ghoulish light of the chart room stayed with him. "Damn it, if you--^l~~m~~"

Ben held up a hand. "Don't. As much as I'd like to, I'm not going to skin you in public. The outfit I have to answer to isn't going to let you look ridiculous, don't worry." He tapped the typing paper again, this time in a tired manner. "Oh, I could write it that way, hell yes, and it'd be red-penciled beyond recognition. So I'll do up tonight's stunt and then TPWP will take its turn. And in the end it'll come out as just one more unpleasant thing that can happen in war, Dancer."

CAPS

The war changed tongues somewhere in mid-ocean as Ben hooked rides on anything that flew in the days beyond Australia. The spatter of sand and syllable where he eventually put down was a sparse island called Eniwetok, and out around it in the central latitudes of the Pacific were scattered other lingual odds and ends now synonymous with the battles on their beaches--Kwajalein and Tarawa, with Saipan and Okinawa and Iwo Jima and others yet to come. Eniwetok itself, Ben found, had been remade from the waterline up in the few months since being taken from the Japanese. Laundries, volleyball nets staked like flags, movie amphitheater, officers club, enlisted men's canteen, chapel, library: it was all there, the practically magical portable platform of American amenities that materialized wherever U.S. fighting forces went. The skinny but vital island, key

link in an atoll with a lagoon that went to the horizon, was surrounded by countless moored naval vessels; if a typhoon blew through, the yanking anchor chains would pull the plug on the Pacific.

It took some asking around, but ultimately he hitched a ride on a supply launch to the troop ship that was his destination.

Confronted with Ben's orders, the deck officer made the usual face of discomfiture. "Ordinarily we could stow you in the sick bay, but we're crammed with assault force officers and there's no way --"

"Don't sweat it, I'll bunk below."

Below meant four decks down, each more fetid than the one before. The transport seemed cavernous after the destroyer. Ben's head swam a bit as he laboriously maneuvered his travel pack and typewriter case deeper into the sweltering hold of the ship. He wondered if he was coming down with something tropical. Three months in the Pacific had convinced him humidity by the skinful ought to be in the medical texts.

He came out at the bottom of the labyrinth of ladders and hatchways to a steel bay the width of the hull, where dozens of sweating men were stacked in racks of bunks that reached from deck floor to ceiling. Most were shirtless or in their skivvies as they tried to read or nap or clean their already cleaned rifles. Amidst everything, a permanent poker game of the sort to be found countless coin pockets of the war was underway. Ben could tell from the pot it was too rich for his blood. He sidled through the alleys of bunks, his shoulder patch drawing quizzical squints, inquiring until someone pointed him

Wels

Wels
Third

AUTHOR

He came out at the bottom of the labyrinth of ladders and hatchways to a steel bay the width of the hull, where dozens of sweating men were stacked in racks of bunks that reached from deck[#] floor to ceiling. Most were shirtless or in their skivvies as they tried to read or nap or clean their already cleaned rifles. Amidst^e everything, a permanent poker game of the sort to be found in the countless coin pockets of the war was under[#] way. Ben could tell from the cash in the pot it was too rich for his blood. He sidled through the alleys of bunks, his shoulder patch drawing quizzical squints, inquiring until someone pointed him

Wells
Third

} Change okay?

(275)

past the toilets to the showers. "The large sarge, you mean? He's either smarter or crazier than the rest of us, he takes about half a dozen a day."

Leaning his pack and typewriter against the bulkhead, Ben stepped to the hatchway and called in to the naked personage camped under a drizzle from a showerhead: "Is that the usual Marine uniform in these parts, Sergeant Angelides?"

"I'll be go to hell, it's our recording angel, right out of nowhere," came the response just short of a shout. "How'd you ever find this stinking rustbucket, Lefty?" That again. Remember it's me, not the nearest southpaw.

Reaching behind to turn off the shower with one hand, Angelides grabbed Ben for a sopping handshake with the other. "Somebody sent me your piece on Sig. Going right down the strong side of the line, are you."

"Danzer jumped in front of you this time," Ben manufactured a dismissive smile, "so I'll have to make it up to you by playing up your saintly side, Animal."

Angelides guffawed and began toweling himself rigorously. "Got your work cut out for you. So is the Dancer still defending Backtrack Mac with the gleam of his shoes?"

"Still is."

A shake of the broad-browed swarthy head and a glance so quick it was more like a glint. "What would we do without Danzer, prick of the month all year long." Angelides wrapped the towel around his hairy middle like a king kilting up. "Come on, we'll get you set up in a fart sack and you can see how Uncle Sam's finest live."

Up on deck out of the stifling quarters as soon as Ben's things were bunked in, the two of them found a sliver of shade beneath the superstructure to hunch under and talk.

"These tubs are the ass-end of the Navy," Angelides declared of life cooped up on one troop ship after another. "The swabbies lug us around to wherever the Japs are holed up on the next chunk of coral"--he flipped a hand disparagingly toward Eniwetok and its recent past--"and we hit the beach. Never know how that'll go. Waipu was a breeze, we walked right in. Tarawa was total hell, they threw everything at us. One way or the other, it all counts toward getting our outfit's part of the war over." Shoulders set, he prowled over to the deck rail as he spoke, all the old impressions coming back to Ben as he watched that lithe restless motion. Indestructible on the football field, Andros Angelides had been rechristened "Animal" by the team for the fallen prey surrounding his spot in the line--offense or defense, it didn't matter, where Animal roved opposing players ended up strewn in the grass. To Ben's mind, Animal most resembled the creature of nature he had seen once on a high-country hunting trip. A ripple in the timberline caught his eye, and by the time he blinked had resolved itself to a cougar on the move. The resemblance was still there in the man at the time. The extensive body, muscled everywhere that counted. The large rough hands, quicker than paws that size could be expected to be. The deep flicker of the eyes back under the bonebox of brow. All that taut animal vitality coming out now as

AUTHOR

ended up strewn in the grass. To Ben's mind, Animal most resembled the creature of nature he had seen once on a high-country hunting trip. A ripple of tan against the timberline caught his eye, and by the time he blinked had resolved itself into a cougar on the move. The resemblance was still there in the man at the deck edge. The extensive body, muscled everywhere that counted. The large rough hands, quicker than paws that size could be expected to be. The deep flicker of the eyes back under the bonebox of brow. All that taut animal vitality coming out now as

} Addition okay?

(277)

the impatience of a fighting man ready to march into Tokyo and trapped amidship^S on a transport scow going nowhere fast. (Webs)

Another of those glinting glances that Ben could practically feel as Angelides turned from the railing. "So what you're in for with us is the Marine Corps tradition of practicing a thing to death." He bared his teeth in a mirthless smile. "Next worst thing to Bruno and his stinking Letter Hill." He jerked his head for Ben to come have a look over the side of the ship. All along the hull a hefty web of ropes hung down from the deck to the water.

"You want to see a bunch of trained grunts who can climb down a cargo net in their sleep, that's us," Angelides was saying conversationally. "Samey same, over and over on maneuvers like this^I--the landing craft takes us in, dumps us in the water up to our peckers, and we storm the shores of Eniwetok one more time. It's a wonder the Red Cross isn't there selling us coffee and doughnuts when we drag up onto the sand." He fixed the kind of resigned gaze known as a thousand-yard stare on the practice island. "Aw, hell, it's pretty much necessary. A lot of our guys are cherries, replacements after Tarawa. Anyway, Lefty, you get to see this good stuff yourself tomorrow at 0500," the Marine topkick batted Ben's shoulder with the back of a hand as if to make sure he'd be awake, "and then the real thing whenever the hell some general makes his mind up."

"You sound like you can't wait, Animal."

Angelides cut him a telling look. "You know what, any more I go by ^(AV) "Andy." It's just easier around the guys in the unit." (/) (AV)

Ben seized the chance to trade. "Funny, that's how I feel about "Lefty."

It's been a long time since I lined up at opposite end."

Angelides belly-laughed his agreement to the deal. "I guess this retires us from football for goddamn sure."

The squawk of a loudspeaker in some tuck of the ship broke in on them. Overhead came the shufflefoot sounds of sailors doing whatever sailors do. Ben waited for those to pass before testing out: "The real thing when it comes--you know where?"

It drew a shrug. "Scuttlebutt says it'll be Guam."

That was how Tepee Weepy figured it, too, Ben knew, or he probably would not have been on this troop deck with this particular member of the Supreme Team at this moment. No other target in the island-hopping campaign would rate bigger headlines. Guam had been surrendered in the war's earliest days when American garrison troops in pie-tin helmets found themselves facing a Japanese invasion juggernaut; there wasn't an admiral or a general in the Pacific who didn't want it back with a vengeance. Ben felt he needed to share his reading of the situation. "Andy? Say it is Guam. The big brass will pull out all the stops if it is. But the Japs aren't saps. They aren't about to say, 'So sorry, here, have your famous island back.' It could be a bloodbath."

Angelides looked at him solemnly and turned to go below. "I prefer showers."

SB

At barely first light, the side of the troop ship gray as a lingering shade of night, the Marines in full combat gear descended the cargo nets.

Below in the landing craft that kept bumping against the ship hard enough to jar him half off his feet, Ben craned up at the mass of humped forms as they came. Angelides was a marvel to watch. Somehow keeping an eye on the entire teeming shipside, he shambled down the mesh of rope rungs one-handed, reaching to any of his unit who needed steadying on the swaying net, injecting alacrity into those who lacked it: "Come on, you guys, you're slower than smoke off of shit. Move, move!" Only after the last of his men thudded safely into the boat did he swing free of the net and give the high sign to the coxswain at the tiller.

Ben's notepad could not hold it all. The bay was a serrated wall of troop ships, the landing boats busy around each in the choppy moat of ocean, helmeted men collected in shoulder-to-shoulder embarkation as ancient as Troy. As soon as a landing craft was loaded to crowded capacity, it revved away into the coral shallows just offshore. Ramps flopped down like drawbridges and the Marines waded into the crotch-deep surf.

Ben piled off with the others, struggling against the weight of the water. Angelides, large sarge to the life, surged ahead while steadily prodding his outfit. "Everybody spread out. Six feet apart. Benson, don't you know what looks like? It's the size of your goddamn grave if you don't spread out. Michaels, Krogstad! Haul that sonofabitching thing in closer, I don't care how big an ass if it is bigger than you are." That pair was pulling a rubber raft, empty but still all they could handle in the surf swirl. The footing was treacherous on the sharp

AUTHOR

Ben piled off with the others, struggling against the weight of the water.

Angelides, large sarge to the life, surged ahead while steadily prodding his outfit.

“Everybody spread out. Six feet apart. Benson, don’t you know what six feet looks like? It’s the size of your goddamn grave ^fif you don’t spread out, meathead.

Michaels, Krogstad! Haul that sonofabitching thing in closer, I don’t give a rat’s ass if it is bigger than you are.” That pair was pulling a rubber raft, empty but still all they could handle in the surf swirl. The footing was treacherous on the sharp

] Change okay?

280

coral and more than once Ben had to catch himself from going face-first into the water. Around him by the dozens, and along the shoreline by the hundreds, Marines advanced at an encumbered gait with their rifles held high and dry. After about a hundred yards of this, the assault force clambered off the coral reef to the sands of Eniwetok. By all evidence visible to Ben the practice landing had gone as well as such things could. On the other hand, on the slight lift of land beyond the beach were situated volleyball courts rather than Japanese gun emplacements.

Panting and soaked to his midriff, Ben stayed close to Angelides as he lustily deployed his forces. When the order came down the line to halt the landing exercise, Angelides turned to check on him. "How do you like island-hopping so far?"

Ben squeezed water out of a pocket ruefully. "Why couldn't you have joined the ski troops or some other outfit that isn't half-drowned all the time?"

"And miss tropical paradise like this? No way." The big sergeant got busy again issuing orders, one of which sent a couple of men back down to the waterline to collect the small rubber boat, and Ben asked what it was for.

"What, that?" Angelides looked bemused to be asked. "You're looking at our hospital ship."

At those words, Ben felt the shiver of memory of his shipboard infirmary stay--the Purple Heart suite--after the shoulder wound. "Part of the Corps lore," Angelides was saying as if he had been asked that section of the Marine manual. "Get the wounded to shore with the rest of us. That thing's the best way I know

how.” He rumbled a humorless laugh. “A lifeboat for the wet-ass infantry, you could call it.”

Ben gazed at the rubber boat, Angelides’ seagoing ambulance. He thought of Prokosch, the width of the ocean away, on watch for the enemy floating in to a creek mouth. Rafts. In the middle of the most mechanized war in history. What are the odds? Huck and Tom against the gods of war.

Back aboard the troop ship, the entire lower half of his uniform stiff with salt from the surf, Ben had barely made it to his bunk when a seaman stuck his head through the main hatchway and bawled: “Reinking? Lieutenant Reinking?”

“Over here, sailor.”

“Message for you, topside.”

DANZER PIECE A DANDY. WILL BE EXCELLED ONLY BY YOU
 SPOKEN AS WELL AS WRITTEN: NEW FIELD FOR YOU TO STAR, ARCH
 RECORDING OF BEACHHEAD INVASION. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS AS
 FAVOR AFTER ARMY, NAVY AND AIR CORPS ALL NIXED IT. TPWP KNOWS
 POSTERITY WHEN IT FALLS IN LAP, THUS RECORDING EQUIPMENT BEING RUSHED
 TO YOU. FOLLOW MARINES ASHORE AT WHATEVER ASSAULT BEACH WITH
 EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT AND ALL POSSIBLE SOUND EFFECTS. HISTORICAL
 RECORD, ORAL AND AURAL, IS THE GOAL.

P.S. TECHNICAL AIDE ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT, DON'T FRET.

MESSAGE

DESIGN

CAPS //

AV

CAPS

MESSAGE

DANZER PIECE A DANDY. WILL BE EXCELLED ONLY BY YOUR NEXT,
SPOKEN AS WELL AS WRITTEN: NEW FIELD FOR YOU TO STAR, ARCHIVAL
RECORDING OF BEACHHEAD INVASION. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS ASKED THIS
FAVOR AFTER ARMY, NAVY AND AIR CORPS ALL NIXED IT. TPWP KNOWS
POSTERITY WHEN IT FALLS IN LAP, THUS RECORDING EQUIPMENT BEING RUSHED
TO YOU. FOLLOW MARINES ASHORE AT WHATEVER ASSAULT BEACH WITH
EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT AND ALL POSSIBLE SOUND EFFECTS. HISTORICAL
RECORD, ORAL AND AURAL, IS THE GOAL.

P.S. TECHNICAL AIDE ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT, DON'T FRET.

Military
Communique

282

CAPS //

AU

CAPS

Ben read it again with just as much disbelief as the first time through. Where do the bastards come up with these ideas? They're turning me into the khaki version of Loudon. A play-by-play of an invasion. Starring, naturally, a certain keyed-up sergeant and the outfit he would lead against enemy fire.

The ship's radioman and the code clerk both were watching him with apprehension. "Any reply, sir?" the coder asked as if he very much hoped not.

"Yes. Send: POSTERITY DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IT'S GETTING."

When he went back down into the hold to tell Angelides he was going to be famous of a kind, the bunk compartment was in such uproar he figured the poker game had drawn blood. It turned out to be simply mail call. Squirring through clamorous Marines clutching letters and packages from home, he worked his way to his bunk hoping to hear his name called, but it was all already there on the blanket, postal riches in a heap.

Flat on his back in the next bunk reading the sole V-mail letter that had come for him--from his uncle--Angelides commented: "You're a popular guy. I must have answered up for you twenty times."

"The stuff's been chasing me all over the Pacific, thanks for nabbing it," Ben rattled out his gratitude. As if fondling gifts, he sorted the pieces of mail into piles. The long-awaited treasure, Cass's letters. Weeks' worth of Gleaners, his father's fillers at the bottom of columns peeking out: The only hope a person can be sure of is his own hatful. Envelopes with his mother's well-schooled penmanship. A couple of blunt cheery

notes from Jake Eisman done in pencil and beer. So many patches of his life, suddenly catching up with him. Almost reverently he slit open the letters from Cass and speeded through the first one and the last, saving the others to savor more leisurely.

Ben, love--

How does a person write to a writer? I feel like a backward kid with crayons. Maybe I can start with saying how much you to miss. I can't turn around without remembering something we did together. You've only been gone a week and I have such a bad case, what is this going to be like from here

...Nine weeks gone, letter no. 9 to you, and I at least you're okay so far by reading you in the paper. You look good as ever in print, but no substitute for the warm body. Must sign off for now, we take off for Edmonton in an hour. I'll waggle my wings toward Hill 57 as we go.

Keep low out there, you with the typewriter.

Cass

#

Her P-39 met the first of the rough air at the Sweetgrass Hills that afternoon.

It was an ordinary Edmonton run, although Cass long since had absorbed the cockpit wisdom that flying through thin air is never exactly ordinary. On a summer day of this sort, however, from fifteen thousand feet above these borderland plains between Montana and Alberta, usually you could see around the world and back again. But right now in the telltale tremor of air above the humpbacked hills her eyes would not leave the sight of the weather making itself,

LETTERS

AUTHOR

DESIGN

AV

AV

notes from Jake Eisman done in pencil and beer. So many patches of his life, suddenly catching up with him. Almost reverently he slit open the letters from Cass and speeded through the first one and the last, saving the others to savor more leisurely.

Ben, love--

How does a person write to a writer? I feel like a backward kid with crayons. Maybe I can start with saying how much there is of you to miss. I can't turn around without remembering some crazy thing we did together. You've only been gone a week and I already have such a bad case, what is this going to be like from here on?...

...Nine weeks gone, letter no. 9 to you, and I at least know you're okay so far by reading you in the paper. You look good as ever in print, but no substitute for the warm body. Must sign off for now, we take off for Edmonton in an hour. I'll waggle my wings toward Hill 57 as we go.

Keep low out there, you with the typewriter.

Cass

LETTERS

AV

AV

Should this be
Maybe I can start
by saying

Letter
Should this space be
here?

#

AV

big prairie clouds ahead where none should be, building up alongside the Rockies over toward Calgary. Who came up with that meteorology briefing we got, a blind man? "Clear and calm," my fanny. Customarily the squadron could scoot in behind such weather cells before the cloud piles sucked the energy of heat from the prairie and rolled off eastward building into major thunderstorms. What was coming at the squadron looked major enough. We get caught in glop like that, we'll be lucky to know where our own wingtips are.

She checked around on her pilots. Beryl waggled her wings, showing she was watching the same cloud pattern. Off Cass's other wing, Mary Catherine made the universal hand signal as if pinching her nose against stinko weather. The plane in back of Cass was steady as if being towed, and she felt both relieved and guilty about that. Della Maclaine was on compassionate leave--^l_ma death in the family, it happened to everybody sooner or later. The TDY pilot filling in from the Michigan group was always on the mark, where Della as a rule was casually acquainted with the mark. Cass knew she should not be thinking about how much better the squadron flew without Della, but it was the kind of thing the mind does. Instinct was fully working during all this. She radioed the others and Linda's B flight and Ella's C flight farther back: "Instrument conditions, everybody. We need to try to bust through ahead of the worst of it."

The worst, however, was approaching at whatever a thunderstorm's top speed was, coupled with the fighter planes' velocity of three hundred and fifty miles an hour. In mere minutes the P-39s were bucketing uncomfortably in unpredictable air, and the cloud pile had closed in around and above. Within the

murk, in the tight cave of the cockpit Cass constantly scanned her ranks of dials, flying the radio beam that would lead to the Edmonton airfield wherever the other side of this weather was, having to trust that her pilots one and all were doing the same.

She was straining to see if there was any sign of this box canyon of clouds giving way ahead, when blue crackles of light danced along her wings.

Whoa. This isn't so good.

St. Elmo's fire, playful static electricity, was known to forecast lightning. No pilot wanted a bolt of electricity sparking through the instrument panel. Already Cass was back on the radio: "Heads up, everybody. We're going downstairs to get under this. Prepare to descend to fifteen hundred feet, repeat, fifteen hundred." *That's low, but it's like the damn Fourth of July up here.* Down there, her hope was, lightning would be drawn to the ground instead of to P-39s. "Ride the altimeter real careful. Let's don't add to the magic number, hear?"

The magic number, sarcastically named, was a figure Ben had looked up when he wrote his piece about the squadron. One of the points of pride Cass and the others wore as openly as the WASP patch on their sleeves was that their safety record was better than the male pilots' in the chancy endeavor of ferrying unproven aircraft. Out of roughly a thousand WASPs, he found at the time, a total of twenty-two had been killed in crashes. Since then, of course, the so-called magic number had kept creeping higher as the women pilots' time in the air mounted up.

CAPs

CAPs

Like a bird flock seeking a pond of calm, the dozen airplanes nosed downward, shimmying and bucking in the turbulence of the storm. Accustomed as every P-39 pilot was to the ungainly torque of the engine mounted behind, this was like flying at the mercy of a cyclone. When her altimeter reading touched fifteen hundred feet on the nose, Cass leveled off, scanning right, left, and behind through the sheeting rain for the other planes. She could make out something that in all likelihood was the fuselage of Mary Catherine's aircraft and she had every confidence in Beryl off her other wing. At least we're not lit up like neon signs. The malicious upper-atmosphere wind reached down this far, however, and the sluggish progress was consuming fuel at a disturbing rate. Cass checked and rechecked the plasticine map strapped to the thigh of her flying suit. They would make it to Edmonton without dry tanks if they could feel their way down out of the headwind. The lack of contour lines on the map attested to flat country below. Even so. "All pilots. Descend to a thousand feet, we'll hold there if we can see the ground, repeat, if. Nobody get to thinking too much, just keep riding the beam. Edmonton is there, it always has been. Let's just damn do it and get this flight over with, officers."

This day, the magic number did not change.

The hours of the day in their circling of the earth returned now to the troopship. Spellbound by the immediate presence of Cass in the inked words, Ben read

the letters over again, knowing all the while there was another recipient of her lines of love or whatever approximated it.

Life was a sum of unlikelihoods, but in his wildest imagining he could not have seen ahead to this, sharing professions of love ^(from) with another man's wife. Were those letters to a long-absent husband somewhere at mail call on a jungle island like these? They couldn't be, the soul issued assurance. Why wouldn't they be? said the demons of the heart.

Only belatedly did he become conscious of being observed in his troubled seance with the set of letters. He tried not to show the extent of his embarrassment, and missed by far.

Angelides gruffly offered up: "This appears serious."

"I have to hope she is," Ben trying a doomed grin along with it.

Angelides waited, attentive to more to come.

"I'm in a fix, Andy. She's married."

The sentences escaped from him before he knew it. He hadn't told Prokosch when he had the opening. Never would he have told Danzer. He had not even confided in Jake, repository of life's complications that he was. Angelides in alert stillness on the next bunk he would have trusted with his life, but the confession he had just made came under another category entirely. I'm not equipped for this. Ben creased the letters closed. "Keep it under your hat, okay? I can't take any pride in being a homewrecker. If that's what I turn out to be, even."

"Sorry, I'm no help to you there," Angelides said as if it was a test he hadn't taken. "All I've ever been round is love 'em and leave 'em. I got left."

Ben looked over at him. One spill of guts for another. It seemed his turn to come up with something medicative. "You'll have better luck later on. Civvie life will be full of lovelies looking for Marines in shining armor, you'll see."

In an exceedingly swift motion Angelides no longer was flat on his back but sitting tight as a coil on the edge of his bunk. "Ben? Something you maybe better know. In case it affects what you want to write or something like that. When the shooting match is over"--that always meant the war in conversations like this--"I'm staying in." He worked up a rough grin behind the exchange of confidences. "True-blue to the stinking Corps."

Ben did not say anything immediately, confounded once again by a teammate he was supposed to know like an open book. War mocked the notion of some sort of order in the human race. The only sane route he thought he knew--it was also true of Cass, Jake, anyone he would lay down his life for and they for him--was to serve as dutifully as you could during the duration, then reconstitute yourself when peace came in whatever measure. Get on with the existence you were cut out for, or, in terms blindingly similar to the argument he would have made to Dex Cariston, we are servants of war forever. Yet here was Angelides, capability itself, turning his back on the TSU degree and probably married life, to stay on in uniform as a glorified groundpounder foreman, rewarded with stripes on his arm and little else. A garrison career for enlisted men was boredom with bad surprises sewn in; just ask the poor suckers stationed on Guam in 1942 when the Japanese imperial army showed up.

By now Ben's silence was saying much in itself. "You're sure," he tried with Angelides, "you just want grunt life to go on and on?"

The bared smile. "You can't tell by looking? It fits me like a cork in a virgin."

SB

Word came that a piece of cargo with highest priority and his name all over it awaited at the airfield, and when Ben went to fetch the dreaded recording equipment, it was attended by the wearer of the most disheveled uniform on Eniwetok.

"Hi, lieutenant. Gosh, it's hot here."

"Jones!" Elated to see that familiar ugly puss under the crumpled fatigue cap, he fought back the impulse to ask a torrent of questions about East Base, especially the WASP side of things. "Old home week, right here in equatorial Eden. I can't believe Tepee Weepy took a fit of sanity and sent you along. I can use all the help there is." Saying so, Ben circled the recorder in its carrying case distrustfully. It basically resembled the bulkiest suitcase imaginable. He looked around the cargo shed for the technician whiz promised with it, then realized.

"Jones, I hate to take your name in vain, but please don't tell me you're the tech aide, too."

"That was the order that came down," this stanza of the enlisted men's repertoire practically sang from the bedraggled corporal. He puckered in contemplation and came up with a morsel of solace for Ben: "They did give me the manual and I read it on the flight over."

AV

CAL

Oh, great. He can pray over the machine when it goes flooey. "Let's get this thing to the ship," Ben said in resignation. "Posterity beckons."

SB

The Marine assault force command plainly regarded the TPWP pair and their recording assignment as a nuisance, and just as plainly had been ordered in no uncertain terms to put up with them. Angelides was mostly amused. "Seems dumb-ass to me--who needs more proof people are shooting at us out here?"

CAPS

The machine when Jones opened its case and started trying to figure out its workings was not the Pandora's box Ben had anticipated, it was worse. It ran on a battery as heavy as a concrete block. It had delicate reels and a delicate needle. It was corded to the hand microphone at not much longer than a dog leash. His brow creased, Jones at length looked up from the so-called portable recorder. "You know what, lieutenant? If we're going to pack this thing from here to shore, what we really need is--"

AU

"--a jeep," Ben admitted like someone coming down with a headache.

"Excuse me while I beg my way through the Marine chain of command."

SB

Across the next couple of days, with Jones in earphones as he fiddled madly with the recorder's dials, Ben stood on the fantail of the troop ship and practiced until his vocal cords were tired. Speaking into the microphone required an entirely different mentality from what he was used to at the typewriter. How did Edward R. Murrow do it? For that matter, how did that moron motormouth Loudon do it?

“Eniwetok’s harbor is jammed with ships of the assault force,” he stared around at the obvious and could only recite it in strained fashion. Wanting to say: *Cass, you should see this. You can’t imagine the steel mills it took to do this, wall an entire island with ships.* “The Marines aboard this one say they are ready for the real thing after weeks of practice landings here.” *They say it in the filthy language of war, naturally--pilots aren’t the only ones with the vocabulary, Cass. Poor Jones goes around the ship looking like his ears hurt. Angelides these days has a mouth on him like a blowtorch. Invasion is a hellish thing to go through. Nobody is actually ever prepared to die, are they--it’s not human nature, the imagination* can’t handle obliteration. And so the guys below decks talk tough, so the fear doesn’t have a chance to speak up. Again aloud: “Equipment of all sorts is in the cargo bays waiting to roll aboard the landing craft. Artillery, half-tracks, jeeps--”

“Sorry, start again,” Jones muttered, repeatedly, from where he hovered over the temperamental recorder. *Oh God, Jones, so to speak. At Guam are we going to stick our necks out from here to Thomas Edison and only get a reel full of blank air out of it?*

When at last they got done with the rehearsal reel and played it back, Ben winced over his voice. He sounded dry and stiff as sticks rubbed together. As for the quality of what he was coming up with to say, if he had it on typing paper in front of him he would have been wildly crossing things out and scribbling in changes.

In the silence at the end of the reel, he gloomily turned toward Jones. "So what do you think, maestro?"

"Maybe it would help if you had some kind of a script?"

Guam was ear-shattering.

Fiery salvo after salvo from the big muzzles of the American battleships and cruisers, more rapid fire from the guns of the rest of the convoy spread across the horizon of ocean, the bombardment ahead of the invasion was like all the sky's lightning dropping all its thunder at once. Explosions erupted on shore every few seconds, smoke and dust spewing as if from volcano vents. After enough of this the entire island looked like it was on fire.

While Ben struggled to jot the scene down amid the jostling swarm of Marines along the deck rail of the troop ship, his memory tunneled back to the Salamaua beachhead in New Guinea. The advantage of darkness there. Friessen's temporarily lucky National Guard unit crawling ashore unhit. The worn-down Japanese defenders heading for the hills. A victorious landing if there ever was one. And I still ended up shot, didn't I. He looked out again at the island being smashed by shells and bombs from the invasion armada. Guam was an ugly lump in the ocean, rocky bluffs and jungle ravines looming behind the crescent of shore called the Devil's Horns. At least he and Jones did not have to follow the hand-to-hand fighting here; their task ended at the beach. Look damn place is, though. This isn't anything like Eniwetok. There the distance from where the landing craft disgorged the assault troops to the practice beach was

In the silence at the end of the reel, he gloomily turned toward Jones. "So what do you think, maestro?"

"Maybe it would help if you had some kind of a script?"

Guam was ear-shattering.

Fiery salvo after salvo from the big muzzles of the American battleships and cruisers, more rapid fire from the guns of the rest of the convoy spread across the horizon of ocean, the bombardment ahead of the invasion was like all the sky's lightning dropping all its thunder at once. Explosions erupted on shore every few seconds, smoke and dust spewing as if from volcano vents. After enough of this the entire island looked like it was on fire.

While Ben struggled to jot the scene down amid the jostling swarm of Marines along the deck rail of the troop ship, his memory tunneled back to the Salamaua beachhead in New Guinea. The advantage of darkness there. Friessen's temporarily lucky National Guard unit crawling ashore unhit. The worn-down Japanese defenders heading for the hills. A victorious landing if there ever was one. And I still ended up shot, didn't I. He looked out again at the island being smashed by shells and bombs from the invasion armada. Guam was an ugly lump in the ocean, rocky bluffs and jungle ravines looming behind the crescent of shore called the Devil's Horns. At least he and Jones did not have to follow on inland to the hand-to-hand fighting here; their task ended at the beach. Look where the damn place is, though. This isn't anything like Eniwetok. There the distance from where the landing craft disgorged the assault troops to the practice beach was

Should this be set off as a different kind of space break?

293

wels

} Change okay?

293

about the length of a football field. Here, for real, the shore of Guam lay beyond what looked more like a quarter of a mile of coral shelf. The assault force would have to wade it all. Prowling through his riflemen as he checked over their packs and combat equipment hung all over them, Angelides looked ready to leap over the side and swim the distance. He had been through two of these to Ben's one.

You're the professional soldier, Animal. If the odds on this don't make you look bothered, maybe I worry too much about the difference between practice and the real thing. Shelling the living hell out of the place this way ought to even things up some. When we go in with the damn recorder, dead silence on shore would suit me.

Struggling through the Marine mass toward him was Jones, a steel helmet somewhat lopsided on him. He had to shout to make himself understood to Ben a foot away. "They're telling us, 'Load up.'^{hair #}"

"Then let's go do it."

After a maximum of administrative runaround they had been allowed the back seat of a jeep assigned to Headquarters Company. It and a few others of a small motor convoy would follow--more aptly, wallow--in over the broad reef behind an armored half-track mounted with a 75 mm. cannon and a machine gun. Angelides' contingent wading in would be in clear sight off to the side. The jeep had nothing else to recommend it as a battle vantage point; a temporary steel panel had been installed where the windshield ordinarily was, with a slit for the driver to see through.

“It’s still awful open, lieutenant,” Jones had pointed out when they looked over the vehicle in the cargo hold.

“Don’t I know it. We’ll need to crouch down until we’re kissing the floorboards.”

Now as they started to make their way below to get themselves established in the motor convoy’s landing craft, the din of the invasion bombardment growing even louder overhead, a hand gripped Ben’s shoulder. Startled, he in turn grabbed Jones to a halt and turned around. Angelides, looking lethal in his camouflage helmet, was there roaring in his ear: “Get in the half-track. You and Bible boy. Not the jeep, savvy? I fixed it with the loading officer and he fixed it with the trackie crew.”

Ben hesitated. The half-track, which was half tank and half truck, would be in the lead crawling across the coral and draw enemy fire accordingly. “You’re sure?”

Angelides winked. “One of us ought to keep his pecker dry in case fun in the sack ever comes back into style. Might as well be you.” He slapped Ben on the shoulder, purposely right on the TPWP patch. “See you on the beach, recording star.” Ben watched the big figure draped in ammunition bandoliers and grenade pouches recede back to his men at the deck rail.

All was commotion in the flotilla of landing craft bobbing against the ship. Jones had been down earlier to secure the recorder in the jeep, and now he and Ben wrestled the hefty equipment case out and into the back of the half-track and climbed in after it. The gunners there turned and met them with dubious looks.

CAPS

One cracked: "Hitchhikers, huh? That gorilla sergeant says we're gonna make history taking you along."

"That's the theory," Ben vouched. His voice sounded tight, and he rubbed his throat to try to relax it. Jones squirmed down beside the recording equipment, manipulating plugs and scanning dials as though they were compasses in a stormy sea.

The minutes of waiting before launch dragged by. The gunners slouched amid their stocks of ammunition and smoked, which maybe helped their nerves but not those of the pair at the recorder. At last the dispatching officer, lordly on the troop ship, gave the signal and their landing craft and the one with Angelides' group of Marines putt-putted away like ducks abreast.

The half-track a metal box within a larger floating metal box, Jones and Ben could not see out during the short yet endless voyage. Engine noise and wave slosh and ominous clatter from the gunners as they made ready seeped through the crashing intervals of the bombardment. As best as Ben could tell, the shelling so far was all one-way, the naval barrage suppressing whatever waited on shore. At least the landing craft was not being blasted out of the water. Yet, *Waipu was a breeze, we walked right in,* Angelides' recapitulations played unrelentingly within Ben, *Tarawa was total hell, they threw everything at us,* the one experience against the other. Either outcome, he had to somehow summon into the microphone in his hand. Jones had traded his helmet for earphones--Ben hoped that kind of faith would be rewarded--and looked up expectantly with his

rom

AU

rom

AU

p. 277

finger over the ON switch, but Ben signaled him to hold off. "Not until we're on the reef. This is recess."

As soon as the broad-beamed craft ground to a halt against the shelf of coral and the landing ramp descended, everything changed as if a single order had been given to every enemy soldier bunkered against the bombardment. Guam erupted back at the invasion force. Geysers in the surf met the half-track as it clanked down the ramp, the Japanese artillery opening up. Bullets pinged off the armored sides like terrible hail. "Inhospitable bastards," one gunner grouched. Grimacing, Ben held the microphone out the back of the half-track to catch the sounds of being under fire. When Jones gave him thumbs ^{up} that the recorder was functioning for sure, he climbed over the tailgate and slid into the water to his thighs, holding the mike up out of the wet.

"War has many calibres," he began speaking from the shelter of the rear of the half-track. "The Marines wading ashore here at Guam are getting an earful of the Japanese arsenal." A nasty sploosh nearby punctuated that. When his flinching was over, Ben reported: "That was a mortar shell, fairly close." No sooner had he said so than a larger eruption sent jarring tremors through the water and the air. "And that was big artillery, probably a howitzer in a shore emplacement. In the background you can hear Nambu machine guns. Their muzzle flashes are red, like Fourth of July rockets going off everywhere on the bluff above the beach. The Marines make the joke, if it is a joke, that if you listen enough those machine gun bursts sound like 'R.I.P.- R.I.P.,' although resting in peace is not how any man hopes to come out of this day." Tallying such details in words as exact as he could

make them was crazily vital to him right then, something other than fear for the mind to try to hold onto in the midst of battle. Jones' suggestion of a script turned out to already exist in him, accumulated from as many combat zones as the correspondent patch on his arm had taken him to. The lore of war. An unsought education. Spectator to himself in this, he talked on into a seeming abyss of time, the assault occurring in unreal slow-motion, infantrymen moving at a heavy-legged slog against the water and the coarse shelf of reef. He clung to the tailgate with one hand to help his own footing, the half-track creeping over the rough coral at the same methodical pace as the wading Marines on both sides of him.

"Off to my left the rank being led in by Sergeant Andros Angelides is strung out wide. Bullets are hitting the water around them." So far, though, the rubber raft rode high and empty near the medical corpsmen as it was towed. Ben described that, the infantry lifeboat voyaging into the sea of hostilities. Leading the wave of men ahead, Angelides surged steadily along, turning sideways occasionally to present less of a target as he looked things over and bawled an order. Keeping up the running commentary of whatever arrived to him--the distinctive whumping sound of a Japanese mortar round; the carcasses of landing craft burning on the reef in back of the men in the water; the confused mix of smells, fine fresh salt air, stinking exhaust fumes, gunpowder odor from the half-track's cannon firing furiously--Ben consistently tried to estimate how far the first of the Marines were from the beachhead. By any measure it was too long a way while being shot at. While he looked on, soldiers near Angelides crashed over into

the surf, one, two. All along the advance line of wading troops were other dark blobs of bodies in the water.

“Men are being hit as they come into closer range of enemy fire,” he somehow kept the words coming, “too many to count. Someone’s helmet just floated by upside down.”

Just as he was at the point of describing the medical corpsmen splashing to the rescue of the pair in Angelides’ unit but having to give them up for dead, an explosion close behind the half-track flung him against the tailgate. Breath knocked out of him, he cringed there as metal debris sailed through the air, miraculously holding the microphone up enough to catch the sound of it striking the water around them. Leaning out over the tailgate, a white-faced Jones had hold of him with one arm. Not knowing if the recorder was still working, beyond caring, Ben in a raw voice spoke into the mike for their own posterity if no one else’s:

“That was the sound of a jeep blowing up in back of us, from a direct hit.”

Jones vanished into the well of the half-track then came up nodding, twirling a finger to indicate the reel remained running. Wiping salt water out of his eyes and ears and the corners of his mouth, Ben groggily mustered himself and swung around in the surf to take stock, checking on Angelides and his men--*I owe you one, don't I, Animal, for stuffing us in the half-track instead of that jeep--* as the line of them advanced like walkers with lead in their boots. Halfway to shore. He gave the distance out loud, words tumbling from somewhere. The next ones that reached the microphone did not come from him.

c/s/c
"SARGE IS DOWN! CORPSMAN, CORPSMAN!"

The cry--it was more of a wail--arose from a young Marine near the leading edge of Angelides' outfit. Where the stalking broad-shouldered shape had been a moment before, there now was a sodden form face-down, and Marines on either side struggling to hoist him up long enough for the raft to come.

"Sergeant Angelides has been hit," Ben instinctively reported in a voice he would not have recognized as his own. "His men are bringing the rubber boat they use to carry their wounded." Even as he spoke that last word, he could tell this was no million-dollar wound, no ticket out of the war. He watched heartsick as the medics splashed their way to the big figure with a torso drenched darker than water would do, checked his vital signs, shook their heads at each other, and made the stark decision to leave his body to the tide. Numbly Ben told of this, finishing up:

"The life raft is there, but passing him by."

He choked up. One more time, death had won. Animal Angelides the indestructible, no more.

"Lieutenant?" A hand from somewhere, grappling away the microphone. "Lieutenant, climb in!" Jones was frantically tugging at him, trying to wrestle him upward into the back of the half-track. "It's over, lieutenant. We're out of reel."