

Quickly Clyde slipped  
off the man's gear



# YOU GET TO KNOW

By ARCH WHITEHOUSE

*Among the hedgerows of Normandy, Phil and Clyde Stoner  
Play their parts in a gripping drama of the late war!*

**P**ARATROOPER STONER huddled close to the hedgerow. His legs hung slack in the ditch. A strip of mottled parachute material was draped across his shoulders, a loose end wrapped around his automatic weapon.

He was tired, but fought sleep as he would an enemy patrol. Under the scoop of his jump-helmet his eyes lacked luster, but they moved back and

forth like automatic shuttles. For hours they had swept from the farmhouse to the windmill just in view over the rise of the hill. He fought to stop counting the poplar trees lining the road to the left. Too easy to go to sleep, even though you took those tablets. He squinted and counted the indelible pencil marks on the back of his hand and figured this must be the fifth day.

“Everything worked out fine when we trained in Ireland,” Clyde Stoner grumbled for the twentieth time. “It was easy over there. We all hit and assembled swell. This is nothing like it. Even the hedgerows are different.”

He drew a map from one of his thigh pockets. His eyes slowly focused, but it told him nothing. It was limp and torn where it had been folded. None of the figures and conventional signs he had marked on it were visible now. That came from being dropped in a swamp, instead of on high ground. They had assured him the maps were waterproof.

Through the twisted latticework of the hedge roots he saw a short column of trucks moving at convoy speed. He tried to count them and figure whether they were heading east or northeast. From over a hill a church bell tonked but he lost count at “four” and stared at his wristwatch. The watch was supposed to be waterproof too—like the map.

Everything had been dumped into the swamp; even the equipment bundles. Some figuring by those Air Service guys. He wondered if his brother Phil pulled boners like that. No, Phil was smarter than that.

Three fighters roared overhead and he huddled deeper with pained deliberation. He wondered about them, listening for the change of prop whine as they banked away.

“Going down to smack that convoy,” he muttered. “Hope they know what they’re shooting at.”

He squirmed, avoiding the nettles and tried again to compute the distance to the farmhouse. He hoped to scout it after dark and cut the telephone wires. That was part of his job—if he lived.

**L**IEUTENANT CROWLEY and Sergeant Sloan thought to be in the area somewhere, but he hadn’t seen a friendly figure since he had jumped five nights before. He looked again at the bluish marks on the back of his hand and tried to figure what day it was. He remembered floundering around in the swamp that first night, trying to find his equipment bundle. All he had was a Tommy-gun and five clips of ammunition. His Gamin grenades were no good—the swamp again.

He discovered three packs of K-ration in his pockets. Couldn’t figure how that happened. Tried to find a skirmish line but only ran into a Jerry patrol using Yank signal clickers. But they gave the wrong signal and he used up a clip of ammunition on them, just to make certain.

The second night he had made his way to a farmhouse and had questioned the old man with the aid of his blue book. The Frenchman was leary and tried to act tough when he cut his telephone line. Good thing the little girl could speak English and make him understand that the old man was scared of another Dieppe mess. She had given him a glass of milk and a roll and then had slipped him a hunk of cheese as he crept out of the door.

The third night he had gone back again but the place was a shambles. The old man, his pinch-faced wife and the little girl were spread-eagled all over the floor. The walls were blasted with Jerry grenades. He still felt raw about that.

The fourth night had been fruitlessly spent seeking a power line. The map was still too wet to handle, and he had nothing left to work on. His second clip of .45 stuff had been poured into a German truck bouncing along a narrow road. The truck was empty and had no maps in the tool box, either.

“Two years of training,” he repeated at the beginning of the fifth day, “and I learn a dozen different weapons. I can identify twenty different types of uniforms and as many aircraft, but when the time comes, they dump me into a swamp and nothing works.”

Only the K-ration seemed to have withstood the test. He ran his fighting knife through the outer flap. The wax flaked off across the blue pencil marks on his hand and reminded him of snow. That brought back memories of Crescent Falls back home and Blaze Ridge over which he used to wander, winter and summer.

Julie Maynard used to go with him, matching his even loping strides, sharing the load on the way back. Julie winced when he pulled the trigger but always beat him to the kill with the enthusiasm of a bird dog. He remembered the way she stood and tossed her head to emphasize her words. He remembered her hair, the color of yellow autumn leaves and how he always felt the urge to stroke those smooth clean curls, but somehow never produced that sort of courage.

His brother Phil—well, Phil was different. Phil had a way with him, and he accomplished miracles like that with ease. Clyde supposed that was the difference; the difference in their hands, Phil could draw things, using just a few lines and there it was as plain as daylight. Phil could draw Julie sitting in a chair with a few easy flourishes or he could take a ruler and show you what the insides of a transmission looked like, and you felt

the gears would start to turn any minute; only Phil never knew what the gears turned.

Phil and Julie. Clyde wondered whether they had come to an understanding yet. Julie wrote regularly offering village gossip and told of hearing from Phil now and then. She gave snatches of her conversations with Pop Stoner, and Clyde could visualize them sitting on the steps of Pop's hardware store.

Clyde remembered seeing Julie sitting there the day he left. She had a blue ribbon in her hair, her shirtwaist was open showing the molding of her throat. Her arms were beeswax brown, cuddling her knees close to her; her feet neatly filling a pair of heeled moccasins.

That was startling, because the night before she had danced with him at the Grange Hall and she had worn pretty slippers, stockings and a dress that seemed to be made of no material at all and yet somehow covered her. He had tried to think of a word that would fit. He remembered too, that Phil had said it must have come out of a milkweed pod. Phil always had the right word for everything.

Clyde watched another Jerry convoy rumble along the road and then turn suddenly into a sunken side road. He wondered where Phil was....

**P**OP STONER was sitting one step higher than Julie while she read the letter. She waited, when Hank Brandon came out and gave Pop a dollar and a half for a hammer he had selected. A self-service system went into effect at Stoner's when Julie read letters to Pop.

"How's the boys?" Hank inquired mechanically as he hefted the hammer.

"Both over there in Europe," Pop said poking his pipe stem in the general direction of Oklahoma. "Be in the thick of this battle, I betcha. Go on with Clyde's letter, Julie!"

*We've been tied up in what they call a marshalling area for some time now. We're all ready to go, but we don't know where. Don't like this waiting around. Want to get it over and get home. Have you heard from Phil lately? I haven't seen him over here yet, but I have seen a lot of our planes going over and wonder how he's making out. Sure doing a great job, those fighter boys. I sure hope he gets through safe and gets back home. I'll bet you hope so too, eh, Julie?*

The girl folded the letter and tucked it back in its envelope. Pop sensed the abruptness of the

ending and peered at the ashes in his pipe. "Them boys make it up that way, Julie?" he asked. "I mean...Clyde always writes to you and Phil only writes to me."

"Oh, they know we read them over together."

"T'ain't the same, Julie," Pop persisted and answered a wave from a passing truck. "Which one you gonner marry when they come home?"

Julie sat up slowly as the film of her mind jumped notches and abruptly changed the scene. It brought out her rambles through the woods with Clyde; the more sedate walks with Phil, talking of books and the old streets of Boston when he was at M.I.T. Clyde showing her the difference between a partridge track and that of a woodcock. Phil could draw flowers but didn't know their names, and laughed about it.

Clyde worshipped her with his eyes while Phil chattered on about his ambitions, his hopes and his uncertain future. Phil was afraid of the future; he had no confidence in any of it and Julie knew why he never spoke the words Clyde expressed with his simple glance.

"Gonner marry one of them, ain't you Julie?" the old man interrupted her meditations.

"I...I'm not sure. I don't know."

It was the only answer Julie could think of, and she knew Pop expected better than that. From the time she had been just a tot Pop had made her the standard in the raising of his two motherless boys. Mrs. Stoner had passed on the winter before the Maynards had come to Crescent Falls and Pop had had to assume the proper "bringing-up" of Clyde and Phil.

Julie then lived with her mother in a small salt-box house on the edge of the village. Julie's grandfather had once lived in Crescent Falls, and when her father's museum connections began taking him off to the far corners of foreign lands, Mrs. Maynard decided to seek cheaper and pleasanter quarters in the village she half-remembered as a child. From the start Pop had seen to it that the plumber from Brackington used the right fittings, that the new water pipes were sunk deep enough against the winter and that the bathroom fixtures were trucked over from the freight station.

Pop always took off his hat when he spoke to Mrs. Maynard.

"She's a fine figure of a woman," Pop asserted right from the start. "Her folks came from these parts and she's just as good as a native. Better than some I know."

It was Pop who had brought the telegram telling about Mr. Maynard. The wires were down that night because of the storm and the operator had given it to Pop when he was picking up a shipment of sap buckets at the Brackington freight station. Julie had stood there holding his hand when Mrs. Maynard announced quietly. "My husband has been killed in an airplane accident in Tibet."

"That's too bad ma'am," Pop had said. "How about me taking Julie up home awhile? I guess the boys can find something for her to do until you've had a minute to think it over. I'll see she gets back before bedtime. If there's anything else I can do.... But I guess Tibet is a long ways off, eh?"

"Yes," Mrs. Maynard had said. "It is a long way off."

Julie had stood there without a whimper. Her little hand was hot within the great palm of Pop's. She looked up at him and said, "Do you think Clyde will show me how to tie a Coachman?"

"Show you!" Pop exploded with astonishment. "You know what, Julie? He told me the Red Hackle you made the other day is the best in his book. I said you pick things up mighty quick."

Mrs. Maynard looked bewildered, the telegram still in her hands.

"It's flies, ma'am. Flies for trout fishing," Pop explained. "Go git your wraps, Julie."

From that night, Julie took over two households. Her influence indirectly kept Clyde at home to help run the hardware store while Phil went on to M.I.T. From one to the other she flitted without questioning why. Nothing interfered as the years rolled on; not even when Julie was packed off to school in Middlebury.

There were long summer vacations and shorter spells at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Her affection for Clyde and Phil was only matched by her devotion to her mother whose failing health made it necessary to leave college.

The village had agreed long before, that Julie would make a fine wife for "someone," but Clyde and Phil had gone off to the war before any understanding was arrived at.

"Like to see you marry one of them, Julie," the old man was saying. "You and Clyde always got along."

"But he has never asked me," Julie said utterly unconcerned that her private life should be discussed openly here on the store steps.

"Maybe it's Phil, then," the old man wheedled on. "But Clyde will always have something ahead.

He has a trade...and the store. Something substantial about a store, Julie."

It was simple to analyze Pop's choice. He could understand Clyde. They talked the same language. What Clyde lacked could be easily made up by Julie.

"Phil won't have much when he gets out," Pop warned. "He'll hafta go back to school, and finish—if he can. It's years afore them college fellers ever get to makin' any money, Julie."

"Yes, it takes years, in a profession," Julie agreed. "But right now, the war's more important. Which reminds me, I must go and make some U.S.O. calls."

"Nothin's more important than fallin' in love and gettin' married," Pop argued. "It ain't to me, anyhow. By the way, here's my dollar for the collection. Might as well get that argument over. But you ought to be makin' up your mind, Julie," Pop added without looking at her.

Julie flared up at that. "Me, make up my mind?" Storm signals fluttered in her eyes. "Do you expect me to ask one of them? If they want me, they'd better get together and make up their own minds!"...

LIEUT. PHIL STONER dropped off the truck as it rolled gently around the perimeter track and wondered how many more times he would have to go over. For a week now his outfit had slammed across the channel from first light to dusk, their Thunderbolts gorged with high explosive and .50 caliber ammunition.

He walked wide-legged against the straps of his 'chute harness toward his assembled ground crew and wondered if he looked as tired as Bill Slocum, his crew chief. Or as dirty as Pete, his armorer, who was snapping the last ammo panel shut.

"What's the story?" asked Phil.

"She's as good as we can make her, sir," Bill said, his arms hanging with simian weariness. "You put in nearly nine hours already today. When they gonna ease up?"

"It's tough, but it's tougher over there," Stoner answered and stared at the inked figures on a card clipped to his left sleeve.

"How we makin' out, Lieutenant?" Pete asked, handing Phil his gloves and helmet. "Can you see any of it?"

"The beach assault troops are pretty well set now, but worried about some of the Airborne and Paratroop crowd. Scattered all over the area. Guess

they're having it bad. We're trying to back them up, but you have the devil's own time figuring out which is your own mob. They all look alike from upstairs."

The ground crew sopped up these firsthand scraps of information with hungry enthusiasm. They were their link with the great cauldron of history stewing across the channel.

"You got a brother over there, ain't you, Lieutenant?" prodded Bill Slocum, cocking one frizzy eyebrow.

"He's over there, somewhere. At least his division is."

"With a brother over there, you'd hate to punch it into the wrong guys," Bill figured. "A heck of a situation."

Phil didn't answer that. He just climbed aboard. He didn't say anything about being down on the deck all the time or mention his fears of misjudging a pull-out. From escort duty at 30,000 feet to zero altitude strafing enemy troops in Normandy, was too big a change. Too many things can happen.

The Thunderbolts of his flight were moving around the perimeter track toward the end of the main runway. Another mission was lining up. His engine kicked over with ease and he moved out when his turn came and waved once more to Bill.

They roared away and assembled by squadrons as they headed for Southampton. Below, the roads were still packed with moving traffic heading for the embarkation ports. Beyond the Isle of Wight grouped convoys were moving southeast to dare E-boat Alley again. Hunch-shouldered tugs strained at recalcitrant barges and floating equipment, the details of which the world wouldn't hear for nearly six months.

They were across again in a matter of minutes and Phil heard Control talking to their leader from a vessel somewhere below. Three warning shots came up from a Navy destroyer and Colonel Donnelly changed course.

"Mayfair to Control," Phil heard Donnelly call. "Mayfair to Control... awaiting instructions."

"Continue sweep in Yellow back-area, Mayfair. Control to Mayfair...repeat!"

Donnelly answered and then spoke to his flight leaders. Stoner, taking Blue flight was ordered to sweep the roads out of St. Mère Eglise. The squadron broke up, each flight heading off on its own particular vector of violence.

"Okay, Blue," Phil spoke through his throat mike after depressing the switch on his control

lever. "Spread out to sweep the road bordering the southwest side of the canal running toward Carantan. Reform over Valognes and head back for the air strip on the beach-head. Got it?"

Hap Halsey, his wing man, answered first. Mort Driscoll and Harvey Beard came through as they swung into line.

"Take everything moving northwest," ordered Stoner. "Watch out for ammo trucks, if you get down low. Small groups of troops moving in the opposite direction may have prisoners. Lay off them. Look for recognition strips. Take it away!"

"Roger!" they answered in vibrating chorus and Stoner, watching out of the corner of his eye, saw Halsey bank off at a sharp angle and head for a concentration of canvas-covered trucks near the canal locks. When he turned to port, Driscoll and Beard were high-tailing for a leg-o'-mutton-shaped wood off to their left. There would be Germans in there—and they could have Yank prisoners there too.

THAT was the worst of this job—you never knew. Phil decided to play it safe and head up closer to the bomb line. He performed a zig-zag twist, wishing he was not saddled with the responsibility of a Flight Leader. He thought of Clyde and wondered where he was by now. This was D-plus-5 and there were still hundreds of paratroopers scattered about the area somewhere. The German radio had made disconcerting statements concerning the many pockets of paratroopers they had wiped out or captured.

But somehow he sensed Clyde was able to take care of himself. This was Clyde's meat. The woods and fields were his books and testament. He read his sermons in stones and sang to the music of the brooks and deer trails. Phil had tried to see these things through Clyde's eyes, but it always added up to a number of miles to be trudged or maybe the possible ore content of a shelf of rock.

That was the engineer in him, but Clyde was at home with a rod or rifle. He could stroke a refractory motor into mechanism that purred. Clyde never read a book, but he knew the ignition system of any engine he touched.

"Hope nothing happens to Clyde," he muttered. "He's the sort that makes the backbone of a country. Can't afford to squander men like Clyde."

Phil then found himself nosing down at a truck convoy that had halted suddenly near a glade of willows. He depressed his firing lever and felt

the 'Bolt vibrate with the thud of cordite that spat from his guns. The slugs bit into the roadway and went screwing off in all directions. He drew his stick back slightly and the sparky lines elevated and forked into the line of trucks. He shot over, winced at the snarl of explosion and raced away to take cover behind a parade line of poplar trees. He hoped the fading day would help.

"That was an ammo truck," he discussed with himself. "I should have known that. Now Clyde; he'd somehow sense which was ammo and which was supplies."

The focus of his mind picked up Julie Maynard. That's where Clyde had all the luck. He had Julie waiting for him back home. That was understood. It had always been understood. Phil thought it queer how people's lives seemed coordinated from the start. It had always been that way with Clyde and Julie. But perhaps it was the way these easy natural guys like Clyde always got along.

Phil found himself swinging along parallel with a tree-bordered highway that burrowed into a small village ahead. Off to his left a smear of swampland gleamed like a greasy tea-tray. He wondered if that was where some of the Paratroopers had been dropped by mistake.

"There must be hundreds of them still hiding around here," he fretted. "I wonder if Clyde—"

The village swept past him, its streets deserted and pocked with battle scars. He flipped a wing to avoid the clutches of a jagged church spire. Leveling off again he shot into the open country and caught the dust pennants of a convoy racing northwest. Automatically, he swung back into a position where he could mark them through a break in the screening hedgerow. They were just making a turn into a side road.

He nosed down and set his jaw against the retch of the guns. Again his fire sneaked ahead and converged on the leading truck. A spiked sheet of flame arced up like the sudden flip of a matador's cloak. Phil cringed but followed his tracers in and held her down until the last truck had been combed.

Then it was too late. He looked once and knew he'd had it! Dead ahead, spite-fencing the main road off which the convoy had turned, stood a barrier of lance-like poplars. There was no time, or room, to clear. With a compressed cry he threw his arm across his face.

A mad flail of whirling steel hacked at the tops of the trees and beat itself into an armless hub.

Four sword blades of frustration went fluttering into the blue as the motor raced impotently and coughed a black sigh of exhaustion.

Catapulted by inertia, the Thunderbolt floundered on for nearly a quarter of a mile. Phil ignored the warning light concerning his retracted wheels and concentrated on his once chance of escape. It had to be a belly landing—and a perfect one at that!

"I knew it! I knew it!" he raged aloud. "I knew I'd get it this way—eventually!"

The heavy fighter lost speed and the controls felt like a spoon stirred in heavy jelly. He tried to rudder her clear of another hedge but the starboard wing-tip caught and spun the 'Bolt into the tall hawthorn.

Phil remembered her tripping her bulk over the hedgerow and feeling the tail come up. That was all he did remember....

**C**LYDE STONER hesitated but a few seconds before he started to crawl along the hedgerow. Instinct told him there might be a chance of yanking the pilot out before she went up in flames. For Clyde's money, they always burned.

Instinct also warned him it would be suicide to take a chance and disclose his own position. The pilot could be dead by now. It was certain the Germans would send a patrol from the shot-up convoy to investigate. But unreasoning fealty overruled instinct.

That pilot could be a lad from Phil's outfit! Phil was flying Thunderbolts. He might even know Phil. It might even be—

His eyes considered the last silver glint of daylight as it etched the horizon. He listened for the expected clump of running feet. His world was dimming out its sounds as well as its day.

Gripping his Tommy gun in his left hand, Clyde began to crawl along the base of the hedgerow. He could see the battered canopy of the inverted cockpit. There was a terrifying crackle of hawthorn as the battered wing settled of its own weight, and Clyde flattened in the ditch.

Assurance returned and he crawled up to the side of the fuselage. Through the battered Plexiglas canopy he could see the head and shoulders of the man inside. His hand went through a shattered panel and sought the release latches. Then his eyes held him while he interpreted the inverted lettering stencilled in black along the man's 'chute shoulder strap.

"Phil!" Clyde whispered as the canopy began

to slide back with a harsh complaining growl. "Phil! It's Clyde. Are you—?"

His fingers soon solved the quick-release shackle and he caught the unconscious man as he fell away and dragged him toward the ditch. Quickly he slipped him out of his harness and hurried back to stuff the gear into the cockpit. A tang of gasoline caught his nostrils: "I should do something about that," he muttered thoughtfully.

He lit a match from his waterproof case and threw it into the cockpit, which immediately burst into flames.

"It will take them some time to figure whether he's still in there," he reflected as he hurried back to the ditch.

Phil was sitting up pawing at his face. A thin trickle of blood drooled from one corner of his mouth and trailed a scarlet design down his yellow Mae West. Without a word Clyde began flexing and unflexing his legs and decided Phil had suffered no serious injury.

"You all right now?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Sure—wonderful!" Phil answered and stared at the burning fighter. "You sure must have worked fast to get me out of that. Where'd you come from, anyhow?"

The paratrooper glanced at him sideways. Phil evidently hadn't recognized him. He wondered whether his jump helmet, his six-day growth of beard and the mottled daubings on his face could disguise him that much.

"But he ought to recognize my voice," he argued with himself and then realized that six days and nights without much sleep had swollen his tongue and husked all the tonal quality from his speech.

Phil was staring at him as if awaiting an answer.

"We jumped D-minus-plenty," said Clyde, helping Phil to his feet. "They dumped us in the swamp and I been floundering around here ever since. "You got any idea where we are?"

"Paratrooper eh? I got a brother in the 101st."

Clyde jammed his teeth together and stifled the words that were bubbling to the surface. Instead, he growled, "We'd better git going. You got any idea how far we are from the skirmish line now?"

"Should have a map. New one I marked this morning. I think I know where we are."

"Git going then. We can hole up awhile in a barn over here!"

"I got to get out, soldier," Phil wheezed after a few painful strides. "I don't want to be reported 'Missing.' Those War Department telegrams sure give your folks an awful shock."

"That's a new gripe," Clyde husked over his shoulder. "Most guys are glad to get down alive."

"They had it bad enough, just sitting and waiting back home," Phil added after some blurred reflection. "Just sitting there hoping the front door bell won't ring."

"Same old Phil," the Paratrooper muttered to himself as he led the way toward the shadow of a small stone shed. "Same old imagination. I never would have thought of that telegram racket."

**H**E WAITED and gripped Phil's arm and steered him for the door of the shed. Once inside he drew a hooded flashlight from his jump-jacket pocket and led the way to a long low grain box.

"Thanks," Phil said dropping down wearily. "I guess I'm pretty bushed."

"Where's your escape kit?"

"Lower leg pocket. Might be a good idea to get some of that dope into me, eh?"

Clyde tore off the tape that held the small plastic box together. From the first-aid pack he selected several small pellets and dropped them into the airman's trembling palm.

"They'll steady you in a minute. Marvelous stuff. I've been living on it for days."

"Whew! You must be about dead."

"Maybe I am," Clyde grumbled, "and maybe I'm too numb to notice it. You don't hurt anywhere too much, do you?"

"I'm all right. Give me half an hour and I'll be able to navigate, I guess."

The Paratrooper was examining the stuff in the escape kit. It contained a silk map, a photograph of Phil in civilian clothes and a wad of faked identification papers.

"Name's Stoner," offered Phil. "I'm a Lieutenant, but you can skip that. Never ran across a guy by that name, did you?"

"Stoner?" Clyde mumbled putting the stuff back in the case. "Too many guys in this outfit to remember names," he said evasively. "You married, Lieutenant? I mean—the way you worry about your folks back home."

Phil wheezed and turned his face to the wall. "No. I never made enough money. Just another college boy who'll be in the breadline when this is over. The guys on the ground who have a trade will come out of this with some prospects. Pilots—

fighter pilots anyhow, will be a dime a dozen after this war."

"Take it easy. Not so loud," warned Clyde. "Maybe some girl back home will have something to say about that," he added squatting in the darkness. "Maybe you got a girl, eh, Lieutenant?"

"There is a girl, we—my brother and I have known for years. I'd marry her tomorrow.... No I wouldn't. I wouldn't load her down with something like me. Now, my brother, he's all set with a trade and he can have Pop's hardware store. She'd be crazy to marry me."

An acid tang of guilt made Clyde swallow hard. He felt like a man at a keyhole, but he had to know—now.

"You like her—this girl?" he probed from the darkness.

"She's really something, brother!" Phil answered after a pause and then stretched out flat on his back. "Yes, I love her."

"Who you trying to be fair to?" Clyde asked. "That girl or your brother?"

After a minute's reflection, Phil said: "Never thought of it that way. I suppose I was thinking about Julie. Reason should come into it somewhere, I suppose."

"I'm only asking, Lieutenant; because some day I might be up against the same situation."

"Could be. What would you do?"

"Ever see a buck standing its ground and fighting off dogs to protect its doe—in the woods, I mean?" Clyde began tonelessly. "Maybe a cock pheasant, ruffled and clawing to protect the hen and young birds. Even a weasel will stand and fight for its mate. I guess they don't think much about what they have to offer—outside of that."

Phil turned and squinted at him: "You talk like my brother," he muttered.

"Yeh?" the Paratrooper answered, and began to talk faster. "To me, you sound like an all-right Joe; only you're working too hard at it. You can do a lot of right people a lot of no-good that way."

Phil sensed a throbbing at his temples and a cold lump in his belly. "I don't get it," he said and listened more intently.

"You're maybe depriving this girl the right to happiness, for all you know. You'd practically force her to marry your brother because maybe he can support her, without figuring whether they'd hit it off or not."

"What's he trying to pull?" Phil asked himself.

"Maybe later on if you finish school and get a

good job," Clyde went on, "what do you do? You go back home maybe, and you see her and you catch the mistake you made. She sees what she really missed by not being allowed to take a chance. I'd say it's worth the gamble. Has your brother asked her to marry him?"

"No. I guess not. They're not engaged if that's what you mean."

"If he can afford to keep her, why didn't he marry her before he left? As I see it he just didn't bother and if he didn't bother he couldn't have cared a lot. What are you waiting for?"

"Yeh," said Phil. "Guess we'd better get moving." His eyes tried to pierce the darkness and his mind said, "I'm almost sure, but I got to know." He fumbled for his map and asked, "What's the time?"

**H**E WAITED until Clyde flicked on his flashlight and watched the beam fall on his wristwatch. That was all Phil wanted to know. The watch was stainless steel and had an outer rim of figures by which time could be computed on the 24-hour system. It was exactly like his own—Pop's present before they had gone overseas.

Clyde quickly shoved his sleeve down and flicked off the light. "I dunno," he said from the darkness, "full of swamp water, I guess."

"Yeh. Guess mine's done, too," said Phil. He rustled his map and Clyde got up and stood behind him to keep out of the pallid gleam of the flashlight. "Look," the pilot began. "The skirmish line is about here. I'd say I cracked up just beyond where this road connects this second-class road."

"There's the windmill," Clyde pointed out. "That was washed off my map."

"Our beachhead forces are moving up this road here," Phil explained. "At noon they were about here—but they should be farther along by now."

"I know this area pretty well, now. I can get you along there in a couple of hours. You can hole up in a culvert here—until they come along."

"That would get me back to the beachhead early tomorrow," Phil half-whispered. "Great! Maybe I can stall off being listed as 'Missing'."

"Sure you can," agreed Clyde with enthusiasm. "You can get out fast."

Clyde snapped off the light and Phil turned sharply. "But what about you?" he asked.

"I still got a power line to clip. It's back here a-ways. I'll keep your map and I can get you to that hideout before first light in the morning. I'll



have that cable snipped before they pick you up, Lieutenant.”

Phil tried to analyze the situation. Why was Clyde taking this stand? There was no justification for any of it. The beachhead forces were so close, the cutting of one power cable in this area couldn't possibly aid or hinder the advance now. Still, if this was the way he wanted it, there must be a reason.

“Maybe it's too late to get back there,” Phil suggested hesitantly. “Why don't you make for the beachhead with me?”

“Look, Lieutenant,” Clyde's voice said brusquely, “I know my business. I'm in charge here, remember. I'll get you out and you can be back by noon tomorrow. You'll be flying again in the afternoon.”

“Okay. If that's the way you want it,” the airman agreed.

“This is the way I want it. Let's get going. There ain't too many hours of darkness this time of year.”

Clyde led the way cross country, just as he always had—and with the same easy-loping stride.

This was the way he wanted it...

POP was sitting on the top step when Julie came down the road waving the letter. It was hot that August afternoon and Pop daubed at his face with a big blue handkerchief. It wasn't just sweat. Pop's pale blue eyes were sometimes uncomfortable in the strong sunlight.

“Pop!” she called. “It's from Phil. He's coming home—fifty missions. He's asked me to marry him. Have you heard, too?”

Pop nodded and stared up the valley, “No, not from Phil. But I'm awful glad, Julie. That'll be very nice. You are going to marry him, ain't you? He'll need you so much. I guess we'll both need you, Julie.”

“Of course. That is, of course I'm going to marry him. Listen, this is what he says.”

Pop listened while Julie read it over twice. He didn't tell her about the telegram he had in his pocket—about Clyde.

They'd find out soon enough. They'd get to know.