

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.

3 mos in
 1 Pac had
 convinced
 him...
 ought to
 be in
 medical texts

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. "We're crammed with assault force officers as well as our own, there's no way I can find you a cabin--"

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

Below meant four decks down, each more fetid than the one before. 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. *Humidity on the brain at least ought to be in the medical lingo.*

~~ordinarily
 we had
 a tank
 at the
 top of
 the bay, but~~

He came out at the bottom of the labyrinth of ladders and hatchways to a steel bay the width of the hull where many dozens of men were stacked in racks of

transport
 seemed to
 offer
 shelter
 from
 many
 men

bunks that reached from deckfloor 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 in the countless coin pockets of the war was underway. 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 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 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 Dugout Doug 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.

stinking

Ba da da da
Mxc

“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--but if there was one creature of nature he most resembled it was a cougar. 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 vitality came out now as the impatience of a fighting man ready to march into Tokyo and trapped amidship on a transport scow going nowhere fast.

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 perpetual damned Letter Hill.” He

But in
B's mind,
he had seen
about
animal

hunting
apple
in woods

stinking

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--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. 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 ‘Andy.’ It’s just easier around the guys in the unit.”

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

+ fly
new guys -
cherries -
↙

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."

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 wonder 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 platoon 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 chopped 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 the platoon.

“Everybody spread out. Six feet apart. Benson, don’t you know what six feet looks like? It’s the size of your goddamn grave if 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 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 the platoon. 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 shook his head 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.”

Ben pricked at the remark, before realizing Angelides knew nothing of his own shipboard infirmary stay--the Purple Heart suite--after the shoulder wound. “Part of the Corps lore,” he 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. *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 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 FORCE 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.

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 his platoon.

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 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?...

...Six weeks gone, letter no. 6 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.

Spellbound by the immediate presence of Cass in the inked words, he read the letters over again knowing all the while there was another recipient of her lines of love or whatever approximated it, as the case may be.

Were those letters to a husband somewhere at mail call in the Philippines like these?

They couldn't be, the soul issued assurance. Why wouldn't they be? said the demons of the heart.

Angelides watched him at this. Ben looked overcome. Only belatedly did he become conscious of being observed in his troubled seance with the set of letters. Trying not to show the extent of his embarrassment, he of course did. Angelides gruffly offered up:

"This appears serious."

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

Angelides waited, alert to more to come.

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

8 WPs?
9/10

more -
1 MT
Brigade
Battalion

more
~~8~~

wol never
tell Danzer,
did. Yell
Parker

“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.”

One spill of guts for another. It seemed Ben’s 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. True-blue to the 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, write your own ticket from there on. 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. How could the knowledgable man in front of him not see military duty as an emergency to be met and then leave it at that, or we are servants of war forever? It was blindingly similar to the argument he would have made to Dex Cariston.

“You’re sure,” he tried with Angelides, “you just want grunt life to go on and on?”

~~striking~~
facial
discrepancy

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

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 million 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."

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."

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

How
goes it?
~~at hand~~

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?"

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 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--"

"--a Jeep," Ben admitted like someone coming down with a headache. "Excuse me while I beg my way through the Marine chain of command."

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 entire 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 a stick. 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

sticks
rubbed
together

H

planes

one. *And I still ended up shot, didn't I.* At least he and Jones did not have follow on inland to the hand-to-hand fighting here, their task ended at the beach. *Look where the bastardly thing 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 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 platoon checking over their combat packs and ammunition pouches, 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.'"

"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' platoon 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.

high terrain

riflemen
bombs
ammunition
trucks

what they carried -
Angelides

transition -
they make their way...

"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 headed below to get themselves established in the motor convoy's landing craft, a hand gripped Ben's shoulder. Angelides, looking lethal in his camouflage helmet, was 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 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."

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 in the well of the half truck and half tank turned and met them with dubious looks. 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

Startled,
he looked
back

Ben
watched
his hand
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recorder... +
shaped
in ammo
boreholes
+ a mark

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 were the only sounds. At least the landing craft was not being blasted out of the water. Yet, 'Waipu was a breeze, we walked right in,' Angelides' times at this replayed remorselessly within Ben, 'Tarawa was total hell, they threw everything at us,' the one 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 finger over the *on* switch, but Ben shook his head. "Not until we're on the reef. This is recess."

When 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. As the half-track clanked down the ramp, geysers in the surf met it left and right when the Japanese artillery opened 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

more -
constant
bam bam T

ON
PC

flinching was over, Ben reported: "That was an artillery shell, fairly close, probably a seventy-millimeter short-barreled battalion gun the Japs use at beachheads because it is so maneuverable. 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." 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 platoon 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 whistling sound of a Japanese mortar round; 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 and 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.

change?

Carcases
of landing
craft
were
burning

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’ platoon but having to give them up for dead, he was flung against the tailgate by an explosion behind the half-track. 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 said 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. Blearily mustering himself, Ben swung around in the surf to take stock, checking on Angelides and his platoon--*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 weights on 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.

“SARGE IS DOWN! MEDIC, MEDIC!”

The cry--it was more of a wail--arose from a young Marine near the leading edge of the platoon. Where Angelides 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.

invest

57
~~Chances~~
~~Revised~~

Captain

“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 put the wounded in.” Even as he spoke that last word, he could tell this was no million-dollar wound. He watched 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:

“Angelides’ lifeboat will have to be for others.”

He choked up. Death had won one more time. 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.”

Farthest out on the Pacific horizon from where Sig Prokosch happened to be patrolling in the half-light before dawn, waves broke explosively on a shelf of reef as if the edge of the world was flying apart.

Scanning from the distant mix of violent spray and drab rumple of the sunless ocean, the intent Coast Guardsman strived to find a low-lying streak of white out there, a chalk trace on the greater gray, that would be the wake disclosing a periscope. He was keyed up, convinced this might very well be the morning he nailed the Japanese submariners. If not him personally, then the plane carrying depth bombs after he radioed in, blasting away beneath the surface in a relentless search pattern that would crack open the hull of the sub and give the damn Japs all the water they wanted.

Sig felt like winking at the oval moon, paling away as daylight approached. He was highly pleased at having figured it out, nights awake while waiting for slelep to catch up with him, gazing out the window of the hut at the moon furrow on the water--the Japs' evident pattern for those sneak raft trips to the creeks for their drinking water. The raft rats had to be using the lunar cycle. Not the round bright full moon, the obvious. Coast Guard headquarters had thought of that and orders from on high were for extreme vigilance along the coast during each such phase. But that had not produced anything except eyestrain among the nighttime sentries. No, the Japs must be timing their shore excursions some number of nights either side of that, using the moon when it was just luminous enough to cast a skinny path to shore, Sig would have bet anything. That way the raft rats could paddle alongside the moonbeam glow on the water without having to use a torch and with less chance of being seen than during full shine. It made every kind of sense to him, and lately he had matched it up with times he found fresh crap at a creek mouth.

He cradled the Tommy gun. There was reassurance in the highly tooled grip of it that one of these times he would jump the raft rats, the odds could not stay in their favor forever. On this coast he was the constant, they were the variable, and accounting had taught him that the basic determinant was to be found in constancy. One of these times, the raft would get a late start from the submarine or be held up by choppy waves on the way in or happen into some other inconstant circumstance, and he would have them where he wanted them. Maybe this fresh morning.

Once more he scanned outward from the thin crescent of beach. Stirred up by some distant storm, the waves coming to shore tumbled themselves into sudden rolling tunnels, crashing apart moments after they formed. A froth of spume piled itself high at tideline, chunks of it flying off in the wind like great flecks of ash.

At his side the Irish setter nosed at one of the spume clumps and brought on itself a wheezy dog fit of sneezing.

“Bless you, Rex,” Sig said as if speaking to an equal. “But that’s what you get for not paying attention to business, isn’t it. Heel, boy.” He lately had written to Ruby that he figured it was okay to talk to the dog, as long as he didn’t start hearing the dog answer him. He smiled to himself, thinking back to all the conversation during Ben Reinking’s stay. Starting with Japanese, when he had come upon the figure that turned out to be Ben spraddled on that rockface. Funny at the time, but good practice for whenever he got the jump on the--

The leash sprang taut in his grasp.

“What’s the matter, boy?” Sig’s voice dropped low, sentry caution even though no one, no sign of anybody, had appeared. Growling, the dog tugged toward the dark band of vegetation that fringed the outlet of a creek not far ahead.

Sig at once angled inland, steering the dog toward the bulwark of driftwood. The pair of them skirted along it, out of sight from the creek, until they were almost to the dunelike bank. There he silenced the dog with a whispered command and, Tommy gun ready, cautiously took a look over the bank. Below, at the edge of the brush at the creek mouth, there were marks in the sand that looked as if a rubber raft might have been skidded up out of the surf. Excitement came with the sight. Plain as anything, the Japs had been here at low tide. An hour or two ago.

Squinting out at the ocean again in search of a telltale periscope wake, he was unshucking his pack to use the radio when the dog reared to the end of the leash, whining in agitation. “Rex, down,” he hissed without effect. The dog was definite, straining now not in the direction of the creek but toward the salal and ferns and overhanging forest.

“Easy, boy,” he whispered. “What is it you think you’ve got?” Alert to the possibility that the Japs were still ashore, holed up there in the woods, he weighed his options. Using the radio was slow and cumbersome and they might hear him talking into it. On the other hand, if they hadn’t spotted him by now, he had the advantage of surprise. He knew these woods, the raft rats didn’t. If he left the radio pack, he could ease ever so slowly into the undergrowth and see what was what. Although there was the matter of the dog.

He hesitated. If he tied the dog here to a limb of driftwood, it might bark. Besides, the Irish setter’s nose was the quickest guide to any Japs. Patting Rex’s head and murmuring soothingly to keep him quiet, he hooked the leash into his web belt and crept toward the forest.

Sniffing constantly, the dog led him on the leash through the head-high barrier of brush and into the forest-floor growth, until shortly yanking to a halt. With his weapon up and every nerve afire for action, Sig even so was surprised, confused, by what awaited almost within touch of him. Not Japs at all, but a sizable wad of fabric. A pale shroud of it, crumpled in the salal. *Parachute*, he thought immediately. Before realizing it was balloon material.

In that fatal instant he saw the dog sniff at the explosive device tangled beneath and put a paw to it.