

ARTHUR BAUDZUS



U-859

An aerial photograph of the USS Intrepid (CV-11) sailing on the ocean. The ship's upper deck is visible, with several crew members standing on the bridge structure. A red flag flies from the mast. The ship's hull number 'U-859' is prominently displayed in large, stylized black letters with a white outline and a slight 3D effect, overlaid on the lower half of the image.



**U-859**



# **U-859**

Arthur Baudzus

**Riverdale Electronic Books**

Riverdale, Georgia

**U-859**

Copyright © 2003, Arthur Baudzus. All rights reserved.

Cover painting © 2003, Chris Lee.

Cover design by Eva Willaert

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Riverdale Electronic Books  
P.O. Box 962085  
Riverdale, GA 30296  
[www.riverdaleebooks.com](http://www.riverdaleebooks.com)

Adobe® eBook Edition  
ISBN: 0-9712207-9-4

Also available in trade paperback format  
ISBN: 0-9712207-7-8

Published in the United States of America

*This is a novel. It is the story of a German long-range U-boat that was chased halfway around the world. It is based on the true odyssey of U-859, in which I was a member of the crew.*

*Most ship names, numbers and dates are authentic, but since I have applied a more than generous amount of literary licence, this story has to be read as a work of fiction rather than a documentary.*

Arthur Baudzus





# **Part One**

## **Germany, 1944**

### **Chapter 1**

KAPITÄNLEUTNANT John Henning was piped ashore from his boat. Ratings and officers within earshot stopped, stood to attention, and saluted as he stepped briskly down from the gangway onto the pier, to which his U-boat was tied. With a crisp salute, he acknowledged the respect of the men around him, and then walked along the pier a short way to the barracks, where the crew was housed when in port.

With the sleek boat tugging on her moorings, the U-boat's periscope seemed to wave like a friendly hand as the bow-waves of a passing ship rocked it slightly. She looked lonely and abandoned without the man with the worn, white-topped cap high up on the bridge.

Smiling faintly, Henning remembered that today was April Fool's Day, 1944. Not that anybody would have dared to play a prank on him. He was a tall man, and his obvious air of superiority kept others at arm's length. As the commander of a U-boat he had to portray that attitude. In the restricted confines of the boat he had to form one single fighting unit with his men and, at the same time,

keep himself isolated at their head, demanding blind obedience. He was definitely not a man to be trifled with.

At the end of the pier he stopped and looked around once more. His U-boat was in full view, and he looked with admiration at this sleek, blue-grey creature of the sea. He had received her from the ship-building yard with a new crew and honed her into the deadly weapon she now was. She was all poised for her maiden voyage. After a thousand mock attack and emergency manoeuvres, he could have blindfolded the crew and they still would perform their tasks efficiently. Now the guns pointed threateningly to heaven, and the deadly torpedoes were armed and waiting in their tubes.

Presently, the bilge-water infested waves of the harbour were lapping lazily against the shiny sides of the hull, but in a few day's time this marvel of engineering would be sluicing through the clean, icy waters of the North Atlantic.

Henning seemed to be reluctant to tear himself from this picture. Tied to the pier, the boat was vulnerable. There was no safe haven to be found in Germany any more. Enemy Mosquito bombers could zoom in from low over the water at any time, dropping death and destruction before any alarm was raised.

He felt responsible.

Like a father, warning his children of all possible dangers before he leaves them, he wondered if there was anything more he should have mentioned? Have the gun crew ready at all times, even when in port! The boat is out of bounds for wharfies from now on—they could be saboteurs.

For Chrissake, those men have been trained for this for nearly a whole year. Stop worrying! Slowly, he turned again and left the pier, his eyes sweeping the harbour, with its maze of turning cranes and discoloured ships, whence the ear-shattering noise of pneumatic hammers sounded as they slammed new rivets into the dam-

aged hulls of ships that had limped home from the distant battlefields.

As he reached the barracks, he entered the room allocated to him. The boat had bunks for only half the crew, because out at sea, half of them were busy on watch while the other half slept. In harbour, however, when nobody had to work at night apart from the duty guard on board, accommodation for the crew was provided ashore, because every one of them needed a place to sleep at night.

Henning exchanged the white cap that marked him as the commander of a ship for the gold-rimmed, navy-blue officer's cap and fastened the ceremonial dagger to his belt. For a second, he looked at that gold-plated decoration on his uniform. Why it was called a ceremonial dagger, and why he had to wear it, he did not know. It certainly beat the long, awkward sabre other officers had to carry around with them, even if it belonged in the middle ages. Henning permitted himself a dry chuckle.

In a few days time, his U-boat was due to pull out and head for a long patrol, and for the next day or two there was no need for him to stay on board. The ship had no cargo room or passenger facilities. It was a compact fighting unit, packed with intricate machinery. Like a living being created by nature, her chest and bowels were crammed with veins, vessels and nerve cells, which came to a pulsing life when manned by the crew.

The L.I., the *Leitender Ingenieur*<sup>\*</sup>, had an ear on that life, like a doctor. In preparation for the next patrol, he would manage all the technical requirements, whilst the IWO, the First Watch Officer or Number One, could handle all the administrative preparations. This was the last opportunity for the captain to spend a

---

\* Leading Engineer, the senior engineering officer and head of a U-boat's engineering department, he was commonly addressed by the initials of his title, pronounced "ell-ee." Engineers were specialists, recognizable by a cogwheel device above their rank stripes. While they held the same rank as line officers, engineers were ineligible for command.

couple of days at home with his family before a prolonged absence.

In a hidden corner of his mind, he had decided that he might as well take one good look at his home before he went away. The way things went, all might be changed by the time he saw it again.

He could take his time. If he returned to the boat one day before the departure date, that would provide time enough to check on the final preparations, and give him time to punish the stray culprits who had overstayed their liberty, caught the clap on their last leave, or those who had drunk themselves into a coma and had to be carried aboard by the military police. He had to put on a show of punishment.

U-boat men were the epitome of discipline and reliability when out at sea, and Henning insisted on that, but only when on board. When on leave, and divorced from their boat, their individuality blossomed and they became a bloody nuisance to the shore patrols. Then they were prone to all kinds of mischief, and Henning did not care. However, he had to put *some* limit to their behaviour, if only to keep them from the claws of the shore authorities, who were only too eager to court-martial them. Every one of them was well trained and valuable to him.

John Henning was a man in his late twenties. As a Kapitän-leutnant he was an old salt among the young commanders of the U-boat fleet. These days, with the enemy sinking U-boats as fast as they could be built, U-Boat commanders got their commission at the early rank of Leutnant. The enemy gave them no chance to gain experience, and one third of all U-boats lost were sunk on their first patrol.

Henning had been quite a long time in the game. In the early days of the war he had rubbed piston-ringed elbows with later aces such as Prien, Schepke and Kretschmer—all of whom had already received the coveted Knight's Cross and were national heroes—all of whom were also already sunk and history.

By now, Henning would probably have been awarded the Knight's Cross, too, if not for the fact that his boat had been deployed in the Mediterranean for a while. That had, unfortunately, been during the time of great and easy successes in the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean it was different. Those waters were bristling with battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers. Furthermore, the Mediterranean water was crystal clear, and a U-boat could be seen from above even if it was submerged, making its life miserable. There the pickings were few and far between, and a U-boat's success was measured in the number of ships she sank. However, somebody had to do the job and cover Rommel's supply lines.

Even so, he had racked up a considerable amount of tonnage. One more patrol and he, too, would be in line to receive the Knight's Cross and join the nation's aces—possibly get one more stripe on his sleeve, which was even more important. All things considered, he was a mighty step ahead of his more successful comrades—he was still alive.

That, in itself, was a miracle in 1944.

Henning emerged from the barracks, put on his gloves, and stepped into the waiting staff car. "To the train station," he directed the driver.

"Aye, aye, sir." The driver saluted and closed the door behind his passenger.

They were in Kiel. It was his boat's birthplace, and it seemed to be significant that she should depart from here on her first voyage. During her commissioning period, while the boat learned to swim and dive, and to make use of her nerves and limbs, she had been stationed in Stettin, but now, fully matured, she had returned to Kiel.

Henning lived not far from here. He looked forward to spending the next few days at home with his family. The next patrol

would take him half around the world and involve a long absence from home. Now he felt desperately in need of a break. In spite of his clean shirt and spotless uniform, he felt dirty and sticky. One did not really shake off a U-boat simply by walking ashore. The smells of sweat and diesel appeared to seep right into one's pores.

The lines in his face smoothed as his thoughts hurried home ahead of him. There was his house, his bed, his bath and his wife, Barbara. She was a good wife, and used to him being away for lengthy periods.

Henning leaned back in the seat of the car, which had just negotiated the gate to the Navy Harbour. Again he had to acknowledge the salute of the guard from his seat as the car passed the final harbour control.

Henning loved the Navy, and had made it his career, but after four years of warfare he was dog-tired of this way of life. He was tired of the war, and did not look forward to being hunted in the Atlantic like a rabbit. As soon as he poked his nose out into the open he would be shot at. Repeatedly, he had put out his feelers for a desk job, but so far without much success. One had to be careful not to appear to be a coward. Still, life was not meant to be easy.

Life for a U-boat man had deteriorated drastically during the last year. Gone were the days when he had been the hunter, when he had been feared and had reigned supreme in the Atlantic. In those days, strategic procedures for a U-boat were quite simple—you attacked an enemy and, when he saw you and wanted to retaliate, you simply dived and you were gone. Even the mighty battleships had to fear U-boats and were vulnerable. Henning had no qualms about sinking ships. It was not really the type of killing an army soldier was required to do. A submariner never saw a drop of blood.

Now he faced the future with dismay. The main advantage of a U-boat was that it could make itself invisible. That was no longer valid. Diving under water did not provide him with shelter any

more. In the fight for supremacy at sea, the battlefield had become subordinate to the science laboratories on both sides. Each new device invented resulted in the invention of a counter device. These days, it took the eye of a professional scientist behind the lens of the periscope to survive.

About his boat, Henning had no complaints. He had assembled a crew of brave men, with a high level of morale and a command of technical and specialized skills and knowledge that compelled admiration.

It was the war, which seemingly would not end, that worried him. For years it all had looked promising, and it had seemed likely that it would be over in a year or two. Now it was already 1944, and things were steadily deteriorating.

Discouraged, Henning shook his head and tried to change the direction of his thoughts.

Through the window of the car he looked out onto the street. There was little traffic. With no petrol available for civilian use, those cars not yet confiscated for the war effort remained in their garages. Only an occasional tram rattled along its tracks in the middle of the road.

The picture in Kiel was bleak. It was already suffering from occasional air-raids. Left and right of the street, there were ruined buildings. Gaps were apparent in the string of houses, where heavy bombs had carved holes, as though hewn with a giant axe. The people looked tired, and showed the strain of the war. Each day they picked their way over new piles of rubble to queue for food with resigned patience.

Henning's lips tightened at this picture. In the past, the German Air Force had been portrayed as invincible—the German fighters as the fastest and strongest in the world. For years Germany had succeeded in maintaining air superiority, and provided a degree of protection over the whole of the fatherland. That enemy bombers could eventually break through past them, and actually throw

bombs on German cities, seemed to be a far-fetched fantasy—but here was the evidence. Germany was obviously buckling. That could not be denied any more, no matter how rosy the picture painted by Goebbels from the Propaganda Ministry.

Not that the bombing of cities would in any way contribute to the end of the war—far from it. Seeing your home destroyed by a bomb does not put fear, or thoughts of surrender, into your heart. On the contrary, it turns peaceful people into willing participants in a war they might otherwise not have approved of when it all began. It encourages the growth of a determination to retaliate.

In a strange way, every side in a war feels righteous, and entitled to participate in destroying humanity. Winston Churchill called German submariners dastardly killers who sink ships, but his own submariners were in his words “noble and gallant men who sink German ships.” Twisting words to distort their meaning has always been refined into a fine art during wars. The enemy was always the liar.

When Henning reached the station he dismissed the car and looked for the train that would take him to the outskirts of Kiel. His home was in a little village at the water’s edge. Here people lived with the smell of salt and tar, and the sound of the thundering surf. Along the beach were plenty of children with sun-bleached hair, who needed no toys to amuse themselves. Their plaything was the surf, and they grew up in carefree abandon.

Once, Henning himself had been one of those roaming kids. It seemed to be an eternity ago. He came from a traditional Navy family. His father had been a captain in the Kaiser’s Navy and so was his grandfather before him.

With a whistle, the suburban train pulled out of the station and in that moment an air-raid siren wailed eerily from a nearby roof. It started off with a threatening growl, rising to an hysterical shriek, then sinking into a low-pitched gurgle, only to rise again. Immediately it was joined by other sirens down the street, until the air was



filled with the sounds of a thousand tormented souls. It brought goose-pimples on to the toughest skin and drove people into their shelters, where they sat on their haunches, painful lumps in their stomachs, wondering what building would next be erased from their street.

The train went on, accelerating briskly, as though fleeing from the impending danger. All this reminded Henning that Germany was no longer the unshakable fortress it had been when the war had started—when he and his fleet had ruled the waves, when Hermann Göring bragged that he would eat his hat if one enemy plane dared to fly through German airspace and live to tell the story.

How much longer would it be? Would he still have to go on until he was one of the aces and got his Knight's Cross? And if he got it, was it worth it? What could he do with it in a defeated Germany?

He would have liked the war to end, but for the time being Germany was on a treadmill and could not get off. For the top brass at headquarters he was but a pawn in a chess game. They paid no heed to his fears and emotions. They measured the status of the game in U-boats lost against tonnage sunk. Humanity was of no importance.

Could Germany lose the war? It was unthinkable. It was true that the war had taken a miserable turn, to say the least, but that could only be temporary. New weapons would be invented, and things would turn around for the better. In times like these, even a cool strategist like him needed a crutch to still believe in Germany's future. Goebbels and his rosy propaganda might sway house wives and boys from the Hitler Youth, but his speeches left Henning unimpressed.

However, there was evidence that Germany could still recover. It was a race against time. Those secret weapons were not all idle talk. There were rockets, jet-propelled aircraft and the nuclear bomb. All that gave hope.

He, himself, had seen a revolutionary new U-boat being tested in Stettin. It had the sleek lines of a fish, without deck or casing. It was reported to proceed submerged faster than any surface ship, and could out-run a destroyer. In total silence it could speed along all day under water as fast as a destroyer and evade detection. A fleet of these would again wipe the enemy from the waves of the Atlantic. There was still hope.

Henning looked out the window of the speeding train. The carriage rocked wildly on the track as the engine driver gave his machine just another notch of speed until his horsepower were stampeding. The sky was clear and peaceful, with just a slight ripple of cirrus cloud. Even the straight vapour trails of the enemy bombers, crisscrossed by lines of German fighters, did little to drive home the bleak future. If anything, it looked like a decoration of the sky.

Still, they were reminders of the war—pictures one had learned to live with. Most air-raids had their targets further inland, and most people had learned not to panic at the sight of mere vapour trails, despite knowing that up there cannons rattled and people were being killed. Occasionally, an aircraft—just a tiny spot—broke into flames and came spinning down.

As a military man, Henning had never been an organized member of the Nazi Party, and had little time for politics and propaganda, but he *was* a dedicated nationalist. Since childhood, he had absorbed the glory of German history. He had learned to condemn the treatment of Germany by the Allies after the First World War. That his country could again be mutilated as a result of this war never entered his mind.

He would love it if the war would stop today. To hell with all rewards for bravery and success—but how does one stop a war? He hoped that someone would come up with a solution.

He was not optimistic about his future as a soldier, but he had sworn an oath of allegiance to Hitler and intended to keep it. He

considered it to be an honour and a privilege to be an officer, and was determined to fulfill his role with dedication. At all times he had to set a good example to the men who served under his command. Still, when out on the Atlantic, he was aware that he was walking a tight-rope, with the sword of Damocles threatening him. Statistics proved life to be extremely dangerous out there. The news propaganda might not reveal all of it, but he knew that too many of his comrades had gone out to sea never to return—had been swallowed by the cruel sea. Henning himself had already tasted it.

Although in the past he had always managed to bring his boat safely home, the last boat he commanded had been destroyed by Mosquito bombers minutes after they had tied up in port. Most of his crew had perished that day.

It had hit him hard.

During nearly four years in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean that 500-ton boat and its experienced crew had been part of him. During many sorties a bond had been forged between the crew members. Now, most of them were dead.

Only by a lucky fluke had he, the L.I., and a handful of the crew survived. On his next commission he received a new and bigger boat, and augmented the new and mostly inexperienced crew. These boys were quickly plucked from U-Boat School in a yet unripe condition.

Nearly one year had passed since he had lost his comrades—one year it had taken to shape the schoolboys of his crew into U-boat men. They now could crash dive the boat as fast as the most seasoned men in the game.

The trouble was that he had lost some of his enthusiasm to proceed back to the seemingly useless battle. He felt rusty, and removed from the dangers of the war. One year in the safe waters of the Baltic Sea had softened him—but life had to go on. He was still the captain of a ship.

How had he become the captain of a U-boat?

Of course, it was the tradition of his family to join the Navy. The ultimate goal of every naval officer was to become the skipper of a battleship. There were a thousand officers waiting in the queue for that, but there weren't many battleships. There was just one *Bismarck*. The answer was to join the U-boat arm of the Navy. It was relatively easy to obtain the white commander's cap on a U-boat.

So far, it had been a good sort of life. Even the threat of a war had held no dread for him, but rules were forever changing. That this war could degenerate into a battle of titanic scientists, with him a pawn in their game, he could not have foreseen.

Now, he had been drifting for nearly a year, just training in the Baltic Sea. In a few days that easy life would be over. No more pretending to evade enemy attacks. There would be killer water bombs again. Luckily, he was an experienced man, but in a way it would be worse than ever. While he had been relaxing in the Baltic, the war in the Atlantic had become more ferocious. New anti-U-boat devices had been invented by the enemy, and every day one had to expect new surprises.

This would have been a good time to say one's prayers, but Henning was not a religious man. He did not have the comfort of religious belief to turn to. He did not have the benefit of a faith that told him that, though he may die, his soul would be saved by God. Henning faced the naked truth—that when his time came, the fish would eat him, soul and everything. It was a miserable future to look forward to.

Religion was a place of shelter for people who did not want to face their responsibilities. If difficulties arose, they simply prayed to their God and let Him take care of it. Henning did not think that one could run a U-boat on that basis. He had a calculating mind. His eyes saw everything, and his mind assessed every situation

with the efficiency of an adding machine. He was not ready to let some unseen, divine force take over the helm of his boat.

In his opinion, that was why he was still alive—why he was still the captain of a U-Boat. A divine force still had to prove to him that it existed.

\* \* \*

The train from East Prussia sped along the sandy shores of the Baltic Sea on its way to Kiel. In the corner of his compartment, by the window, the lonely sailor seemed to be asleep. He was a heavy-shouldered, athletic looking fellow—a rock of a man. The gold-plated, oval submarine war badge, pinned to his uniform, declared him to be a veteran of the Navy's U-boat arm. So did the jaunty fold of his sailor cap, which had the compulsory, stiff wire ring removed to make it more pliable. On his left sleeve, a stitched-on cogwheel, with a lightning arrow through it, marked him as a stoker. Adam West, electro-stoker in U-Henning, stirred and yawned. He hadn't really been asleep. He was learning to speak English. It would not only serve to satisfy his natural curiosity, it also would come in handy. He already knew that his next patrol would go to foreign shores, and if he could speak English he would have a great advantage with the girls there. His lips moved as he tried to memorize whole sentences from the tourist booklet he had bought. *Good morning. How are you? How about a kiss? Take off your pants.*

He chuckled inwardly. The most important phrases for a sailor were not in his little book.

Adam yawned again. With his eyes still closed, he also contemplated his life as a U-boat man.

How does one become a U-boat man, a “dastardly murderer,” as Winston Churchill called them?

His mind raked back to the beginning of the war. Everybody had to be drafted and become a soldier. There had been another war within living memory, and pictures showed men in steel hel-

mets, lying in muddy trenches, looking for the enemy behind defoliated tree stumps in a landscape torn to shreds by murderous artillery—not an attractive picture, when compared to the life of a sailor on a ship, feasting his eyes on the wide blue sea.

Of course, one chose the Navy.

But even the best Navy career started off with three months of backbreaking boot camp. No blue water here. Drill-sergeants barked at you and grabbed your body. Brutally, they exposed it to physical abuse and knocked it into shape, until you were square as a cube and fitted nicely into that square hole they had prepared for you.

At last, you were ready for the wide blue sea.

Your platoon was all ready and lined up for the release ceremony, the drill-sergeant pacing wild-eyed down the line, inspecting and searching for some impurities on you he might have overlooked.

Then the command, “Volunteers for U-boat service, three paces, forward march!”

You have exactly one millisecond to make up your mind and decide if you want to join the glorious heroes praised so highly by Goebbels, or stand back alone, pulling your head in between your shoulders, and squeezing your tail between your legs like a beaten dog.

Most of the platoon took three paces forward.

You are a U-boat man. A volunteer.

Adam West yawned again and opened his eyes as he looked out the window. The train was already slowing down, as they were nearing Stettin. He knew that town. It had been his boat’s base for the past year.

Stettin was a sailors’ town. Its safe position on the Baltic Sea made it ideal as a base for training crews, which were always needed to fill the gaps torn by the hungry Atlantic.

Hundreds of men poured ashore every night, intent of enjoying their short hours of liberty. They got drunk, monopolized the streets, sponsored prostitutes, initiated young girls into the pleasures of love, and comforted married women who badly missed their husbands, who were busy digging trenches on the Russian front.

For Adam West, all this was over. His boat had left this base for good. He yawned again and stretched his frame. With the boat laid up in Kiel for a final check-up, he had been lucky to obtain a peaceful week-long leave to Lyck, a provincial little town where his parents lived. It was one of those oasis areas of Germany, still untouched by the miseries of war. The cobblestoned tranquility of that little place lay way off the beaten track for Allied bombers. Out there, there was little to remind one of the war—except a notable lack of males.

Now Adam was in his early twenties, but he felt old as Methuselah. He had already seen much of the war, and had faced death more than a dozen times. After 19 patrols, it was a miracle that he was still alive. Back home, however, he had tasted peace and felt young again. After many years of absence he had found his own footprints, left behind when he was still a little kid. He had reveled in a place that never changed, where only the shortage of food and men was a reminder of the war.

He had gone boating on the river that still flowed, powerful and crystal clear, where one could see right down to the bottom and fish had to be quick, because they had little chance to hide. He had walked through endless pine forests, and watched the spring emerge with youthful eyes he thought he no longer had. It had been a great adventure to visit the place where he had been young—where his roots were still firmly planted in the ground.

There were many places to see—too many memories—many friends to greet from days gone by. After years of exposure to the

war, it was heaven to relive the carefree days of youth, unblemished by the clouds of war.

Best of all had been the girls. They were all still there, and a few years older. Suddenly the kids he had not wasted a second look on had sprouted tits, which they carried proudly. They were women now. Sweet Gretl, the neighbour's girl, was still as cuddly as ever. There was a big difference between holding the girl next door in your arms and some soldier's conquest in Stettin.

With these pleasant thoughts, the sailor's face broke into a happy smile.

Adam was glad to have seen that his parents were well off and cared for. It was one less worry, now that he was to embark on that long trip. Already, he had heard rumours that they were heading for some far-away place.

The train rumbled into Stettin and came to a full stop.

Adam rose and looked out of the window, wondering if he would see a familiar face. This was his old stomping ground. He knew every nightclub in this place.

The steam locomotive huffed and puffed, as though exhausted from this long trip. At last, the engine gave a final sigh and lapsed into loud clanking noises, like the pendulum of a giant clock. There was no indication that the train wanted to start moving again. He became concerned. A delay could make him overstay his leave and that meant trouble.

Then Adam saw the hold-up.

Here was the war again. Some men went along the train, checking the passengers and their identification cards. They were civilians, but they looked intimidating in their stiff hats and long, shiny leather coats. They were obviously Gestapo men, checking the train for deserters and draft dodgers. Every person on the train was treated as guilty until proven innocent.

Adam's marching orders were beyond reproach, and the Gestapo men went on to the next compartment. Not much later the



whistle shrilled, the Gestapo men were dragging a reluctant and protesting couple off the train, and the locomotive started pulling.

Adam sighed. Life was a hassle these days, wherever you were. Except home at Mum's, he added and sat down again.

\* \* \*

Kapitänleutnant Henning was luxuriating in front of his open fireplace. He had exchanged his uniform for a pair of comfortable slacks and a white pullover, rolling the collar high up under his chin. He was refreshed. It was a miracle what a hot bath could do to a man who was used to going many weeks without.

On his knees sat Nicole, his five-year-old daughter. For the affectionate girl it did not take long to bridge the gap created by his long absences at sea. Henning loved to be hugged, even if he found it hard to show it.

Sweet Nicole—she was burdened with that treacherous French name because Barbara had loved it. It was a name used by enemies, and completely un-German, but, then, when she was born, the French had not been at war with Germany. Now she called herself Nikky to avoid being teased by her friends.

He looked at the window, which rattled in the wind.

Outside it was chilly. A stiff northerly blew, and he could hear the waves thundering against the rocky coast. In all his life he had never been far from those thundering waves. However, here in his house, he felt protected. Here it was cosy. The wood in the fireplace crackled, and the leaping flames contributed to the sheltered atmosphere. This was a good time to be home, and not having to brave the cold seas dressed in an oilskin.

He looked around. He lived in a pleasant house. It was comfortably furnished, with book-lined walls. Most of all, he liked the log fire, crackling cheerfully on the open grate. The room gave off an air of rural prosperity and comfort.

With a twinge of envy, he realized that some naval officers *always* lived like this. They conducted the war from behind their

desks, and collected medals and stripes like the men exposed to the hardships of the sea. In the evening, they came home to their families and smoked their pipes, if they were so inclined.

Barbara came in with the daily newspaper and sat down on the couch next to him.

Sweet Barbara. They had been married many years by now, but had so little time together. A Navy man was always on the move, and the days at home were few and far between.

Henning put an affectionate arm around his wife and hugged her in a sudden swell of gratitude. She was the only tender spot in his life. When he was out at sea, all his hands touched was cold, grey steel.

Here, everything was different. He felt taken care of by his wife, in a house that was run by her. He was still young, but to his men he was The Old Man. He was a father-figure, to be trusted implicitly with their lives. He, alone, determined if 67 men would have to die, or would have the chance to return home once more. It was an enormous responsibility.

Feeling Barbara's warm body beside him, Henning wistfully contemplated his ever-returning dream of a desk job. When he came home from this patrol he would definitely apply for it, no matter if other officers thought that he had lost his nerve. This definitely must be his last patrol. With another hug he kissed Barbara. She blushed and looked at him. He was a stiff Viking, and she was not used to demonstrations of affection from him, but he felt that she still needed reassurance.

They had had a turbulent night.

In the early hours of the night, Barbara suddenly pierced the darkness with a terrified scream. She had never in her life done this before and it took Henning some time to calm her down. It appeared that a nightmare had frightened her. Still blubbing, that emancipated woman had been frightened stiff when, in her dream, she had seen her husband drowning with his boat.

"But it was so real!" she insisted, when Henning tried to calm her down. "I saw you clearly. You were swimming in a dark room, with only your head sticking out, and you were screaming, 'Barbara, Nikky,' and then you went under. I wanted to reach out to you, but you were so far away. Then I woke up and there you were, snoring next to me."

"I don't snore, do I?"

"You sure do, always—but it doesn't bother me. Quite the contrary. When you are snoring next to me, I'm deliriously happy, because then I know that you're with me. Then I know that I have you all to myself."

Henning chuckled.

"Never mind that dream," Henning hugged her shivering body. "You're no clairvoyant. It was just a silly dream."

All this morning, Barbara had not been her usual self and acted as if starving for his hugs. Now she looked at him, and when there was no follow-up she rose and went to the kitchen to make some coffee from beans obtained from U-boat rations, while Henning started to study the newspaper. It was a paper with many words and little news.

Henning smiled sardonically.

After all, he thought, what could they possibly write about? With the U-boat successes at an all time low, and all fronts caving in, there was no food for headlines any more. Reports about U-boat losses and withdrawals on the fronts had to be carefully suppressed, to keep the spirit of the people up. The end of it all could be read between the lines, but nobody wanted to see it.

Of course, people were not stupid. However, they could not be blamed for living in ignorance. They were exposed to the daily propaganda of Hitler's comments and Goebbels' encouragements. They were kept unaware of the threatening clouds. Bombs on their heads only stiffened their will to resist and their hope for vengeance on the enemy. Just wait for the secret weapons Hitler had

promised. We will get back at them for bombing and destroying our homes!

With an angry sigh, Henning flung the paper down on the table. It might look grim, but he had a duty to perform. He was the captain of a ship and, as far as he was concerned, he would go out on his patrol, shoot torpedoes at anything that moved out there and do his duty.

Barbara came in with a fragrant cup of coffee and put it down in front of him.

"Well," she put her arms around his neck, "that will be a long kiss you'll give me when you go this time."

"Kiss? I always give you a long kiss when I go away."

He took a sip of coffee.

"Yes, but you never went away that long. I calculated that you will leave me alone for more than a year this time."

"A year? You calculated?" Henning put his coffee down. "Who told you where I'm going?"

"You're going to Penang, aren't you—everybody knows that."

Henning frowned as he looked at his wife. He knew that he was heading for someplace tropical, but even he did not know his destination yet. As usual, he would receive a top-secret, sealed envelope, to be opened when he was out at sea, and only then he would know his destination and be able to inform his crew.

"Penang? Who told you that?"

"I heard it on the radio. The Atlantic transmitter said where you're going. They said that they're waiting at the Rose Garden to send you on your way with pipes, drums and trumpets."

"You listen to Atlantic?" Henning was appalled, "but that's dangerous. You could be put behind bars for life if anybody turns you in."

"I was just twisting the dials when I heard your name. You expect me to switch off at a moment like that?"

Henning fell silent. Atlantic was transmitted by England, aimed at U-boat men, and designed to demoralize them. It was a war of propaganda, and the enemy was gaining on all fronts.

"What is Atlantic, Mama?" Nicole piped inquisitively, and looked at her mother.

Startled, Barbara looked at her daughter. Nicole could bring their whole life crushing down just with the slip of a tongue.

"Atlantic is the big ocean where Daddy sails with his ship," Barbara explained. "I dreamed of mermaids talking there."

Nicole hugged her father tighter. Of course, she did not believe in mermaids any more. She was about to join the Girl Guides, and already had the uniform, but anybody can have dreams.

"Rose garden?" Barbara asked now. "That sounds romantic. You have a ship and can go to a rose garden? What do they mean?"

Henning smiled.

"The Rose Garden is a narrow strait between England and Iceland," he said. "It makes sense that they will wait for me there, but don't worry. I'll watch it."

\* \* \*

The train had pulled out of Stettin and was steaming at full speed toward Kiel.

Adam had slumped back in his seat, but he found no rest. Nobody had entered his compartment here, but one or two compartments further down the train a noisy crowd had assembled. Without restraint or consideration for others, girls shrieked and men laughed as though the world belonged to them. Now they were singing:

*On a sailor's grave  
there grow no roses,  
on a sailor's grave  
there grow no flowers at all,  
the only mark*

*that is a lone white sea gull,  
and hot tears, shed by my little girl back home.*

Adam smiled thinly. "U-boat men!" he whispered.

U-boat men, with solid land under their feet, undisciplined and unrestrained, like steam escaping from a hot boiler. They carelessly sing about their death and most of them really do die out there, but that leaves them unconcerned. Thoughts of such realities are blanked out from one's conscious mind. They live only for today and worry about tomorrow when it comes. None of them contemplates that he could possibly die.

"Sailing against En-ge-land!" they now sang boisterously. Adam thought he recognized some of the voices and went over to investigate.

He had been right. The new passengers were three sailors from his boat and two girls, who he knew from his previous time in Stettin.

"Hello, boys," Adam greeted them, and his eyes gave the assembly a cursory glance. "Girls," his hand came up in a sloppy salute. "You're noisy. I was trying to sleep next door."

"No time for sleeping, Adam. We're celebrating."

It was Hein who answered. In civilian life he had been the baker's apprentice Heinz Obermaier, but as a sailor the name Heinz was converted to Hein. It had a more *macho*, salty ring to it and one could imagine Popeye being called Hein. Legends and songs had been spun around that name, and Hein tried to live up to it, although his land-locked name of Obermaier had a hillbilly ring to it and did not chime in harmoniously. Anyhow, Hein's jaunty, battered sailor cap, and his illegally flared trouser bottoms, created an image of the wide blue sea and far away places.

"Have a drink, Adam," said Hein, and filled a glass with rum. Hein drank only rum, as fitting for a seasoned sailor. "We're celebrating Kurt's wedding. We got him married last night and he takes his wife along to Kiel."

“Congratulations,” Adam smiled and shook hands. He kissed Gerda heartily, then he downed his drink.

He knew that Kurt Podlizki had applied for a marriage licence months ago. Such a licence was not easily obtained. The bride needed proof of a good genetic family tree before a marriage was approved.

Kurt Podlizki was an old hand for a sailor. He was 25, and at that age he should have been at least a sergeant, or even a petty officer, but Kurt was not suitable for promotion. He had joined the Navy at the beginning of the war, and was a reckless sailor. He had started his Navy career by catching a dripping dose of the clap from his first Navy activities. That put his promotion back a year. More courts martial for over-staying his shore leaves followed, and now, four years into the war, Kurt was still an ordinary seaman, without any golden stripes to brag about.

He did not let that worry him. In all those years he had collected all the available medals short of the Knight’s Cross, and was the most decorated and experienced man on board, right after the captain. Now he seemed to be determined to put his wild life behind him and settle down with Gerda. He still had to lead the irregular life of a U-Boat man, but now there was somebody to come home to.

Adam was in a similar situation. He, too, was an experienced sailor, although he had never picked up the clap. His previous boat had operated in the icy waters off Norway, hunting Russian ships. Once, when his boat was laid up for repairs in Trondheim, he took a few days leave to visit some relatives in the west. On his way back, his train was bombed and he missed his boat. The boat pulled out without him, never to return.

Adam was court martialed, and had also missed out on promotions.

A good U-boat man does not pick a train that is getting bombed. A good U-boat man never missed his boat when it was due to leave.

With U-Henning in need for experienced men, he was transferred to join them, and was one of the latest additions to the crew.

Now Podlizki sat down contentedly, drinking rum with one arm possessively around his wife. Now he was a family man, and his wife would collect his wages while he was out at sea.

The third man was Johann Schmidt. They called him Joe. He was obviously drinking himself into a coma, and was already blubbering incoherently.

Alas, he had good reason for his drunken stupor. Coming with the other boys from Kiel, he had gone home for a surprise visit, only to find that his sweet wife had already filled his bed with a replacement sailor. In a mad rage, he had smashed the place to pieces and had been drunk ever since.

"Here, have another one," Kurt Podlizki filled Adam's glass again. He came from Upper Silesia, a part of Germany taken away by the Poles after the first World War, and reclaimed by Hitler before the next war started. His German was thick with a Polish tinted dialect, often the source of teasing and ridicule, but Kurt had the skin of an elephant. It didn't bother him.

"Thanks." Adam drained his glass. He did not know Kurt very well, although he shared his bunk with him. On board, the two had identical jobs, but were on opposite watches. When one was working, the other one was sleeping, and vice versa. They slept in each other's sweaty sheets, but hardly knew each other.

Only in port and ashore did the twain meet.

Adam sat down next to Joe. He was his pal because they shared the same watch. When Adam operated the port switchboard, Joe did the same on starboard.

In the other corner, Hein was passionately kissing Trudchen Kowalski. She had taken a few days off from her work to join the



boys in Kiel. While the boat had been in Stettin, she had been a U-Henning girl, drifting from one sailor to another.

By no means was she a tramp—more like a butterfly in a lush flower garden, drifting from one flower to another, tasting and rejecting. She was a connoisseur of men.

Most sailors in Stettin were young boys and clumsy lovers, having their first stumbling experiences in matters of love. With Trudchen, all they could get was a bloody nose. She just picked the raisins out of the U-Henning cake.

Right now Hein, who carried his name with honour, was her champion. Presently the two, who had been kissing and fondling for a while, were flushed with passion and rose to look for another compartment—one which offered them more privacy.

Adam smiled and drew Kurt's wife into a conversation to preserve the honour of the boat.

## Chapter 2

Robert McKay hurried up the steps to the British Admiralty. He knew his way along the long corridors. At the door marked Rear Admiral W.H. McCain he stopped and went in without knocking.

The Admiral, a large, bluff-mannered man, sat in his swivel chair, both of his gold-braided elbows on his desk. Irritated, he looked up from his work and focused on his visitor, then his face lit up. The furrows in his lined face smoothed and he smiled.

Lieutenant McKay took his cap off, and put it under his left arm. "You wanted to see me, sir?" He stood to attention.

"Yes, Bob, come in boy. Sit down and skip the formalities." The Admiral's voice was gravelly from a life of shouting commands in the salt-laden air of the North Atlantic, and from too much whiskey to keep it lubricated. "Sit down and have a cigar."

A tobacco-stained finger pointed to a chair in front of his desk.

Lieutenant McKay sat down and declined the offered cigar, pointing out that he still did not smoke. There was no reason to be intimidated by the impressive figure of the Admiral, because he was Robert's uncle, affectionately known as Uncle Hux. However, when in uniform, McKay felt that certain formalities had to be

observed—especially when under the roof of the British Admiralty.

Admiral McCain looked what he was, an old sailor, who would have been long retired had there not been a war. His was a lined face, strong, tremendously wrinkled around the eyes. One could well imagine those eyes piercing the blue waters toward the horizon in search of enemies.

He seemed to be wasted behind that desk.

The rows of ribbons that decorated his chest signified that he had managed to stay alive through countless battles in all parts of the globe. The year 1917, when he had been the commander of a destroyer flotilla, had been the peak of his blue-water fighting career.

Now he conducted his battles from behind the desk of Atlantic Operations.

“You have good news for me, I hope?” McKay asked. With his copper-red hair and sea-blue eyes he was clearly a handsome Scot. He looked dashing in his naval uniform, but with his strong Scottish burr one could well picture his lean figure dressed in tartan.

“Good news, indeed,” the Admiral roared, and lit himself a long cigar. With a proud, approving glance his eyes inspected his nephew. He liked what he saw. For a second he permitted his mind to wander to the years when he, himself, had been a lieutenant, eager to win his spurs in the battles of World War One.

“You found me a better ship?” McKay urged.

“I have—how’s your mother, boy?”

I suppose she’s fine. I haven’t seen her in months. Been out at sea all the time. With her up north, I had little chance to see her.”

McKay was only twenty-two. At that age his mother was low on his list of priorities. There was a war to fight, medals to be won and promotions to be earned. That was where he concentrated all his energies at the present. Already he had wasted a lot of time

with what he considered to be useless training, and felt sour at his lack of success so far.

With envy he looked at the wide, golden braids on the Admiral's sleeves. He had still a long way to go, and this war couldn't last forever. At the moment he had set all his ambitions on adding a third stripe to his two golden lieutenant's braids.

"You'll see your mother soon," the Admiral interrupted McKay's speculations. "And when you see her, give her my love."

McKay's mother was the Admiral's sister.

"What do you mean?"

"Your next commission is at Scapa Flow."

McKay was pleased. That sounded promising. With his connections, he had been the commander of a small minesweeper, which was sunk from under his feet by the enemy. His life was saved by swimming for half an hour in the icy waters of the Irish Sea. Afterwards, he had approached Uncle Hux, asking to be commissioned into a ship with a bit more substance, something that would not sink that easily. What did one have an Admiral in the family for, if one could not use these good connections?

By now he was desperate. It was 1944, the war threatened to fizzle out, and he was still messing around with small fry. Stripes on his sleeves and decorations were what he needed to advance in his chosen career. He had to hurry up before the war came to a sudden end.

"What is there at Scapa Flow?" he asked hopefully. "That *is* close to home."

"That's why I said you can drop in at home and see your mother. She will be pleased."

"About the commission?" McKay urged.

"Oh, yes." The Admiral puffed on his cigar. "School friend of mine has a destroyer there. Latest design, that. All the latest instruments, S-type radar, latest Asdic, all of that. Practically undefeatable. Good boat to make a mark on your career."

"That's great, what—"

"Eventually, I'll find you a place on one of these as Number One, but first you have to go through all the procedures, learn the ropes, you know. You'll start off with the guns and depth charges. We expect that you will have sunk a few U-boats on your first patrol and know all about destroyers. After that, we can promote you."

"Yes, sir, that's fine sir. I will."

"Of course, life up there is miserable," the Admiral interrupted McKay's enthusiasm. He swiveled around in his chair and pointed to a chart on the wall behind him. "You'll be operating in the waters between Iceland and the Shetlands. Horrible waters, that, but plenty of action."

He swiveled back to face McKay.

"Of course, I would *rather* have you here in my department, hunting U-Boats. Much more comfortable, that. You sure you won't change your mind and join me here? I promised your mother I'd look after you."

McKay was horrified.

"Please, sir," he pleaded. "I rather prefer that destroyer."

Hungrily, he looked with the trained eyes of a navigator at the chart on the wall. It showed the North Sea and the whole Atlantic, the stomping ground of Admiral McCain.

"What are all those lines on the Chart?" McKay asked, pointing at a dense network of green and purple lines on the chart, which were punctuated by coloured marks and crosses.

"Well," the Admiral explained, "I do some scribbling on it. This chart is a replica of the one on the table at OIC, our Submarine Tracking Room. The purple lines are the anticipated headings of U-Boats, and the green ones are the actual tracks of those U-Boats. We try never to lose sight of them."

He rose, and his finger followed some lines north of Scotland.

"This area here," he went on, "is called 'The Rose Garden' by the Germans. It is a graveyard. There the bottom of the sea is plastered with dead German U-boats."

"Can't they avoid going that way?"

"Well, they haven't many alternatives. The shallow waters of the English Channel, which are well patrolled by our aircraft, are even worse, so the best way out is to take their chances between Scotland and Iceland. That's where we're waiting for them. Of course, once out, they base their fleet in France now—they're not stupid either—but all the new boats have to come along this way. This is where the action is."

He went back to his chair and continued chewing his cigar.

"There are lines right down to Germany. Do you attack them there, too?"

"Most likely not," the Admiral swiveled thoughtfully. "But we have to keep an eye on them right from the start. We know of all their movements. We work in close cooperation with all secret service departments, who intercept and decode their radio communications at BP, that is, Bletchley Park. It's a lot of effort—a lot of detective work, you know. Very interesting. You sure you don't want to join me here? I could give you another stripe."

"No, please, sir! I want that destroyer. I'd like to earn my stripes in battle with the enemy. They killed my father. I still have to get even with them."

Secretly, the Admiral agreed with his nephew. He wouldn't have reacted differently, had he been in his shoes, but for the sake of McKay's mother, who had pleaded with him, he had to try.

Pondering, he took a few puffs at his cigar, then he said, "This might interest you. In a few days time some boats will leave Germany and try to break through our blockade. You will be there by then to stop them. They're a most important target. They have mercury loaded in their keels. Top secret stuff, that. We must not let them get through."

He swiveled and looked at his chart again.

"What in blazes do they need mercury in the keel for?" McKay asked his uncle. "I've never heard of it. Is that some secret weapon?"

The Admiral chuckled.

"No secret weapon," he smiled. "Just trading goods. A million dollars worth of trading goods. They hope to take it to the east and sell it to the Japanese, who need it badly to build ignition devices for their bombs and other military projectiles. Then the U-boats bring back other stuff, badly needed in Germany, such as tin, quinine and natural rubber."

"They work as freighters?"

"Some of them do, indeed, work as freighters only. They try to break our blockade, but most of them, including those about to leave, are doubly dangerous. They break our blockade and, while they're out there, they shoot at anything that moves. Of course, we have to increase our effort to stop them."

"Of course," McKay agreed.

The Admiral rose. "Come," he said. "I'll show you the Submarine Tracking Room. We'll see when the next batch of U-boats is leaving Germany."

McKay followed the Admiral past armed guards into a windowless concrete bunker, where a chart of the Atlantic covered a large table. It, too, was crisscrossed with purple and green lines, punctuated with coloured flags at the end of the green lines, each one marking the death of yet another U-boat.

A young Wren rose from her desk and joined the Admiral. She had large, deep-blue eyes with long lashes, which were the principal features in a face of special distinction. Her trim, well-tailoured uniform made her look efficient, but did not distract from her air of femininity. It indicated that she was a Third Officer.

"Anything new here, Fowler?" the Admiral asked.

"Not much since you last checked, sir," the Wren said.

With the faintest indication of a smile around the corners of her mouth, she appraised McKay, then she moved toward the chart. In a sure manner, her index finger moved along the lines and pointed toward Kiel—a point which her outstretched arm could just reach, and said, “These boats here are due to leave very shortly. There are three of them. They’ve been delayed by some work in the docks. They are still working on the loads in their keels—most likely adjusting their trim. Now they seem to be ready to go.”

McKay noticed that her hands were slim and well-kept. No long, crimson fingernails here. These hands were functional, like those of a surgeon. He felt inclined to take that hand and kiss it.

He had been a long time out at sea, and afterwards spent a lot of time in a hospital, tended by some elderly nurses who helped him to recuperate from his miseries in the Irish Sea. This was the first time that he stumbled upon a stunning member of the opposite sex, and above all, one who was in the same business as himself.

He could not help staring at the pretty Wren. Working for uncle Hux suddenly didn’t seem so unattractive, either.

“Well, carry on then, Fowler.” The Admiral interrupted McKay’s considerations and headed for the door.

With regret, McKay tore himself from the tempting sight of the attractive Wren and followed his uncle out. The last thing he saw was, again, that faint, enigmatic smile as Third Officer Fowler watched him leave.

He felt like a schoolboy, struggling with his first crush.

\* \* \*

It was late afternoon on the fourth of April when U-Henning drew away, stern first, from the group of U-Boats that were tied up along the pier. Kapitänleutnant Henning, distinguished by his white-topped commander’s cap, towered high up on the bridge and, with crisp commands into the voice pipe, eased the boat away



from the cluster. After the tension brought about by last minute preparations, the actual moment of getting under way was a relief.

On the pier were a few officials. Relatives and friends of the crew were not permitted into the harbour any more to see their loved ones off. In the old, glorious days, they would all have been there, along with a Navy band in gala uniforms, to send them on their way. Then there would have been tears and crying, and waving handkerchiefs as the boat pulled away.

Now the boat sneaked away in secrecy. Only Barbara, the captain's wife, had the connections and was permitted to be there.

On deck, fore and aft, those crew members not on duty were lined up to have their last glimpse of Germany. They did not spend a thought on what lay ahead of them. They lived for the moment only, being a vital part of a streamlined fighting machine on their way to do their duty for their fatherland, not yet knowing that most of them were never to return.

None of them knew their destination, although they had some idea that they were special, that it would be a long time before they would be home again.

All their belongings, their blue uniforms, even their identification papers, had been packed into their bags and sent ahead to Bordeaux, which would be their planned destination after they came back from their long trip.

That it would be a long trip to exotic lands, there was no doubt. Instead of their usual, navy-blue uniforms, they had been supplied with strange outfits—khaki, with short drill pants, and the same in brilliant white. Along with that came flimsy, net-like underwear, which kept them speculating that their destination must be somewhere tropical. Everything they did was wrapped in secrecy.

Adam was on duty when the boat pulled away. He operated one of the switchboards, which controlled the powerful electric motors. In port, where quick responses at manoeuvring were

required, the sluggish diesel motors could not be used and were declutched. Then the boat was propelled by its electric motors only.

Operating the switchboards quickly and efficiently was a matter of pride to Adam and his offsidiers. It required exceptional reaction, and quick thinking, to determine which combination of switches to throw to comply with the sudden commands on the machine telegraph. Especially when pulling away from the mooring, the commands chased each other relentlessly. The slightest mistake could result in collision and disaster.

Each of the two motors had two rotor halves. Switches connected one rotor for slow, two rotors in series for half, and two in parallel for full speed, with another choice for ahead or reverse. A hand wheel, controlling the magnetic field, gave steps in between and fine-tuned the RPM. A command on the machine telegraph took less than a second to execute.

At any time, three men were on duty in the compartment for the electric motors, one stoker for each switchboard, and one artificer to give a hand when needed.

In the meantime, the boat had pulled away from all obstructions and the bow pointed to the harbour exit. The few people standing at the pier and waving grew smaller and fainter in the dim light of the sinking sun.

"Both stop!" came the command from the control room, and Adam confirmed it on his machine telegraph, immediately pulling out the switches. Then he and Joe Schmidt, who worked the other switchboard, went forward to engage the clutches of the diesel motors.

The next second, the huge engines coughed to life. Rumbling like gigantic drums, they propelled the boat into the growing dusk of the outer harbour, where the sleek shape of the boat gracefully parted the waves.

Adam switched the rotors into the ‘charge’ configuration and adjusted the rate of charge for the batteries with the field control. Then he left his post. Both switchboards could now be attended by Joe Schmidt.

Up on the bridge, the captain remained alert to guide the boat past the harbour exit. It was always exhilarating to pull away from the pier, with this heavy boat responding to his voice like a well-trained animal. This feeling could only be topped by a safe return from a patrol, with victory flags flapping from the periscope. These were the times, when watched by a reception committee, he derived real pleasure at being the commander of a U-boat. Times out at sea were just a string of misery.

For the time being, there was no danger. He was in the Baltic Sea, and was still a long way from the dangers of the North Sea. The boat had first to pass through the many narrow straits to gain open waters. He could stay surfaced for some time to come. Once out of the Baltic, he would stay in the shallows and hug the coast of Norway in relative safety, relying on the umbrella of German aircraft cover and the presence of friendly surface vessels. It was the deep waters of the Rose Garden he feared most.

Hard days, with very little sleep, lay ahead, but for the next day or two, at least, they would be in the friendly waters of the Baltic. Henning decided that he might as well relax, and left the bridge to the officer of the watch, which was Oberleutnant Schneider, the IWO\*.

“All yours, Schneider,” Henning said, and left the bridge.

Down there the boat was pulsating, with all systems functioning. The time for training was past, and now all of them were heading for the war zone. The experienced ones knew what to expect, and the younger ones were elated that, at last, they had joined the heroes of the sea. For the time being, they were still able to ignore

---

\* IWO, *Erster Wachoffizier*, First Watch Officer. The boat’s executive officer and second in command.

the perils that lay ahead. Up until now, most of them had never experienced the terror of exploding water bombs.

Adam had left the switchboard, and went down a few steps to a compartment that housed the drinking water generator. He sat down in front of the machine and switched on the heater. When the water started boiling and condensing, he switched on a pump and the machine started to distill sea water and pump fresh water into the storage tanks.

Now the hectic time of manoeuvring away from the mooring was past, and with the boat pointing on a steady course, relaxation settled down in his corner.

"Hi there," Kurt Podlizki looked down on him.

He, being off watch, had been up on deck for decoration when the boat had pulled out. He was an old hand, of course, and often before had pulled away from the pier to head for a patrol. He knew what lay ahead—misery and stormy seas, hair-raising minutes when water bombs rained down, while the boat squirmed and tried to sneak away. However, at times like the last ten minutes, all that was forgotten—pushed into the most remote corner of his mind.

Pulling away, watched by the people on the pier and the ever-present news-reel camera, made him feel important. As the sleek boat cut the waves with ease, like a fleeting dolphin, he felt only pride and his chest threatened to explode with his feeling of belonging—to be a U-boat man.

"How was it up there, Kurt?" Adam asked.

"No big deal." Kurt was not very enthusiastic. "Normally, a band is playing and all the girls are watching. Makes you feel ten feet tall when you go out to fight a war for them. Today, not many were there. We sneaked away like a thief in the dark."

Adam knew what Kurt was talking about. He, himself, had been often enough on deck when his boat had headed out to sea. More often than not, a girl had been standing there to see him off. He fell in love easily, but since he had always been on the move,

any relationship was doomed to be reduced to some sporadic correspondence and then fizzle out.

A sailor's life was without substance. One lived only for the present, and refused to face the future. Right now, his life belonged fully to U-Henning.

"Well, see you later." Kurt managed a lopsided smile.

His mouth was still sore and hurt like hell. The whole crew had been sluiced through the Navy dentist's practice to remove all teeth that could have given trouble during the next year or two. Kurt had left two molars behind. Now he turned and shot through the round, after quarters hatch, to lie down in Adam's bunk.

With the alert eye of the man responsible, captain Henning looked around the control room, the *Zentrale*, which was located under the conning tower. A wilderness of pipes and cables, valves and switches, mixed with many gauges, twisted along the curves of the inner hull, the bulkheads and the overhead. The secrets and purpose of these made sense only to their skilled operators, each of whom had his own section to attend to. These men, with their knowledge, made this machinery come to life.

Henning, satisfied that everybody was alert and at his post, turned and stooped down over the chart table, which was next to the wireless operator's cabin. He checked the track, which the Number Three had penciled in earlier. They had to check their bearing and position often to make a safe passage through the narrow straits between the islands.

Henning was a cautious man. He made it his business to keep his eye on everything. There was no buck-passing on a U-boat. The slightest mistake would send it down to the bottom of the sea, never to return. Then it was too late to look for a culprit who could be blamed for it.

Satisfied with their progress, Henning rose and stretched his limbs, then he went to his quarters and pulled the curtain for pri-

vacy. He was the only person on board to have his own private quarters. With a slight groan he let himself sink onto his bunk.

It was a hard life, this, but what else could a man do these days? If he was not the captain of a U-boat, he would most likely be fighting in the trenches on the Russian front, or be a pilot, dropping bombs on cities. Wherever he was, or whatever he did, he would have to shoot somebody, like everybody else did. In times like these, men all over the world were involved in this bloody business, all doing the same thing. Only the reason for doing this was explained differently by their respective governments. Everybody felt that it was his duty to do it, and that he was the righteous one.

When he joined the Navy as a career officer, he should have known what he was doing, but even then it all had looked very different. At that time there had been no war. As a young man he had dreamed of a gold-braided uniform, and the status that went along with it. He had seen himself standing on the bridge of a big ship, giving crisp commands.

The career had looked promising. There were few surprises. One started up with one gold braid on the sleeve and worked oneself up the promotion ladder, rung-by-rung—always in good company—until one became an admiral and retired as such with a healthy pension.

Somehow, he did not even remember at what point, he had slipped into the U-boat branch of the Navy.

Then the war had started, and even then it all looked rosy, with the added glamour of being the commander of a U-boat. At that time, it had been a position that could match the fame and glamour of movie stars. After all, the media dealt only with the successes of their famous captains. They did not mention the dirt and sweat in which they had to wallow. Even the most famous U-boat captain had to go for three months without ever having the luxury of a bath. By that time he would be stinking like an animal. The sacri-

fices those men were prepared to make for their country were simply mind-boggling, but it all was endured in good spirits.

However, as the years went by, things were getting out of hand. This had ceased to be a promising career. This was bloody murder. He cringed when he thought of the cold Atlantic waves that were soon going to drench him.

Henning had changed during the years. The war had turned him from a smooth career officer into something like a hunted predator, with his eyes darting about seeking the other hunters on his tracks. It was a simple fact—if you did not see the hunter first, before he saw you, you were dead. And so were the 66 other men on board, who had only your animal instincts and alertness to depend on.

Barbara, the only woman permitted to see them off, had cried when he had left her standing on the pier. Never before had he seen her in tears when he had pulled away for a patrol. In spite of the media blackout on U-boat losses, she, too, must have figured out that running a U-boat was not what it used to be—that on this day she might have seen her husband for the very last time. It had taken him two days to calm her down after that dreadful dream, but he suspected that, deep underneath, the roots of fear were planted.

Listening to Radio Atlantic surely did not help to build up her confidence. Maybe she listened to that station more often than she let on. Atlantic knew everything, and contradicted the German media on all issues. Of course, in Germany there was the death penalty for listening to the enemy, but some people just could not resist the temptation.

Well, he was determined to come back. The crew might have no control over their destiny, but he was the master of his fate. He, alone, determined what risks to take and what dangers to evade. He would be back, and then this would have been his last trip. He would apply for that desk job, and he would have earned it by then. He had seen enough blue water, and could leave the swashbuckling

to the young Leutenants, whose turnover as U-boat commanders had taken on frightful proportions.

Henning tried to relax and get some sleep. There would come the time when he had to stay alert for many days on end. He should take advantage of the present lull, but his body was awake and tensed, like a coiled-up spring. He was all keyed up to drive this boat through the next six months toward her destination.

Through a split in the curtain he saw the L.I. pass by and called him in. If he could not sleep, he might as well pass the time chatting with a friend—especially with a friend who knew what it was all about.

“Come in, Hendrick, how do you feel?”

“Like it used to be, John. I can already feel the hair on the back of my neck stand up on edge. I’m all ready to face the music and we’re still in friendly waters.”

Henning chuckled.

“Same here, Henk. Take the weight off your feet and sit down.” The captain pointed to a chair, one of the very few on board.

The L.I. sat down. He, too, was a Kapitänleutnant, though of the Engineering Branch, and being of equal rank the two men had become friends and dispensed with the usual deference between captain and crew—especially as they had already shared many previous patrols together.

The L.I. was in his late twenties, about the captain’s age, a man who was aware of his capabilities—who could be, sometimes, slightly contemptuous of those around him. When talking about the boat, he had good reason to feel superior. His knowledge of all its parts and details was encyclopædic.

The two men went back a long way. They had been together since the beginning of the war. Being crammed together into a 500-ton boat, with water-bombs exploding all around them, and death lurking only seconds away, had helped forge an iron bond



between them. They recognized each other's competence, and had proven it by keeping each other alive.

"What's new?" Henning asked, and rolled out of his bunk.

"The war takes a miserable turn, if—"

"For crissake!" Henning interrupted him. "I know all *that*. I expected you to cheer me up. Say something pleasant!"

"Yeah, it looks as if they are determined to hold out to the last man or woman. I'm lucky in a way, I have no family there."

They were interrupted as the doctor passed by and asked to enter. The doctor was the oldest of the three. He, too, had the same three stripes on his sleeves...

"Sit down, Doc," Henning invited. "We were just talking about the end of the war."

"Oh, my goodness," the doctor smiled sardonically. "Did we win already? How ever did we do that?"

"We were only talking hypothetically," smiled the L.I., "in case you have to open your next practice in Havana. One has to prepare for the future."

"Quite so, Gentlemen," the doctor agreed. "Anything is better than a U-boat. As far as I'm concerned, I'd rather I had a practice in Timbuktu."

"I know how you feel," Henning grinned. "I, too, was once a gentleman, but that seems to be ages ago."

"We have millions in our keel—we could escape with them when the war is over," reminded the L.I.

"You're joking, Hendrick," laughed Henning. "The millions belong to Hitler, and he has other plans for them."

"Millions?" The doctor pointed his ears.

"The L.I. means the quicksilver in the keel."

"*A propos* quicksilver," said the doctor. "I wondered about something when I saw the bottles. If a water bomb should crack them, it could be very unhealthy, or even fatal, for the crew."

The L.I. laughed out loud.

“That reminds me of a lecture,” he said. “The teacher asked, ‘Why has the gas mask shatterproof glass?’ and the student answered, ‘So that no splinter can enter the eye when a bullet goes through.’”

Henning laughed out loud.

“So?” asked the doctor. He was not a technically minded man, and did not follow the L.I.

“So when a bomb smashes the quicksilver bottles, we all are dead and nobody needs to breath any more.”

Unlike the captain, the L.I. was no career sailor. At home he was an engineer, and had worked in a shipbuilding yard, in the U-boat section. Having an important job in the war industry, he never would have been drafted to the fighting forces, but he liked the gold-braided uniforms and had volunteered. In those days, it had been glamorous to be a U-boat man. Today, he often wished he could turn back the clock and be back at his old workplace in the shipbuilding yard.

When the boat was surfaced, the L.I. was idling, and the boat was under the command of the navigators, like any surface ship, with the stokers operating the machinery. His job started when the boat was diving. With the assistance of the stokers and artificers, who knew every screw on board, he ran the boat when under water. He had to calculate weights and balances, shift water into tanks fore and aft to fine-tune the trim, and supervise the planesmen who operated the bow and stern planes to keep the boat on an even keel.

The doctor was new on board. Atlantic boats did not have a doctor, and only boats bound for the Indian Ocean could afford this luxury. He had the military rank of *Marinestabsarzt*\*—the Medical Corps equivalent of *Kapitänleutnant*.

---

\* *Marinestabsarzt*, literally, Navy Staff Surgeon.

Like the L.I., the doctor was a volunteer into the Navy. As a Gynæcologist, he had little hope of remaining forever undisturbed in civilian life once the war started. Rather than risk being drafted to the Russian front, he had volunteered for the Navy, where the food was good and tasty. When he volunteered, he had in mind a practice on the *Bismarck*, however, in hindsight, he was not sorry to have landed in a U-boat, because the *Bismarck* sank with man, mouse, and doctor. Anyhow, now, after living for some time in a U-boat, he often wondered if that had been the right decision.

"Let's not talk about the future," Henning opened a whiskey bottle and filled three glasses. "Let's drink to the present. Cheers, Comrades!" He lifted his glass, and all three emptied them.

"Ah," approved the doctor, "that was good, very healthy—kills the worms in the stomach. I hope you have enough of that stuff on board."

"It will do," smiled Henning.

"We might need it. A most unhealthy atmosphere on board," the doctor gave his medical opinion.

"Yes," the L.I. agreed. "The boat is still cold, except for the diesel room. Condensation is dripping everywhere from the hull and the pipes. It is quite uncomfortable. Luckily the crew is young. Such men can put up with anything."

"Just let's get the Rose Garden behind us," said Henning. "Then we'll make a bee-line for tropical waters. Soon, it will be the reverse. Instead of complaining about the cold, we will be sweltering in tropical heat. A U-boat is never comfortable."

"How long until we get there?" the doctor asked.

"Two or three weeks." The captain shrugged his shoulders. "Depends how much mileage they let us travel surfaced. Submerged, it would take us many weeks."

"But first it will get worse," said the L.I. "We've been near Iceland before. That's really miserable. Where are we going anyhow, John? You haven't told us yet."

Henning smiled.

Only an hour ago he had opened that top-secret envelope and learned what everybody, according to Barbara, already knew—they were going to Penang. Since that was at last confirmed, he could also now believe that the enemy was already waiting somewhere to receive him with pipes, drums and trumpets.

His smile faded as he looked at the L.I.

“While we were still ashore it was top secret, as you know, although Atlantic seems to have broadcast it some days ago, but now you might as well inform the crew officially. We’re heading for paradise—for Penang, a tropical island in the south of Asia. We will be well rewarded for the trouble of getting there.”

\* \* \*

Adam’s watch was finished. Four hours duty, four hours rest. That was the duty cycle for the technical operators. He rose, switched off the water distiller, and went up. Between the two switchboards, Joe Schmidt sat on a step and yawned.

“Time to hit the sack.” Adam smiled, and Joe stumbled to his feet.

Through the round hatch in the last bulkhead the two jumped into the after torpedo room, which was also the stokers’ mess and sleeping quarters.

There were no tables or chairs—only twelve bunks along the sides. At mealtime, one sat on the lower bunks with his plate on one’s knees. Every bunk was shared with the stoker from the opposite watch. One was on duty while the other one slept. Adam had the middle upper bunk on the port side.

Roughly, he evicted Kurt Podlizki, who rose grumbling. It would take weeks before the men were trained to fall asleep as soon as they hit the mattress. Podlizki had just fallen asleep and started on his first dream when he was shaken up again. No wonder he was not very happy. He put on his shoes and disappeared through the hatch towards the electro room.

There was no smoking on a U-boat—ever. The batteries produced an explosive gas, and the ventilation system was not trusted to remove it all. Smokers had to wait their turn during surface travel, when they were admitted, two at a time, onto the bridge.

The aft quarters were cold and moist. Condensation was dripping from the pipes and overhead, and the mattresses felt damp and sweaty.

Here there was no room to spare. Every nook and corner was crammed with boxes and supplies. Later, during the trip, when some of the supplies had been consumed, there would be more breathing space.

Even the torpedoes were a nuisance. From time to time they had to be withdrawn from the two tubes for maintenance. They were special weapons. The deadly attack torpedoes were all in the front of the boat. The after torpedoes were only for defense, like the venomous sting of a bee.

Kicking off his shoes without undressing, Adam climbed into his bunk. He was six feet tall, which helped the climb into the upper bunk, but was a nuisance, too, because the bunk was just six feet long. He had to watch that he did not poke his feet on Joe Schmidt's head, who lay one bunk further up.

Like all the crew, Adam still had to learn to fall asleep on command and wake, refreshed, after a time span of just four hours—and that with the noise of the 8,000-horsepower diesels in his ears.

The other boys, too, were not yet used to the routine, and sat around chatting on the lower bunks. Adam chuckled. One advantage of having an upper bunk was that nobody ever sat on it.

As always, the boys were talking about girls. It was Navy topic number one. With a head filled with sweet images of lovely girls, there was no room to brood over death and drowning.

*U-859*

“Fuck the new uniform,” Hein Obermeier complained. “The pants don’t flap down. You have to open all those buttons on your fly.”

“You could leave them open,” Karl Steinpilz suggested.

“Nah,” Podlizki had the problem solved. “They’re shorts, and in shorts you can pull ‘em out from underneath.”

## Chapter 3

“What’s new this morning, Fowler?”

Admiral McCain had entered the tracking room, speaking to Third Officer Fowler, who was standing near the chart table, making corrections to the tracks of U-boats. He had had a good night’s sleep and felt full of energy, like in his younger days.

“Our aeroplanes have spotted three U-boats tied up in a fjord at Kristiansand. They’re the ones from Kiel, and will be on their way, most probably tomorrow,” Fowler reported.

McCain went to the chart on the table and squinted his eyes. Those blasted eyes! he cursed silently. They were the first indication that one was heading for the scrap heap.

“That would be here, Fowler,” he addressed the Wren, pointing at a speck on the chart. “Draw a purple line from Kristiansand, hug the coast toward Bergen and then go straight up to north of the Faroes, halfway up to Iceland. That’s the most likely track I would take were I in their shoes.

“We must not lose them. We’ll wait there for them and see what happens.”

He watched the Third Officer lean over the table and draw in the expected track, then he asked, “How many did you say there were?”

"There are all three of them tied up at the moment, sir." Fowler went back to her desk and put her pen and ruler back into the drawer. Then she continued, "Preliminary intelligence has it that they are most likely U-Henning, U-Büchel and U-Oesten. We'll know more about them after they start communicating with their base."

The Admiral grunted in approval.

"Do we know where they're heading?" she asked. "Do we send an Ultra to shipping in the Atlantic? Three of them together are a lot—they can do a lot of damage."

"It's to be hoped they'll not get that far. We'll do nothing at this stage. They'll have their hands full to avoid our blockade. They're Monsoon U-boats—long range submarines. They're out to reach the Indian Ocean and South East Asia, maybe the Pacific. They will most likely split up. We have plenty of time to stop them before then. I've already lined up a reception committee at the end of your purple line."

\* \* \*

The reception committee was still at Scapa Flow.

This was a world of grey. Everything was grey—land, water, the sky and the ships that tugged at their anchor chains in wind and rain. Scapa—that one word brought on a shiver to many sailors during the time of the two World Wars. Damp and cold—howling wind and raging seas.

It did not impress Robert McKay that way. He was used to it. He had been born in this part of the world. If anything, the cold waves brought on a memory of his last swim in the Irish Sea. He would not like to swim in these waters.

Presently, he got a guided tour around the destroyer H.M.S. *Dauntless*. This was his new commission. Uncle Hux had promised that he would be first officer on one of these as soon as he had familiarized himself with it.

He had been tickled pink when he had first set foot on the ship,



which was destined to propel his new career to fame and recognition. It was a new ship, one of the first batch of the latest destroyer design. All in all, this commission was more than a young officer like himself could hope for. The very thing to earn his laurels before the war ended.

Having just lost his command in the Irish Sea to a U-boat, he hated the enemy and was craving revenge. He looked forward to sinking a few of those U-boats and teaching them a lesson about what it was like to swim in the cold waters of the sea. It was good to have connections with a person of influence.

Approaching along the pier from afar, he had admired the fine but menacing lines of the 3,000-ton ship. From the low quarter-deck it stepped up over its 390-foot length to the proud, flared bow. McKay could picture that bow parting the waves, pursuing the enemy in a no-nonsense way.

The ship looked threatening. It was bristling with six double barreled turrets. Her crew was more than 300 men and officers, and thanks to uncle Hux he was now one of them.

McKay had reported his arrival to the first officer, Lieutenant Commander Burns, who had relayed him to Lieutenant Ernie Wallis, who would familiarize him with the ship.

"Feels funny to be new aboard," Robert started the conversation. "On my old mine sweeper it wasn't all that glamorous, but at least I was an old hand on it and knew everyone. Everything was familiar there."

The lieutenant smiled.

"Don't worry about that," he said. "We're all relatively new aboard. This ship has just been commissioned. You can still smell the paint. You won't be sunk in this one easily. It's the latest scream in naval warfare. With our electronics we can detect anything that moves within 50 miles. Our Asdic tells us everything about the enemy except the name of the captain of the unlucky U-boat in its claws, and our 50,000 horsepower can out-run or catch

anything that comes and goes. We all still have to start from scratch and learn about all those new devices.”

They had arrived on the bridge, the highest part of the ship. It was completely enclosed and air-conditioned for comfort. Right in the centre was a single, elevated swivel chair that looked like a throne. Robert McKay marveled at it, and thought that a throne like this was a worthwhile target on which to pin his own ambitions. At any time he would have preferred this to Uncle Hux’s chair.

In a sudden impulse he climbed into the chair and swiveled around. His eyes looked possessively over the Asdic and Radar monitors, the chart tables, the gyro repeater in front, and the maze of monitoring instruments and switches that covered the bulkheads like wall paper, recording and controlling the ship’s movements, machinery and performance.

“How does it feel?” Ernie Wallis chuckled. “You already look like a captain.”

“I feel ten feet tall,” Robert laughed, too. “All I need is a cigar. I must ask my uncle to give me one of these ships for Christmas.”

“You have a generous uncle who distributes them?”

“I don’t know about generous, but he has a few of these to give away. He’s an Admiral—he can do a lot of things if he wants to.”

“Lucky fellow,” Wallis smiled enviously. “I hope you’ll think of me when you end up in that seat.”

“Long way to go, even with my kind of uncle.” Robert climbed down from the captain’s seat. “Hope the war lasts long enough to get somewhere.”

“Yeah,” Wallis agreed.

They took the steps down to the Combat Information Centre. It was located directly under the bridge—a windowless room, approximately four metres square. Again an elevated swivel chair was the only piece of furniture in the room, which like the bridge

above, was cluttered with instruments and switches.

"This chair is more within our reach," said Ernie Wallis. "Number One sits in it. This is where the action is. At action stations, this room is operated by about 30 people."

"Thirty people—" Robert's jaw fell open. It seemed to be unthinkable that so many men could fit in here without crawling on top of each other.

He wondered who would create a fighting machine such as this, where you battled an enemy without seeing your opponent. In his dreams about his career he pictured himself as the commander of such a ship, holding on to the bridge screen, glaring at the enemy on the horizon, shouting commands like, 'Fire A! Fire B!' and then seeing the explosive geysers rising from the mortally wounded enemy. Here, one saw nothing. Electronics did all the work.

"It all looks rather small," Robert commented, with a thin voice.

"Well, it is," Wallis agreed readily, "but we have been out to sea and tried it all. It works. In battle, everyone is trained and has his place. Nobody is in another's way. Let's go back aft, and I'll show you something bigger and more generous."

They went aft, had a short look into the crews quarters, with bunks three tiers high, and then went into the officer's mess, which was behind C.I.C.

"This is our domain. This is where we live," said Wallis. "This is all ours—exclusively."

"Quite cosy in here, and rather spacious, don't you think?" Robert observed.

They left the officers' mess and went back on deck. Suddenly the intercom crackled and a voice directed, "Lieutenant McKay, to the captain's day cabin."

"Well, there you are," said Ernie Wallis. "You've seen the most important parts of the ship. We'll look at the guns and the

engine room another time. Let's go to the captain."

He led the way and Robert followed.

"What's the captain's name?" Robert asked.

"Captain McGraw. Four striper."

"Is his cabin on this deck?"

"Not far behind the officers' mess. If we had girls in our mess, he'd hear them giggling."

In front of the captain's cabin, Lieutenant Wallis left and Robert knocked at the door. He took a grunt from behind the door as permission to enter and went in.

"Lieutenant McKay reporting aboard, sir." Robert put his cap under his arm and stood to attention. He looked with awe at the four stripes on the captain's sleeves. That was something else he would have to work toward, before he could ascend the throne on the bridge.

"Come in, Lieutenant. Come in and sit down."

The captain's voice sounded habitually gruff, but his manner seemed amicable enough as he pointed a tobacco-stained finger at a chair in front of his desk.

Robert felt at ease. He sat down and looked around. The captain intrigued him. He would have expected this ship to be under the command of a man with three stripes, or even a Lieutenant Commander, like the first officer. A four striper usually commanded a battleship—even an aircraft carrier.

Either McGraw was out of favour at the Admiralty, or this ship was very important.

"And how's the Admiral these days?" Captain McGraw lit himself a cigar and offered one to Robert, who thanked him and declined. "Haven't seen him in years. Not since we were running destroyers in the last war, in fact. He was a Captain then, and I only a Lieutenant in his ship."

He leaned back in his chair and his eyes went to the overhead,

as though searching for an image of the Admiral somewhere up there.

"He's fine," Robert told the captain. "I'm ordered to convey his regards to you, sir."

"Thank you, lad."

The captain pulled on his cigar. He had an old-fashioned, wide wedding ring on his finger, but Robert couldn't picture him as a married man. Surely, his gruff manner could not be subdued by any woman.

"Thank you," the captain repeated. "The Admiral sent you to me with the highest recommendations. I hope he knew what he was doing."

His weather-beaten face furrowed into a maze of lines as he leafed through a folder on the desk in front of him. It seemed to be Robert's personnel file, recording his past experience in the war.

"I shall certainly do my best to live up to his recommendation, sir," Robert said, hoping to make a good impression.

"Fine, fine. I hope he'll put us on the right track to find some good targets and some action. This ship needs to start off with a good record. We'll sail tonight. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see you've never before served in a destroyer."

"No, sir." Robert felt inadequate.

"Well, doesn't matter." The captain took some more puffs from his cigar. "You've already had command of a ship. We'll teach you all you need to know about a destroyer. You're supposed to get instruction in the whole routine. Obviously, the Admiral has big plans for you. You'll do gunnery first, and depth charges. That's the most important action in a destroyer."

"Yes, sir."

For a moment longer, the captain looked into the blue haze of his cigar smoke, then he looked down on Robert and barked, "Okay, Lieutenant. Report to Lieutenant Commander Burns now."

He'll fill you in on the routine. Now run along, lad."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Robert jumped to his feet and stood to attention. Then he turned and went out, closing the door behind him.

He was already reasonably familiar with the lay-out of the ship that was to be his home for some time to come. While he was in search of Number One, to receive further instructions, he was struck by another oddity, the wheel house. In a windowless compartment, measuring no more than two metres square, was the helm, with the gyro compass and two engine room telegraphs.

Blindly, the helmsman had to steer this big ship. Gone were the romantic days when the helmsman on the bridge braved the elements, looking into the stormy sea, wrestling with the rudder. Here, he sat in this little cube, shut off from the outside world, with only the engine room telegraphs and the gyro compass for company. He would not even notice if the ship was sinking while he steered it.

Well, a ship like this doesn't sink anyway. Robert corrected his train of thought. He had nothing to do with the helmsman. His department was the throne on the bridge.

Briefly, his thoughts went back to that pretty Wren working for Uncle Hux. What was her name? Fowler? Third Officer Fowler. Quite inadequate for such a girl. He should have a better name to remember her by, and he wanted to remember her. He had acted stupidly. He should have asked her out on a dinner date while he was still in London. He had been too eager to get to his new commission. Now he found himself madly in love with that efficient, U-boat hunting girl and did not even know her full name.

Robert racked his brains to find a fitting name. Eve? Not bad, but that wouldn't do. She looked more efficient than any Eve he knew. Besides, it didn't suit her face. A girl who hunted U-boats in the Atlantic could not be called Eve. What about Bernadette? That sounded better, but too extravagant. A Bernadette wouldn't wear a

uniform—too unapproachable.

Lisa would be good—her smile had been Mona Lisa-like, tantalizing, with its veiled thoughts hidden behind—a smile that haunted him. But then, she was much prettier than Mona Lisa ever was. She was much sweeter.

Better call her Sweetie. That would not have to be corrected, even after he had met her and knew her real name. Sweet Sweetie, he thought. We will sink a few U-boats, and then I will be back in London and we'll put things in order.

Quickly, he wiped those pleasant thoughts from his mind and went in search of Lieutenant Commander Burns.

\* \* \*

Adam had been on switchboard duty when they arrived in Kristiansand. It had been a big hallo when they met up with the other crews. Their boats were siblings, and the crews had often before met at their base in Stettin during their commissioning period. Together, they had enjoyed the sweet life of Stettin, and the pleasures it had to offer. Now all that was over, and the battle had begun.

The U-boats were moored side by side, close to the shore of the fjord at Kristiansand. It was a place where there were no shops or entertainment. The off-duty crew was permitted ashore to stretch their legs while fuel was topped up, and fresh food loaded. There were eggs, meat, fruit and fresh vegetables to be taken aboard and crammed into the already laden hull.

All that would be consumed first, before the supply was down to the tinned food.

Adam was not in the mood to socialize with the crews of the other boats. He had not been in Stettin long enough to know much about them.

Alone, he climbed up the steep slopes of the coast and looked down on the deep blue waters of the fjord. It all looked peaceful, like on a picture postcard. Even the sleek hulls of the three U-boats

had nothing menacing about them. There was no indication that this was a time of war.

A faint humming could be heard. Adam interrupted his thoughts and looked up to the sky. It was spring, and the weather was already nice, with a blue sky and a faint ripple of cirrus clouds. High up, connecting all the ripples, was the vapour trail of a lonely aircraft. It obviously did not belong there. A German aircraft would not have to hide, and therefore would fly lower.

Already the war was coming out to meet them.

Down on the boats, the anti-aircraft crews came to life and hurried to their stations, but the vapour trail veered off in a wide circle. On the boats, the gun crews relaxed and dispersed again without firing a shot.

The shore at the water's edge was unique. Like a steep cliff, the land fell into the water to a bottomless depth, only to retreat from the threatening water, giving the width of a street and then rising again to greater height and safety.

The U-boats, with their deep draught, could be tied up right at the shore, without the need for a jetty. Only a gangway was required to disembark the crew.

Adam sat down in the grass and looked down on the boats with the detached feeling of a Buddhist monk.

This would be the last lull for some time to come and he enjoyed it thoroughly. He was an experienced hand, and knew what lay beyond that deceptively peaceful blue horizon. Hell would start soon after they left this sheltering coast.

Conditions had changed while he had enjoyed the make believe period in the Baltic Sea. In the olden days, it had been easy to arouse a sailor's spirits with a swashbuckling song like, "We're sailing against Eng-e-land." Now it was a bit like a Tommy singing his heart out about "hanging out his laundry on the Siegfried Line," and ending up being pushed into the sea at Dunkirk.

Experienced sailors like Adam could not be fired up by songs



and propaganda any more. They just had to toe the line, and had their hands full just to stay alive. They all wanted to see the end of this war and go home again.

In the meantime, they had a job to do and, while they did it, they avoided thinking about all the consequences. Another boat has been sunk? Don't think about it. It couldn't possibly happen to us.

With a resigned smile, Adam rose. It was time to go back to the boat. He swept a last look at the beautiful world around him. This would be his last glimpse of the splendour of nature for a long time to come.

Once in the boat he would not be permitted to leave his post until they had reached their destination. For maybe six months he would have to live in the space between the switchboard and his bunk. The next time he would see the sun would be on the other side of the world.

## **Part Two**

### **Blockade Breaker**

#### **Chapter 4**

“The quarry is on the way.” The Admiral entered the submarine tracking room early in the morning. “Now, at last, we can start with our green line.” He stabbed his cigar in the direction of the chart on the table. “Follow the purple line up to Bergen. They’re on that line. I just got news from BP that one of them had been sighted off Stavanger.”

“Won’t they stick together, sir?” Third Officer Fowler rose from behind her desk and walked toward the chart.

“Bletchley Park says they’ve all left, but we’ve sighted only one. Obviously they departed in single units and spread out. Much safer for them that way. We just have to set a wider net and knock them off one by one.”

“Do we know which one of them we have located, sir? Shall I mark the number on the chart?”

“No, we’ve not identified him yet. Our reconnaissance could not identify any markings on its superstructure, but we will know soon enough. We’ll have to wait until they start communicating,

then we'll know who is who. Better remind Bletchley Park to keep a special eye on their transmissions."

"Where do we intend to intercept them, sir?"

"Here." The Admiral pointed to a spot on the chart. "That's halfway between the Faroes and Iceland. As the Swiss hero William Tell is quoted to have said, 'Through this narrow lane he must come.' That same quotation is true for us. I've deployed three destroyers with long-range radar there. We can't miss. Not a mouse can get through."

"You think three destroyers will be enough?" Fowler had her doubts. She had seen other fool-proof schemes falter.

"Plenty," McCain assured her. "No need to over react. Besides, they're not ordinary destroyers. Latest design, all three of them, the best we can come up with. They all have superior detection gear. By George, I wish I were in one of them. I'd teach them a lesson or two."

\* \* \*

Lieutenant McKay got his first taste of real action. In the past, with his ill-fated minesweeper, he had mostly hugged the coast, hardly ever straying out of sight of land. When the weather got rough, he could always run for shelter. Here, however, he was far out on the icy sea, and had to cope with the elements as they came. The long Atlantic waves tossed the big destroyer with the same nonchalance as a chip of wood.

As the Admiral had promised, Robert had spent a day at home with his mother. She had hugged him and clucked around him, being a lonely Navy widow—his father had been lost early in the battle of the Atlantic—glad that at least one of her loved ones was still around.

She had not been over-enthusiastic about Robert's new commission. She had been too long a Navy wife and dreaded ships. She would have rather seen Robert safely tucked away in her

brother's office. She tried to talk some sense into both her men, but was preaching to deaf ears.

Robert was glad when he was back on board.

The Admiral had put *Dauntless* right in the centre of his purple line, with another destroyer 50 miles north, and a third 50 miles south. They all had long-range radar, and were overlapping each other comfortably. The entire gap between the Faroes and Iceland was covered. The three ships barred the exit from Germany as securely as the Great Wall of China.

Last night, heavy seas had tumbled the ship like a seesaw, but this morning the sea was calm. There was no wind at all, and a thick fog had settled on the waves like an oily blanket.

Robert had had a good night's sleep, having been off-duty for the last eight hours. He found his quarters very comfortable. Previously, he had seen more of the ship and, while he admired her as a finely honed fighting machine, he also found her full of death traps.

The off-duty crew had only two little hatches to escape from their quarters, should the need arise. That was poor for nearly 200 men, providing them with just two ladders, which they could climb only one man at a time as the ship sank.

Angrily, Robert brushed that thought aside. What was the matter with him? A ship like this did not sink. Besides, what was he fretting about? The officers' quarters were on the upper deck. It still would take some time until he had swept his experiences with his mine sweeper from his mind. He had to learn that here he was on a ship that would not sink.

Captain McGraw sat on his throne on the bridge and stared into the white emptiness. Under bushy brows, his blue eyes, in a face reddened by rough seas and wind, searched for the enemy, who was hidden somewhere behind the rapidly thickening fog. It seemed that one could have cut it like a cheese with a knife. The

ship proceeded at both ahead, slow, the flared bow cutting elegantly through the gentle waves.

In front of the captain, by the gyro repeater, was Robert, relaying the captain's orders through the various voice pipes. From time to time he turned to look at the radar monitor behind him, but there was no enemy in sight.

Robert must have made a good impression on the captain—or Uncle Hux had a lot of pull. The captain had been generous and had placed Robert near the very hub of all the operations, with the captain himself explaining all the actions to him, treating him like a captain's apprentice.

Robert had been daunted by that privileged treatment. In the meantime, he had learned that McGraw was an experienced hero, with an impressive record. Ernie's voice had been husky with awe and respect when he relayed to Robert the captain's previous battles in the Atlantic. Now McGraw was in charge of this Iceland task force.

So far, it had been an uneventful mission with all the battle stations ready and manned in the crowded space of the bridge. They were in the icy waters of Iceland, but on the bridge it didn't feel that way. This space was air-conditioned, and felt very comfortable. However, Robert could see that outside it was bitter cold. Icicles were hanging everywhere on the superstructure, where the waves had splashed over the gunwale during the stormy night. Outside, the men on deck duty were wrapped in thick duffle coats and oilskins. Robert, too, had his duffle coat and oil-skin ready, in case he was ordered out on deck. As a gunnery officer, he expected that to happen sooner or later.

Earlier, Robert had been in the C.I.C., where Number One sat on the throne. The place was humming with activity. Thirty men were at their places, each concentrating on his allotted task. The room was dimly lit, with no deadlights to let daylight in and distract the operators. Each man had his eyes riveted to some monitor.

The electronic detection tables were most impressive. Every second, like a drop into calm waters, a fluorescent circle spread out from the centre toward the outer edge, probing the ocean for a trace of the enemy.

Now Robert was on the bridge and enjoying the panoramic view through the windscreen, although they were still enveloped in an impenetrable cloud of fog. Even the bow in front seemed to lose itself in the haze outside.

"Radar to captain, new detection on green one-double-oh," the voice pipe suddenly broke the silence on the bridge.

The captain's chair spun around and his thick brows lowered as his eyes glared at the monitor.

"Action stations! Ready guns! All guns load semi-armour piercing. Ready depth charges!" The staccato commands sounded like the roar of a machine gun.

Robert thought that the guns were unnecessary, for in this fog nothing could be seen, but who was he to criticize the captain?

"Asdic?" the captain questioned the operator.

"Nothing yet," came back the report.

"Radar range?" the captain demanded.

"Twelve miles, sir," answered the voice pipe from below.

"Steer zero-seven-zero, both ahead, full!"

Robert relayed the commands.

Looking at the chart, he mentally calculated that they would have their target to port in about fifteen minutes. His eyes pierced the fog, and he wished that he had X-ray eyes. He felt some disappointment. He had so looked forward to seeing the sinking of his first U-boat, and now it was all to be done with electronics.

Suddenly, a vicious gust blew over the waves and the wall of fog lifted immediately, giving visibility for a few miles ahead. Obviously yesterday's storm was returning.

“Hah!” the captain roared, his massive chin jutting. His alert eyes had not been distracted by the upcoming wind, but immediately riveted on the enemy. “That’s better! Steer zero-five-zero!”

He cleared his throat in preparation for further commands.

“Have to catch the target before he starts to dive,” he explained to Robert after his command was relayed to the wheelhouse.

“Radar range?” the captain had no time to waste.

“Radar to captain, range 5,000 yards, closing fast.”

Looking at the target, the captain thrust his head forward like a charging bull. Firmly, his hands gripped the elbow rests of his elevated chair.

“Alarm port!” he removed the cold cigar from his mouth, so that it would not muffle his bellowing voice.

“All guns follow director—port ten!”

*Dauntless* heeled over sharply, following the impetus of her twin rudders at full speed, and obeying the thrust of her big propellers, which were now biting furiously into the water, maintaining the ship’s speed of 30 knots.

“A Gun ready!”

“B Gun ready!”

“X Gun ready!”

The reports came in quick succession, and none too soon. The U-boat had been in full view for a few seconds now. It was traveling at full speed, with the grey waves foaming along its sleek hull as it forged effortless ahead. Already the sharp bow was cutting under, like a playful porpoise.

“Barrage short—commence!” Captain McGraw’s voice barked.

“Hah!” the captain suddenly roared. “That sneaky bastard’s diving!”

Robert followed the captain’s angry gaze, seeing the conning tower disappear and white, creamy waves close over the enemy. It

was just a fraction of a second before the sea was ripped open by the thundering broadside.

“Steer port ten, ready for depth charging!” the captain commanded. “Set charges at 100 feet!”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

“Asdic range?”

“Asdic to captain, 800 yards, closing fast.”

Robert searched the heaving vastness of the grey sea, which had just swallowed the enemy. Nothing could be seen. None of it was the way he had pictured it in his imagination. As a naval officer he would rather have fought his battles along with Nelson in the old days. This was all very technical.

“Drop pattern of ten.”

Robert’s thoughts were interrupted by the captain’s bark. *Dauntless* had just passed over the place where the U-boat had been a moment ago.

From both sides of the quarterdeck the grey canisters curved out and overboard. They entered the water with small splashes. The pattern was complete and had gone down in the shape of a rough diamond. *Dauntless* was moving fast, tearing away from the area of destruction to protect her own vulnerable stern.

Twisting his mustache nervously over his wet, cold cigar, the captain looked back at the sea beyond their foaming wake. *Dauntless* shuddered. The sea suddenly boiled and a series of ten geysers rose to heaven. Tons of exploding amatol ripped into the water, trying to destroy the enemy.

All eyes searched the water for some sign of victory—a speck of oil, corpses, or some other wreckage, while the crew on the quarterdeck reloaded the throwers for the next series of depth charges.

“Fifteen knots!” the captain grunted in disappointment, when nothing could be found. “Lower dome, start operating.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”



The enemy had obviously refused to disintegrate. Now the Asdic dome was lowered and, like an underwater searchlight with a cone-shaped beam, the sound pulses left the Asdic dome, sniffing out its victim.

With no enemy in sight, the captain relaxed and listened to the speakers that relayed the pinging transmissions. His hands were searching through his pockets.

"Here you are, sir," Robert flashed a lighter in the captain's face, anticipating his need. He lit the cigar the captain had chewed on for so long.

The mustache muffled a grateful grunt.

"We'll find that sneaky bastard," the captain explained, after taking a few puffs from his cigar. "We know where he's heading. Now that he's here, he can't get away any more."

"Yes, sir," Robert answered doubtfully, looking at the grey emptiness outside.

"Hah!" the captain snarled, detecting the doubt in Robert's voice. His tobacco-stained finger pointed to the chart table. "I forgot, you're new in these waters. This is no convoy business here, where the U-boats are moving in all directions. This is a blockade. Here all U-boats have a one-way ticket. They all are going either east or west. The battered ones head back for Germany to be repaired, and the new ones head west and out for action. This one came from the east, so he's heading west and we know his track."

He paused for a moment and drew heavily on his cigar. It had absorbed too much moisture and burned reluctantly.

"This one," McGraw continued, "is a new one, because he was heading west and in these waters he has to continue on this track. He cannot make much headway—not much more than five knots, if his battery is to last all day. With us circling in a predetermined pattern we're bound to pick him up any time now."

He had sounded like a lecturer in a classroom, now he stiffened. The monotonous ping of the Asdic, which sent its searching

sound out into the vastness of the sea, was suddenly joined by a healthy pong.

“Hah!” the captain snarled in triumph. “We’ve got him!”

Ping... ping... *pong!* Ping... ping... *pong!*

It was unmistakable. The echoing pong came back, pitched higher than the transmitted ping. Closer and closer together came the sounds of transmission and echo, as the distance between the hunter and the hunted lessened. Robert found all that very interesting. He remembered learning that bats catch their prey in that manner.

“Asdic range?”

The captain was in his element. This was what destroyers and their captains were created for—hunting U-boats. He was doing his job most efficiently. Directed by the echoes of the Asdic beam, he steered the attacking destroyer straight over the target. Down there in the depths the enemy could twist and squirm, the Asdic held him in its claws.

Ping... *pong!* Ping... *pong!*

Both sounds could be heard almost simultaneously. A few seconds later the echoes faded away completely, for the Asdic could not transmit straight down. They were above the target.

“Throw pattern of ten!” the command was short and crisp.

The bombs arched over the sides, and again the sea exploded.

This time the captain didn’t waste much time in searching the sea for wreckage. He immediately turned the ship around, before he lost contact with the target. As it appeared, he would have wasted his time, for again there was no wreckage and there was no evidence that he had hit the U-boat. One lonely fish drifted belly-up to the surface. It was an innocent victim of the war. Otherwise the sea looked empty, but the enemy had not escaped. This time the Asdic clung to it. It held its victim in its claws with tenacity.

Again the captain homed in on his target. No need to hurry. His victim could not run away. Now accuracy was more important

than decisive action. With cold deliberation, the big ship moved on toward its helpless target for the kill.

"Asdic range?"

"Asdic to captain, 500 yards."

"Good!"

The captain crushed his cigar in the ashtray beside the elbow rest of his chair. His brow beetled as he concentrated on the Asdic sounds, to judge the precise moment for firing.

His command came suddenly, and again the deadly canisters arched from both sides of the quarter deck, each loaded with more than 400 pound of explosives, and set to go off at 200 feet.

With a deafening roar the charges ripped into the sea and threw the water up high above the waves. No U-boat could survive such punishment.

The captain waited tensely for the last vibrations of the explosions to fade away. On the surface there was still no evidence of a defeated enemy.

"Asdic, how's it look?"

"Asdic to captain. Four echoes, all stationary, can't make it out."

"We've got him!" Robert was jubilant. "He broke up into four pieces. That's the end of him."

"Hah!" the captain barked in contempt. "He would have fooled you. If he's broken up in four pieces, there would be an oil slick big enough to get the environmentalists on our back. What has happened is that this sly fox fired a cluster of S.B.T.s—he's ducked off and left us holding an empty bag."

"What are S.B.T.s, sir?"

"They're Submarine Bubble Targets," the captain explained readily. "They're some chemical pills, the Germans call them *Kobold*. They reflect our Asdic and allow him to escape."

"Now he's gone?" Robert was disappointed.

"Only temporarily. He escaped while we were throwing our depth charges at his dummies. We've lost him for a while—but only for a while. When I get him next time I'll get even with him, I swear. I'll teach that bastard to waste my ammunition. Each of those charges costs a fortune."

Frowning in disappointment, he fished a cigar out of his pocket and started chewing on it. A series of commands sent the ship searching in ever widening circles toward the west of the waters around Admiral McCain's purple line, which had been copied from the chart on the tracking room table to the chart on *Dauntless*.

"We'll get him soon, boy," the captain addressed Robert optimistically. "His battery won't last much past evening, and when he comes up our radar will catch him. He can't possibly get through."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, run along, Lieutenant. Join the crew on the depth charges. Familiarize yourself with the procedure, then relieve the officer on duty. Soon you will see more action from the quarter deck again."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Robert saluted and left the bridge. On the way to the quarter-deck he donned his duffle coat, his oilskin and life jacket as prescribed by regulations.

Out in the open it was icy cold. The wind cut into his unprotected face like a cold knife. He decided then that his place should be up on the bridge. Uncle Hux had to see to it that he became a commander in a hurry. When they had sunk those U-boats he would have a long talk with Uncle Hux.

His stinging eyes searched the many still-unknown faces of the depth charge operators. He headed toward the loudest voice. It was Ernie Wallis, who looked at him through watery eyes. His face lit up when he recognized Robert.

“Hi, Bob,” he greeted him. “This weather is murder. We must be near the North Pole. I prayed to God to send me an offsider, so I can turn in and warm my frozen bones for a change, and there you are. Who says there is no merciful God in heaven?”

“Well, I don’t know yet.”

“Come, I’ll show you and then you’ll know,” Ernie interrupted Robert’s doubts. “First, we have to line up more of these babies for the next attack.”

Ernie went on explaining the operation of the throwers.

\* \* \*

After the boat had left Norwegian waters off the coast at Bergen, Kapitänleutnant Henning was on the alert. For this trip, he had planned no heroic deeds. He just wanted to worm his way through the bottle-neck without being detected by the enemy. They would be away for many months, but this next week would be crucial, as they sneaked on their way past the notorious graveyard of the Rose Garden.

The boat made slow progress, traveling submerged most of the time. They surfaced only at night, when the depleted batteries needed charging. It was agonizing—trying to flee this dangerous area, yet being unable to run. This feeling was truly the stuff nightmares were made of, running in a frenzy, yet being nailed to the ground.

On the fourth day, Henning met with a stroke of good luck. Thick fog had descended upon them, and visibility was down to zero. He decided that this was a good opportunity to gain some mileage and run hell for leather. He would make the best of it while his good fortune lasted. Little merchant traffic was expected in these waters, except the odd blockading destroyer, and they operated radar. The U-boat would get plenty of warning when their Naxos detected the radar signals and they could dive in time to avert disaster.

So now the boat was running full speed ahead, with Henning standing on the bridge, staring into white emptiness.

He had left the lookouts below, for there was nothing to be seen out here. That way he could crash-dive faster if an emergency arose. Besides him, only the Naxos operator was on the bridge, slowly turning his antenna, searching the air for enemy radar signals.

Down in the boat, the crew was on alarm alert, ready to crash dive, should the necessity arise.

All this was a calculated risk, but the captain felt it was worth while. At a speed of 20 knots he was making good time, and his batteries were fully charged. He realized that the boat was highly vulnerable. With the roar of his own diesels, his hydrophone was useless, but he could be heard from miles away by a lurking, listening enemy.

The boat itself had radar on board, but it was an inferior, long wave type and its efficiency would be reduced by the thick fog. It was no match for the enemy's long range, penetrating detectors, and in this weather was only useful for preventing collision. He had only his Naxos to warn him of impending danger.

The bottom line was that every added day in the bottleneck of the Rose Garden was a deadly threat. The faster he could put this area behind him, the better were his chances of survival. A faint smile lit Henning's face, with its week-old stubble. How times had changed. He had arrived at the stage where he no longer measured the success of his patrol in enemy tonnage sunk, but in surviving days, or miles run without being killed.

In front of him, the open Atlantic beckoned like a paradise. In those open spaces it was still dangerous, but there were more chances to hide and lose oneself. There, it would be easier to survive. Impatiently, his eyes drilled into the fog ahead. He felt like taking oars and helping the boat speed along in order to survive.

And survive he would—that he was determined of. The fiery enthusiasm for the Navy of his younger years had waned. Wild slogans like, ‘Dying for your country and the Führer,’ did not impress him any more. He had sworn to get home again, and to take no unnecessary risks.

Right now the hair on the back of his neck was standing up on edge. Something did not feel the way it should.

They had traveled for three hours now at top speed. At more than 20 knots, the sleek bow cut through the waves like it had in the training ground in the Baltic Sea. This tranquil air gave him an eerie feeling, like being on another planet. His eyes tried to penetrate the silent, white wall ahead. He had the premonition that some disaster was about to crush in on him.

This was the blockade area! Then where was the enemy? Why had he not heard a single bleep of enemy radar? Past experience had taught him that his opponents were not stupid.

“Valenski, you sure your Naxos is in working order?” Henning addressed the other man on the bridge.

“Yes, sir, I checked it when I came on duty.”

“Then check again.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

From his pocket, Valenski produced an instrument like a torch. It emitted weak signals on the enemy’s radar frequency. He waved that in front of his antenna and listened to his headphones.

“It works perfectly, sir,” he reported, and put his testing instrument away, then continued twisting his antenna.

Puzzled, Henning shook his head. The boat proceeded on its track with the captain staring straight ahead, seeing nothing. His luck was unbelievable. It was too good to be true, and made him feel uneasy, but every second at top speed was precious now. He must have gained a hundred miles in this fog. In his mind, he counted every mile, ticking it off on the chart below. He wished

his boat had wings. Out there ahead was the Atlantic and relative safety. A few hours more of this and he was home free.

He was about to grin in relief when a gust of wind swept across the bridge. He nearly lost his cap, and the Naxos operator wrestled with his antenna, which the wind tore from his hand. The wild gust tore the fog to shreds and lifted it up from the waves, where it had lain motionless like a white blanket. It was like emerging from the dense foliage of the jungle into a sunny clearing.

"Okay, Valenski, down you go! It's time to dive," the captain said and fumbled for his binoculars to have a last look around. They were hanging from straps down on his chest, but before he could bring them up to his eyes, he saw the destroyer, heaving a mighty bow wave, heading straight for him.

"Crash dive!" he screamed, and closed the cock to the voice pipe. Then he tumbled down the ladder, his boots hitting the Naxos operator's head.

Responding to his command, the bow immediately cut under the waves. The water was already lapping up onto the bridge when the captain clanged the hatch shut overhead and dogged it down with the hand wheel.

A moment later the detonations of the destroyer's broadside ripped into the water above, rocking the boat as it was heading down. When Henning reached the control room, the diesels were already silent and the electric motors humming.

After the stinging wind and spray above, Henning's cheeks felt flushed in the ordered world of the *Zentrale*. He ran his eyes over the men around him. The helmsman, with his eyes on the gyro repeater, the two planesmen, with the L.I. standing behind them, his arms folded in front of him, giving unhurried corrections to adjust the trim, the control room stokers turning valves, for what purpose only they knew, to make the boat behave.



*A good crew*, Henning decided. For many of them, this would be the first fire probe, but already they behaved like seasoned U-boat men. He could depend on them.

He, himself, was still shocked and needed time to think. He had felt that there was something wrong. How could that destroyer have sneaked up on him without being detected by the Naxos operator? The way he came out of the fog, he would have rammed them, had the fog not lifted. The enemy had moved as though they knew exactly where the boat was.

“Cripes!”

Henning suddenly awakened from his shock. There was the enemy bearing down on them and he was still contemplating.

“Rudder, hard port! Both full ahead!” Henning made a sudden decision.

Steer for the enemy, he’s still operating visually—trust your luck!

The sound of the destroyer’s screws overhead was quickly growing to a deafening roar as the two ships headed for each other. The destroyer was moving at full speed ahead, and the U-boat added another eight knots.

There were the splashes—they still have to sink—hope we can out run them.

The experienced men in the crew knew how to interpret all those noises. They saw nothing of the war. Theirs was a world of sound. The screws of a destroyer, guessing the distance of the approaching foe, his eerie Asdic signals, the splashes of the water bombs, picturing them sinking toward the boat, their eyes staring fearfully at the overhead, where the decision over life or death is made. Flip of a coin—hit or miss.

*Wham! Wham!*

In quick succession the bombs exploded. The boat has survived. Still, the bombs were too close for comfort. The boat shuddered. As though handled by a giant fist, it was thrown out of

balance. Lights went out, glass splintered, objects were thrown around. Men lost their foot-hold, disaster seemed ready to strike.

Somewhere in the diesel room water broke through and hissed into the boat. The emergency lights came on, and in a flash the crew was back in action. Ears functioning again—brains, too.

The blown fuses were quickly found and a valve closed, isolating a broken pipe. It appeared that the damage was minor, and within seconds the boat was restored again.

In the meantime, both ships, traveling at full speed in opposite directions, had drawn far apart.

“Both slow ahead, rig for silent running,” commanded Henning. He hoped to have shaken off the hunter. “Steer two-seven-zero!”

The boat came around and proceeded slowly on their western track. The destroyer’s screws could still be heard in the far distance and gave Henning the creeps.

“L.I., can’t you stop the pumps?” he asked, irritated.

He realized that the L.I. was an experienced man and knew his business, but the noise made Henning nervous when the boat should be playing dead.

“In just a moment, John, the trim has to be right.” The L.I. took no offence.

The boat had trim ballast tanks, fore, aft and on the two sides. To keep the boat on an even keel, especially at low speed, the planes were working hard. By pumping water from one tank into another, the boat was first fine-tuned, and then steered by the planesmen.

Presently the pumps fell silent. With all auxiliary machinery stopped, it was very quiet. One could hear a sneeze from one end of the boat to the other over all its 90-metre length. The noise from the destroyer could still be heard in the far distance, but hopes soared that they could out-run their pursuer.

"L.I., bring her up to 15 metres," said the captain, climbing the vertical ladder up to the conning tower.

Once there, he sat down in the saddle behind the periscope, which was a column about one metre thick. With his eye on the soft rubber ring of the lens, his feet operated the 'scope's controls, revolving his seat around the column as his hands adjusted the focus.

He made a full circle and then stopped, frozen into one direction. By now the fog had completely disappeared and he could see that he had only this one destroyer to deal with. For a moment he toyed with the idea of attacking and ridding himself of his foe for good, but then he rejected this alternative. In this area one never knew what to expect, and it was suicidal to rock the boat. There surely were more destroyers in the area. He should be glad that they were out of Asdic range. It was better to let sleeping dogs lie and run. So far it looked promising, and there was a good chance that they could get away this time.

He sent the periscope down into its well and went down to the control room

"L.I., take her down to 100 metres," he said, and grabbed a pipe to steady himself as the deck inclined with the boat on her downward path.

When the boat leveled out at her new depth, he bent down over the chart table, where Braun, the Number Three, had made corrections to the track during their recent manoeuvres. He sat down by the table. Supporting his head on his hands, he wistfully looked down at the chart, contemplating his next move should his pursuer catch up with him. It looked promising. He nearly had the dreaded Rose Garden behind him. Only one or two days more at his sneaky underwater speed and he was in open waters. At times like these, one should learn to pray, he thought.

A thin smile curled around the corners of his mouth. He was sure that many of his men would do that for him, and *had* done it

when the bombs were falling. He preferred to rely on a sharp mind to make his decisions as required. In this business, it took only seconds—a few precious moments lacking in vigilance could bring about oblivion.

After this first encounter, their presence in these waters was no secret any more. The enemy would continue to search for them at leisure and pick them up at a later time. Even in the wide-open spaces of the Atlantic he would have to keep a watchful eye looking back over his shoulder.

In the rear of the boat, Adam and Joe were on switchboard duty. Far removed from the control room, they knew nothing of what was happening. Blindly, they threw switches as required by the machine telegraph, without knowing what the boat was doing. By the seat of their pants, they felt the boat squirming and writhing without knowing why. All they knew was that the switches had to be thrown when asked for. They had become a vital part of the machinery

When the water bombs exploded it came with little warning. One moment their machines were running at full speed ahead, and the next the boat was rocking like a cocktail shaker. Their necks pulled between their shoulders, they stared at each other. Adam had survived water bombs before, and knew that this was not necessarily the end, but for Joe it was his first experience. It appeared to him as though doomsday had, indeed, arrived.

For some time there had been a lull, and by now their necks were gradually relaxing. There was hope, at last, that they were escaping the clutches of their foe. The electric motors were humming reassuringly. Slowly, that nonchalance typical of U-boat men was spreading over the crew again.

Suddenly a dreadful sound—a ping!

With a jerk, their heads made a tortoise-like movement.

“Shit, they’ve got us again,” someone whispered.

Silent running was of no use any more. The enemy had caught them again in their Asdic claws. The ping, like the outer web of a spider, now was clinging to the U-boat's hull. It had struck the hull, but had it traveled back to the transmitter? If the enemy was heading in another direction, maybe this was a stray ping and there was still a chance to escape the web.

The control room sprang into action.

"What's the position, Müller?" the captain asked the hydrophone operator in the wireless cabin nearby.

"Hydrophone effect at five-zero, sir. Seems to be approaching."

"Damn!" the captain cursed. He already regretted his earlier decision not to attack when he had the chance.

"Steer one-five-zero—both ahead one third."

The boat veered around in the direction of the approaching destroyer, whose propeller noises were growing louder as the two ships approached each other. The dreadful ping left no doubt about the intention of the foe above, and the expression on the faces of the crew froze as they prepared themselves for another round of punishment. Would they get away again this time? Doom, in the form of ever increasing noise, approached with unstoppable certainty.

"Both full ahead!" the captain suddenly shouted, and the boat surged forward to meet the danger head-on. The trick had worked once, let's try it again.

The threatening pings stopped as the destroyer passed overhead, and the men winced when they heard the splashing of the dreaded water bombs. Anxious, waiting with their eyes up to the overhead, where any moment now a hole could burst open, with the deadly sea pouring in, killing everything that moved in their secluded world. The explosions were nearly a relief from the dreadful tension of uncertainty—too far behind and set too shallow. Still ear-shattering, but there was no damage to the boat.

“Prepare the Kobold for tube five!” the captain shouted.

He had to do something more drastic to escape his persistent foe, and now the bubbles of the Kobold would confuse the enemy’s Asdic. He could not evade him forever just by clever manoeuvring. The enemy was bound to set his bombs more accurately. This time, the destroyer’s Asdic had clung to the hull of the boat like an elastic cobweb.

The destroyer above had turned around, and could be clearly heard approaching again. In a straight line, he was homing in on them. In the Asdic net they could squirm like a captured fly, but they could not escape.

“Shoot the Kobold! Both full ahead! Rudder, hard starboard, steer two-seven-oh!”

The captain produced a handkerchief and wiped his face, then he held on to the ladder as the boat heeled over in a sudden turn as the chemical pills left the torpedo tube to confuse the Asdic.

The boat was speeding away now. It had escaped the Asdic net. Far behind them they could hear the exploding depth charges as the enemy tore apart the sea around the dummy pills, which had reflected the Asdic signals.

For the moment they were safe, but for how much longer? The captain knew that he could use that precious speed only for short periods, because of the drain on the battery. However, it was his only chance of escaping the enemy, and he would keep the boat running as long as he dared. He went on for five more minutes and watched the Number Three, who had made corrections on the dead-reckoning track on the chart.

“Both one-third ahead!” he said to the helmsman, who operated the telegraph and relayed the command to the electro-machine room.

“Both ahead one-third,” came the confirmation.

“Persistent fellow up there, John, isn’t he?” The L.I. looked at the captain and smiled faintly. He had recovered from the ordeal.

Although himself a veteran of many attacks, a man never got used to it. Fear always grabs you by the heart and squeezes it cruelly.

Henning looked at the L.I.

"We're at his mercy," he said. "Eventually, we have to come up to breathe, and then he'll come and get us." Again he wiped the sweat from his stubbly face with his handkerchief. I suspect that, in the end, we'll have to fight our way out of this."

"It will be night in a few hours."

"Night will not be the answer—his radar will see us just the same. I hope, for all our sakes, that he soon gives up. If he comes back we'll give him a cracker to chew. Something of his own medicine. I've had about all I'm prepared to take. As you well know, we've cracked destroyers before and lived to tell the story."

He turned to the hydrophone operator. "Müller, what's it like up there?"

"Propeller noises at five-zero—seems to go in circles, sir."

"Still searching—won't give up," said Henning, and then, "To after torpedo room—load T-5!"

There in the stern, Hein sprang into action. He kissed his fingertips and then transferred his kiss to the greasy torpedo. The eel slid smoothly into the tube, making room for another bunk.

The T-5 was a venomous weapon, an acoustic torpedo. It had a fiendish little brain in its warhead, which homed in on noise. One did not have to aim it. It only had to be shot into the general direction of the target and the whole wide field of sound, generated by the enemy it was aimed at, sucked the torpedo out of the ocean and into its belly. The torpedo sniffed the water for a victim like a bloodhound on the trail of a fox.

Of course, after firing the torpedo, the U-boat itself had to dive quickly to the safety of the deep, lest the torpedo turn around and attack its own master.

In silence they went on.

Henning looked around again, assessing his crew. The men were all right, but there was still a long way ahead of them. Today, most of them had had their first taste of what it was like to serve on a U-Boat. Back home, U-boat men were glorified in the newsreels, and many had been attracted to this arm of the Navy for these very reasons. They were now being shaped into the mould and becoming veterans.

How am I, myself, doing? Henning wondered. I do not think that anybody can see that I, too, am scared when the bombs are falling. Everyone on board is scared. It is only in the movies that the men are chewing gum and cracking jokes, counting water bombs while around their ears their world is caving in. Every time is a new terror. The only thing a veteran learns is that there is always hope. Not every bomb is deadly. If a man tells you he is not afraid, he is either a bloody liar or a damned fool. One could get scared, as long as one preserved an ice-cold brain to act as required.

Fear is a natural reaction. It is needed to produce adrenaline in the body, which enables one to perform feats beyond normal human capabilities. It is a warning of impending mortal danger. A commander who ignores fear gets his Knight's Cross early, but he and his crew have only a short and glorious life to look forward to.

Henning heard a stoker laugh. It was a good sign. The horror of the past hours was already giving way to relief at being spared. It was not over yet, but it was good that someone could already laugh, he thought.

The distant propeller noises from the destroyer never abated. They could be heard in waves, sometimes louder, then fading again, as the enemy sniffed the sea for his elusive victim.

Henning continued to stare at the chart, where his track was penciled in—the route he had to follow to safety. It looked a bit like wishful thinking. In spite of his aloofness when ashore, when aboard he was as human as the rest of his crew. His mind, too, cringed from the suddenness of death, threatening the men on a U-



boat at all times. Just do not show it. His mouth was twisted into a forced smile as he appeared to be relaxed.

Ping... ping!

Torn from his thoughts, Henning winced along with the rest of the crew. There it was again. Now he had to move fast to work out a plan of action. The T-5 might be deadly, but nothing was certain in this business. Sometimes there were duds among them, and nothing was guaranteed. One always had to rely on a generous portion of luck.

"Here he comes, sir," the hydrophone operator took off his headphones. The propeller noises could be heard as they increased in volume.

"Here it goes, Henk," the captain addressed the L.I. Now he was not scared. The ball was in his court. "Take her up to 20 metres. We'll throw him a knuckle!"

"Rudder ten degrees starboard, steer two-eight-zero!" Henning addressed the helmsman.

He waited until the boat had leveled out at 20 metres and come around on its new course and then, "Both full ahead!"

The boat accelerated briskly away from the approaching enemy, as if they intended to run from the destroyer. The L.I. kept the boat at 20 metres. At full speed the boat was easier for the planesmen to control.

"Rudder, hard port—steer one-seven-oh!"

The captain's sudden command swung the boat around at full speed, and the men held on to what they could grab to steady themselves. A knuckle had been thrown—it was a vicious, left-hand angle wake, whose bubbles would reflect the hunter's Asdic beam. The U-Boat, in the meantime, could pull away abeam of the destroyer while he still homed in on the knuckle that had attracted his Asdic beams.

"Both one-third ahead!"

“Both one-third,” the helmsman worked the machine telegraph.

“T-5 ready!”

The T-5 was only in the after torpedo room, only to be used in defence. The attack torpedoes were all in front, and all of them had standard impact-type ignition, which had to be aimed with accuracy.

“T-5—fire!”

The boat shuddered slightly as the torpedo left the tube on its deadly mission.

“Okay, Hendrick, take her down to 100 metres.”

## Chapter 5

It was late afternoon. Unsuccessfully, *Dauntless* had been sniffing the water for the last few hours.

Robert was still on duty, his life vest secured around his chest and neck, as he paced the quarterdeck from port to starboard and then back again to keep his blood circulating. Impatiently, his eyes scanned the heaving line of the horizon in search of the elusive enemy. So far things had not proceeded in accordance with the book. With so many depth charges thrown, the enemy should already have disintegrated, unless he knew some tricks they had not recorded yet at the Naval College in Dartmouth.

All the men were suffering from the cold, and Robert yearned to be relieved from the torture of the quarterdeck.

While his eyes searched the ocean, he tried to find some pleasant thoughts and turned his mind to Sweetie. He did not have to call her Sweetie anymore. While still at Scapa, he had rung Uncle Huxley to report his progress. Third Officer Fowler had answered the phone. Robert had been quick to grab this opportunity and had asked her name. It was Eve after all, and suddenly it really did seem to fit her like a second skin. Before he was transferred to the Admiral, he had even secured a date with her on his next leave in London. She had agreed. Obviously, she was still unattached. He was elated.

That was something to look forward to. He just had to sink that blasted U-boat first. The sooner that was sunk, the sooner he was back in London.

Impatiently Robert paced the deck and searched the water.

\* \* \*

Up on the bridge, Captain McGraw sat in his chair, swivelling thoughtfully. He had sat in this hard chair for many hours now, and would rather have relaxed in the warm upholstery of his day cabin. Alas, a captain is never off watch. His duty cycle went around the clock. Even at lunch time he was not relieved, and stuffed some chicken drumsticks under his mustache while his eyes scanned the empty waves outside. He was irritated by this delay. Not that he feared that the U-boat he was hunting had the slightest chance to escape—far from it. Traveling submerged, the enemy could never leave the range of his radar screen, and very soon he would have to surface to charge his batteries. But his seat had become very uncomfortable. He did not look at it with Robert's admiring eyes. To him, it was just a place to sit—one that could do with some improvement.

A frown was etching deep furrows into his weather-beaten face. He was an experienced man, and had sunk many U-boats before this. He was not afraid of them. A destroyer always had the advantage over a U-boat. It was the faster gun. His main weapon was his detection equipment. It enabled him to keep the enemy at arm's length and, in battle, the offence was the destroyer's decision, because of its superior speed. It could run circles around its prey.

The U-boat's torpedoes were deadly, but if the enemy was bullied he had no time to fire them. Besides, these torpedoes, too, needed time to travel. They only armed themselves after having travelled some distance, during which time they could be detected by their intended victim's hydrophones, and then there was usually enough time for evasive action.

Ping... ping... ping... *Pong!*

Electrified, McGraw spun around and faced the speaker on the overhead. The healthy ‘pong’ quickly ironed out the deep lines in the captain’s face. Forgotten were the blisters on his backside. Now his worried mind had found relief in decisive action.

“Saturation barrage!” he barked, after he had aimed his ship into the direction of the enemy. “Make it snappy!”

“Setting, sir?” came the question through the intercom.

“The first five at 200 feet, the rest at 100.”

*Dauntless* had changed course, and was now following the direction of the Asdic echo. Trembling with restrained power, so as not to disturb the sniffing Asdic signal, *Dauntless* closed in on her prey, determined not to miss this time. The sound reflections were strong and positive. The crew on the quarterdeck had already loaded a wide pattern of depth charges that could not miss this time.

Suddenly the speaker crackled. “Sound to captain! Torpedo noise from port, approaching!” It was a voice on the edge of panic.

“Rudder hard starboard!” the captain’s response was immediate. “Both ahead—full!”

Captain McGraw remained cool. He had evaded torpedo attacks before and had succeeded. No U-boat was ever to get the better of him. A torpedo was only a little faster than a destroyer. Even the new ones—the new ones—suddenly an agonizing thought struck him. Was he getting old? What was the matter with him! He should have done this long before!

“Stream the Foxer!” he screamed at the top of his voice.

In a flash he realized that he had failed to keep up with changing times. He had the most modern boat, but had failed to utilize all of her facilities. Acoustic torpedoes were new on the battle scene, and could not be evaded, but human ingenuity becomes inexhaustible in times of war. Already he had a counter measure on board: the Foxer. It was a noise buoy, to be towed behind the

ship. Only by creating a secondary noise, away from the ship, could one get away, and the Foxer did just that. He should have streamed the Foxer long ago.

Was he in time with his countermeasure?

Down on the quarterdeck, Robert held on to the railing as *Dauntless* suddenly accelerated and heeled over in a violent turn. The port gunwale was creaming the water, and foaming spray flew into Robert's face.

He had known that the hunt was on again. All depth charges were in place, and the crew had their hands on the trigger, waiting for his command—and then this!

What was the sudden rush? Stupefied, he looked up to the bridge, whence he had expected the command to fire.

The explosion deafened him.

As if propelled from a trampoline, he was lifted off the ship and thrown overboard. Dazed, he hit the water and started floating in his life vest. The chill of the icy water revived him instantly. Gulping for air, he looked around for help.

He could not see anything, but only experienced a terrifying sense of agony at the cold that grabbed him like a vise around his chest. The icy water seeped into his clothing, and he realized that he would die within minutes if he was not rescued.

Then he saw *Dauntless*, far away. Under the full power of her dying engines, and the impetus of her weight and inertia, she had travelled nearly another mile. There was total silence now. The water was ice-cold and deadly, and he was alone.

So much for his Navy career. There was no power, no vibration to be felt under his feet—just deadly emptiness. Was this the end of a Navy man's career? His father must have died this way, and now it was his turn. He should have heeded the warning when he had found himself swimming in the Irish Sea once before. He should have taken up Uncle Hux's offer for a safe place in his

office for U-boat hunters. No ship in the world guaranteed safety. Even the *Titanic* had sunk.

The howling wind, which only minutes before had whipped cold spray into his face, seemed to have abated. Like a chip of wood, Robert was tossed up and down by the grey waves.

From the crest of a wave, he could see the remains of *Dauntless*. She was lifting up her bow, the stern already deep in the water. He pictured the crew, thronging out through the two hatches from their quarters. There were no life-boats on the ship. A destroyer was not built to sink. He was lucky, he was out—or was he? How long could a man live in this icy water? Maybe another five minutes, unless a boat came to rescue him, which was highly unlikely. He was already numb, and only his brain was still alive. Time to say your prayers, Robert.

\* \* \*

The effect of the exploding torpedo on the crew of the hunted U-boat had been electrifying. This was not just a simple trophy—a victory over an enemy—this was a gift of life!

“Take her up to periscope depth, Henk,” the captain addressed the L.I., and went to the rear periscope in the control room. “And steer north,” he said to the helmsman.

As the boat approached the stricken destroyer, Henning could ascertain that the ship was sinking. To him it was no danger any more. It was still floating, but not for long. It certainly had had plenty of time to transmit a wireless message about its plight, and soon other destroyers would appear on the scene to rescue the survivors and continue the hunt for him. He had to clear this area quickly, before he was pursued again. The batteries were already badly depleted from the past battle, and he could not repeat this for much longer.

Even now, he realized that he had barely scraped through with his life. A second before the explosion, the destroyer had thrown his noise-maker buoy, which was still shrieking in outrage, and

could be heard without a listening device. Had the enemy done this a few seconds earlier, the T-5 would have silenced this buoy instead of slamming into the destroyer and the U-boat would have been at his mercy.

Surely now, other ships would rush to the scene and hunt for him. No use sneaking away. He had to make some tracks.

“Steer two-seven-oh. Lookouts to the bridge—full speed ahead!” he commanded. To the L.I. he said, “Take her up, Henk.”

\* \* \*

Robert was cursing his chosen career. Nothing was safe in the Navy. Even battleships were sunk. The King already had lost a few of them. He should have thought of this when he had still had the opportunity, and Uncle Hux has asked him to hunt U-boats from behind his desk. Now it was too late. His hands hurt badly and were blue. So was his face.

“Please, God, I’ll never go out to sea again if you’ll let me live!” he prayed.

He did not think that this could help, but on impulse he just felt that he had to explore all avenues open to him, even if they were not listed in his Navy handbook for survival at sea.

Suddenly there was a sound of rushing water. Was that a big fish about to eat him? Alarmed he turned around. His fear-widened eyes detected a periscope coming straight at him. In a super-human effort his arms spread out and his frozen feet managed a few kicks as he embraced and hugged that big pole as the only thing of substance in this grey emptiness. His arms clung to it for dear life and he was dragged along, feeling that the boat under him was rising. Already his stiff feet felt a solid deck under him as he slid down that greasy pole, then he saw the U-boat’s conning tower emerging from the water like a mermaid. Foaming water was spilling off the bridge and was running down the sides. In amazement, Robert looked down on this new platform that had rescued him.

Was this the answer to his prayers? Could they work that fast?



Slowly, he let go of the periscope and stepped down onto the bridge deck as the U-boat's forward deck broke the surface and emerged sluggishly. His legs hardly supported him as he stumbled toward the railing and clung to it. Already, he saw the upper hand-wheel of the downward hatch turning before the hatch clanked open. Robert's body ached, and his legs threatened to give way under him as he clung to the railing.

The moment the hatch sprang open, a string of men emerged with practised speed, all hurrying to the outer bridge, bringing their binoculars to their eyes, staring out to sea. From the stern came some hollow, low-pitched coughs, and then the diesels rumbled to life, accelerating the boat to form a foaming wake.

All the men looked the same. Dressed in oilskins, with oilskin fisher hats, they looked out to sea, scanning the horizon for some sign of the enemy. Nobody looked at the alien on the bridge. No enemy was supposed to be here. The men had emerged from the hatch like ferocious bull-ants crawling out of a hole, ready to bite whatever was threatening their nest. Single-mindedly, they had hurried to their predetermined places to cover their allocated sector of water and airspace.

Two men stood at the centre front of the bridge. One of them had to be the captain. Robert put his bet on the taller one. He had been the first one to emerge from the hatch, putting his binoculars to his eyes and studying the water all around instead of seeing Robert.

He was right. That man slowly dropped his glasses and left them dangling on their straps. Now he looked around and checked on his crew. His eyes fell on Robert, who was dressed like the other men, but had no hat and no binoculars strapped to his chest.

There was no reason to be shocked. This man was clearly out of order. Fancy coming up without binoculars. How dare he, and who the hell was he? In his mind, Henning paraded the faces of the 60 odd men who served in his boat—this one did not fit. Besides,

this man seemed to be wet and was shivering. His head was bare and the red hair was sticking in wet strands to his face. Still, it was a confusing task to remember the faces of U-boat men. They were forever changing. In port they were clean-shaven, and when out at sea their faces were hidden under bushy beards.

“What the hell are you doing up here?” Henning asked in German, in an irritated tone. He insisted on the utmost discipline on board and tolerated no foul-ups. “What is your name, sailor?”

“I’m sorry, sir, I’m Lieutenant Robert McKay.”

The captain’s jaw fell open. His eyes wandered over to *Dauntless*, which at that moment lifted up her bow and slowly started sliding down to the deep bottom of the Rose Garden, which accommodated all nationalities. His eyes returned to Robert.

“Stupid question—you’re from over there, aren’t you?”

With his chin the captain pointed to the spot where seconds ago *Dauntless* still had been. He spoke very good English.

“Yes, sir,” Robert answered.

He was soaking wet, and shivered from the cold as he held on to the cold steel of the railing, while the boat heaved in the long north Atlantic waves. By now, the bow of the U-boat had lifted further out of the water and with increased speed the wind cut into Robert’s skin.

Kapitänleutnant Henning was silent again. He had planned this trip carefully, but this was something he had *not* figured on. He had a long trip ahead of him, and before he reached his destination he expected to shoot and be shot at. His boat could spring a leak, or he could get a toothache, but a passenger? That was out of the question.

Robert felt a knot forming in his stomach under the captain’s stare. He was dying from the cold, and longed for a warm cabin and some dry clothes.

Another man came up. After a short, curious glance at Robert, he unfolded an antenna and turned it slowly, as though searching the air for some radio signals.

"No radar signals, sir," he reported and continued turning his antenna.

A grunt from the captain.

Robert's uneasiness increased under the captain's silent contemplation. He had expected Gestapo-type questions to be fired at him and was prepared to answer with name, rank and serial number, but this silence was maddening. He had the distinct feeling that his life depended on the flip of a coin. After all, here were two enemies facing each other. At the Russian front they would try to shoot each other at this range, but in the Navy? Wasn't there *some* chivalry left on earth?

Sometime sailors shot each other, too. Certainly they did in the time of the buccaneers, but these were more civilized times. And what about God? He had come across with a million to one chance to save his life—after that, could he let him down?

"What in blazes am I going to do with you?" the captain suddenly came to life. "You couldn't just swim past and let me go? It is strictly against regulations to pick up survivors. You had to come up to the bridge and put me in this awful situation?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"If I had any sense and followed my orders, I'd throw you overboard again."

"Wouldn't be human, sir."

"You think that was human?" the captain's chin jerked towards the resting place of the ill-fated *Dauntless*. "Lots of fine men died there. What a bloody waste."

"That was different, sir, we were shooting at each other."

Robert was longing to be permitted to go down into the boat, which he suspected to be warm and cosy. He did not feel like philosophising with the captain about the pros and cons of war. The

lookouts paid no heed to them. Their glasses kept sweeping along the horizon in their allocated sectors.

"Tell you what," the captain seemed to have come up with a solution. "This place is extremely dangerous. As you know, we will be pursued every mile we go. Most likely we will be shot and sunk. Your chances of survival are much better if you jump overboard and wait. Someone is certain to come along and rescue you. What do you say?"

Hopefully he looked at Robert. The wind had increased and dusk descended slowly on the waves.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, sir," Robert was desperate. "Out there, I would not last 30 minutes. It will be dark in a few minutes. Nobody is going to find me."

"I will give you a rubber float to keep you dry," the captain bargained.

"I'm all wet, sir. Even up here on the bridge I couldn't survive another ten minutes."

Again the captain contemplated, and Robert hoped that his ordeal would soon come to a happy end. He was perfectly willing to take his chances with a captain who had battled with *Dauntless* and won.

Henning was still undecided. On a short Atlantic patrol, he would have welcomed picking up of a survivor, preferably the captain, and keeping him for identification and interrogation, but in this case, embarking on a trip around the world, it would be stupid to do so.

Still, could he throw a man overboard and murder him? Making a sudden decision, the captain turned to the officer next to him.

"Keep running—you're in charge Number One," he said. "Steer two-four-zero."

"Get down there, Lieutenant," the captain addressed Robert and waved toward the hatch.

With stiff legs, Robert lowered himself along the vertical ladder into the conning tower, where he hesitated for a moment. But the captain's feet were on his head, so he went further down, until he stood in the *Zentrale*.

The general picture was familiar—Navy machinery, lots of gauges, switches and pipes, all hidden from the sunlight as in *Dauntless*, only this place was brightly lit.

This was the pulsing heart of the enemy who had been hunted by *Dauntless*. The men, each busy with his own chores, were staring at him curiously, then turning back to whatever they had been doing. The whole picture looked very similar to the central control room aboard *Dauntless*, except there was no throne in the middle.

The air was thick with the smell of oil and the sweat of a dense crowd of men, but it was warm in here. Robert started to peel off the outer layer of his clothes and ceased to shiver. Already he was regaining the normal use of his limbs.

The huge MAN diesel engines made more noise than a destroyer's turbines, and through the hatch in the bulkhead he could see them operating. The many cylinders in the blocks on each side of the aisle were crowned by a forest of valve tappets, which were rocking furiously in rhythm with the noise like giant fists.

Robert had shed his life vest, his oilskin and the duffle coat, but his other clothes were still wet and clung to him. He longed to get rid of them and looked around for help.

The captain came to his aid. He had gone into his cabin and now emerged from behind the curtain with a bundle of crumpled clothes.

"Here," he said, and handed them to Robert. "Put these on and get out of your wet gear before you get pneumonia and become a nuisance for our doctor, too. You can keep them. You can undress there."

He pointed to a curtain forward of his cabin.

\* \* \*

Adam was off duty. He had been at his battle station when they fired that torpedo, operating the starboard switchboard. It was a job for seasoned men. Split second reaction was required when evading water bombs. There was no time for dreaming about girls and a peaceful life ashore.

Through the round hatch in the last bulkhead, he jumped into the aft quarters. The torpedo was gone, and they had a bit more breathing space. All the off-duty men were already there, their smiles unfrozen, the terror past. They were back to bantering and joking. It felt good to be alive. Having survived this ordeal, crowned by the sinking of a destroyer, made the younger ones among them feel like veteran U-boat men.

Adam took off his shoes, heaved himself up into his bunk and turned his face to the wall. There was a picture of his latest girl on the wooden door of his locker. What was her name? Monika—no, Monika was the one he had in Stettin. This must be Susi, the one he had picked up in Kiel. Pictures of girls changed with every port the boat left. Adam chuckled silently. The girls always had a ready supply of photos of themselves. Maybe Goebbels provided those pictures for distribution to keep up the morale of the armed forces.

To Adam the pictures were important. When he lay in his bunk it was time for dreaming, and one slid too easily into a nightmare in which one dreamed of a bleak future. Seeing the image of a beautiful female helped enormously to keep one's mind on track.

A sailor needs an anchor like Susi ashore to pin his off duty thoughts on. How could one fall asleep instantly if one permitted the mind to brood over the last battle and the possible consequences? One had only four hours time to sleep and then wake up for another four hour stretch of concentrated duty. These four hours of rest were precious. There was no room for brooding. They could only be filled with sleep if one had pleasant things to think about—pleasant things like Susi.

Hein was sitting on the lower bunk, still bragging about his torpedo. He did not need his sleep. Like George Unterhuber, the cook, he had a bunk all to himself, and was not tied to a four hour shift. Although George had his galley mid-ships, his bunk was aft. He was a noisy fellow. He had a good voice and his nick-name was Caruso. Right now he was strumming a guitar and was singing ‘auf einem Seemannsgrab.’ An unfortunate choice of song, to sing about a sailor’s grave, when they all had just jumped off the devil’s shovel, but it had no adverse effect on the men. In their brains the thought of dying was blocked out, except during the time of water bombing.

Most of the men were already asleep. Noise did not bother any of the sleepers. Down in the bunk at Adam’s feet, Joe was already snoring. In the opposite bunk Karl Steinpilz, a diesel stoker, was already sleeping, too. His cover blanket had shifted, and his penis had erupted out of his fly. It was standing up like a flagpole. His dreams were on the proper track.

Adam took a last look at the picture of Monika—no, it was Susi. He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

\*            \*            \*

Robert had disposed of his wet gear, and changed into the captain’s dry clothes, when he came out from behind the curtain. Awkwardly, he stood in the aisle between the officers’ bunks, not knowing what would happen next.

Men purposefully moved past him, brushing him with curious glances as they appraised him, wondering what an enemy looked like. They were supposed to be enemies, the very people who had tried to kill each other only an hour ago. In the media, enemies always were portrayed with a devilish smirk when they did their killing, however, here they all looked very much like the men on *Dauntless*.

There was no animosity between them.

Suddenly the curtain to the captain's quarters opened and the captain gave Robert a sign to enter. He went in, and Henning closed the curtain behind him.

"Well then," the captain started, "let's get on with our business. Sit down."

He pointed to a chair.

Robert sat down on the chair in front of the captain, who sat on his bunk. He looked around. The room was sparsely furnished. Only three chairs, a small table and a bunk filled the room completely, with no space to spare. Instead of a door, there was only a curtain.

Expectantly, Robert looked at the captain and braced himself for questioning. He was still filled with gratitude, and would have liked to tell that man all he wanted to know but, as a British officer, he knew that he could not divulge more than his name, rank and serial number.

"What was your name again?" the captain started.

"I'm Lieutenant Robert McKay, sir, serial number—"

"Never mind your serial number, Robert. Tell me the name of your ship."

"I'm not permitted to answer that, sir."

The captain smiled thinly, and for a moment inspected his fingernails, contemplating. Here was a man who could answer a burning question that had bothered him all day, but obviously he intended to stick to international rules and was not prepared to divulge any information.

"Well now, Robert, that ship does not exist anymore," the captain was persuasive. "You can tell me what lies down there at the bottom of the sea."

"That was HMS *Dauntless*, sir," Robert agreed.

Henning fell silent again.

At the moment the U-boat was running at maximum speed, which was not too much slower than the speed of a destroyer. Any



additional ships from the blockade line, hurrying to the aid of the stricken destroyer, would have to run full speed to catch up with him. He was happy as long as he could escape their radar range. The radar range—there was something about the radar range that bothered him. What was wrong with his *Naxos*?

The captain shifted his focus from his fingernails back to Robert. There was the answer, but how to extract it? In the olden days they would have used thumb screws, or put this fellow on the rack and torn his limbs away one by one. He chuckled inwardly at that thought. He was a civilized man. There must be other ways.

“Was your ship new?” the captain tried again after a while.

“Yes, sir.” No harm in that.

“When I saw your ship first, you were coming like a charging bull out of the fog. Weren’t you afraid of a collision?”

“Not with our radar, sir.”

“I suppose your radar must be very good, to see us in that weather.”

“The very best, sir. We saw you all the time.”

“So you came guided by your radar straight for us?”

“Of course, sir.”

“What other ships are out there?”

“I’m a junior officer and do not know that, sir. Besides, if I knew, I would not be allowed to answer that.”

Henning pondered for a moment over Robert’s answer, then he suddenly sprang to life. “Captain to bridge—crash dive!” he yelled through the curtain into the control room. “Go to 100 metres!”

Immediately the alarm bells rang, and the boat slowly heeled forward as the rumble of the diesels died away. The captain waited until the boat had levelled out at the required depth, then he called out, “Captain to Number One—prepare to snorkel at maximum speed! And throw an *Aphrodite*!” he added, as an afterthought.

Hennings sat down on one of the other chairs. A thin smile softened the hard lines of his stubbly face.

"Well, Bob," he started, slightly amused, "do they call you Bob?"

"Not often, sir—not since I'm in the Navy, sir."

"Well then, you're not in the Navy any more. Not in the English one, anyhow. I'll call you Bob. I like you, you saved my life."

"I did?"

"Whether you like it or not, you must realize that your hide is now at risk the same as ours. If we die, so do you, along with everyone else on board. Do you realize in what situation you have placed yourself by playing on our hospitality?"

"Yes, sir, come to think of it."

"Just think of it," the captain interrupted Robert. "Your friends are now trying to kill you with the same zeal as they are pursuing us."

Robert thought of Uncle Hux and his purple lines. He thought of the lovely Eve Fowler, whose deadly finger was at this moment pointing straight at him.

"Just think of it," the captain said again. "If you risk my hide by keeping secrets from me, it's your hide, too. Do you have anything to add?"

"No, sir."

"Well," the captain smiled, "if you think of something to help us survive, come back to me. At the moment I'm quite grateful. I could hug you. You just saved all our lives."

"I did?" Robert's eyes widened. He did not understand.

"Yes, you did. You see, for me this area has become too hot to handle. Who can blame me for making tracks and high-tailing it out of here. I was complacent and trusted my normal routines. It was reckless." He paused for a moment and then continued, "You just told me that our anti-radar device cannot be trusted."

"I did?"

"You did. We were heading with hurrah into doom, and you along with us."

"I don't see that I told you anything I shouldn't have." Robert still did not understand.

"You might not see, Robert, but you told me that you had us clearly on your radar screen. If that is true, then our Naxos should have warned us, and we should have submerged, before you could see us. All this tells me that your ship must be equipped with a new type of radar that operates on a frequency unknown to us—a frequency which our Naxos does not pick up."

"I see."

"Yes, you see—for all I know, we might again have been on one of your radar screens while we were forging ahead west like some swashbuckling cavalryman. We were hell-bent to run into somebody's arms. You probably would know that out there was more than just one destroyer. Now we have a good chance for our escape."

"With the Aphrodite?"

"With the Aphrodite. If you're wondering, that is a balloon with metallic streamers to confuse your radar."

"I see."

In the meantime, the diesels had sprung to life again, and the boat travelled submerged with the big machines sucking their air out of the boat, and the head of the snorkel, sticking out above the water, replacing the air inside the hull.

"Well, Bob," the captain went on again. "At the moment I have other things to do. I will not ask you any more questions. Theoretically, you are a prisoner of war, but we have no facilities for that. There is no jail or any enclosure on board. We have no barbed wire and there are no men to spare to watch you. I know of a colleague who has a cat on board, and another one with a dog as a talisman. We'll keep you as a pet. There is no empty bunk for you, so I suggest you find a quiet spot and curl up somewhere on the deck if you want to sleep."

"Aye, aye, sir."

“You won’t be back to see your people until the war is over, if we survive, so we have no secrets to hide from you. You’re free to move to any place in the boat as long as you are not under anybody’s feet. Once we arrive at our destination, which is Penang, we’ll have to hand you over to a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Now run along, boy.”

The captain rose and closed the curtain behind Robert as he left.

Goodbye, Sweetheart, Robert thought. He would not see Eve Fowler for a long time to come. She would be informed that he had gone down with *Dauntless*. Next time he saw her, she would probably be married, and would have forgotten all about him. Better not to think about it again.

\* \* \*

In the morning, Admiral McCain arrived early at his office. With a groan, he sank down into the chair behind his desk and covered his aching eyes with both his hands. He felt lousy, and had not slept a wink all night. There was still the sour task of ringing his sister and telling her the bad news. He had put it off, hoping against all odds that Robert still would be found, but now he could not postpone it any longer. Deep sorrow had dug furrows in his face, and he seemed to have aged ten years in but a single night.

He was afraid to ring his sister. That woman already had lost her husband, and now this! How much pain could a woman bear?

It was easy to say that he died for his country, but this was different! This was Robert. He had been like a son to him.

He swivelled around and looked with squinted eyes up to the chart on the wall. The loss of *Dauntless*, one of his best destroyers, was devastating, but life had to go on. The trap was sprung and the enemy had escaped. The green line had pushed through his blockade and now Fowler had already extended a purple line to north of the Azores.

It was his job to watch all U-boat movements and get the convoys through, but now he had an extra task—to kill this blasted U-boat. This boat had killed Robert. As Admiral in charge of Atlantic operations, he was obliged not to let anything interfere with the smooth functioning of his job, but this was more than even he could swallow. This was personal. This screamed out for revenge!

From the beginning, it had seemed to be an easy task—a battle he could not lose. Even if it had developed into a shootout, like in a western movie, he had been convinced that McGraw was the faster gun. He was experienced, with many notches to his gun.

Now he was in hospital, along with 83 survivors.

More than 200 men were lost at sea. Along with them was Robert. The Admiral had drawn more boats from Scapa and deployed them in his search for survivors and floating bodies. They had combed the water all through the night. Alas, Robert had simply vanished. It had to be assumed that he had gone down with *Dauntless*, although surviving witnesses had stated that he had been on the quarterdeck when disaster struck. In this case, his body should have been found floating in his life jacket.

Who was to blame? The Admiralty, usually quick to nail a culprit, had not blamed anyone. It was true that perhaps the destroyers were too widely spaced to be able to assist each other, but he had three U-boats to cover.

That blasted U-boat!

Even when one of the other destroyers detected the culprit on her radar screen, it had suddenly disappeared and could not be found any more. Like a slippery eel, it had evaded the trap.

“Bloody Houdini, that’s what he is,” McCain grunted to himself, but he did not despair. He was sure that he would get that culprit, if it was the last thing on earth he did. Even Houdini had died in his own trap.

Depressed, the Admiral supported his worried face in both his hands, with his gold-braided elbows supported on the desk. Count-

less ships and convoys in the Atlantic depended on him for their safety, but at the moment he could only think of Robert. He had loved him like a son—and then there was his mother. I should not have given him this dangerous commission. As a good uncle, I should have stuffed him away somewhere behind a desk, to wait out the end of the war, but how can you put the brakes on those young firebrands who want to win the war single-handed?

He thought of his own young years, before the First World War. He, too, had been a lieutenant once. A dozen horses couldn't have held him back from participating on the firing line. Even now, he was itching to climb onto the bridge of a destroyer, and follow in the wake of that damned U-boat. These were the facts of life. In hindsight, everyone has all the answers.

Well, it was now up to him to get even with the enemy. An eye for an eye, that was the way. Of course, he would not neglect his duty of guiding convoys safely across the Atlantic, but there would be enough spare time to concentrate on his vendetta against that particular target.

He rose and went into the concrete bunker of the submarine surveillance room. His whole body ached from lack of sleep.

"Good morning, sir."

Third Officer Fowler jumped to her feet and stood to attention. She did not look as crisp as usual.

"Morning, Fowler—you're early."

"Not really, sir. I haven't been home yet. I sat all night by the telephone, hoping for some news from the fleet."

The Admiral grunted and went straight to the chart. "Anything new along this line?" His finger traced the purple line, which pointed to the Azores.

"Nothing yet, sir."

"Has Bletchley Park come up with an identification yet?"

"Not positively yet, sir, but we have U-Büchel and U-Oesten identified. They went north around Iceland, through the ice belt, so

this one must be *U-859*, so we have the culprit isolated. We'll know him for sure as soon as he starts transmitting."

"Bloody idiot!" the Admiral growled. "Dönitz ordered him to report his position every day. He doesn't play fair."

For a moment he glared from the portrait of Dönitz on the wall near the chart, then he turned to go. He was a busy man. At times there were more than 600 merchant ships in the Atlantic, and hundreds of escort vessels to protect them. All that had to be organized. Had it not been for Robert, *Dauntless* would have been but another casualty. But now, he would keep a special eye on this boat. In the early years of the war the enemy would have had a good chance of getting away, but by now the whole Atlantic had been covered by surveillance aircraft without a gap. This U-Henning had no chance to get away.

\* \* \*

The sea was reasonably calm and the boat proceeded submerged at snorkel depth.

Robert remained forward of the control room, which seemed to be the officers' quarters. A gold-rimmed officer's cap lay on one of the bunks. The place was cramped, like every space in that cigar-shaped hull, giving only the barest amount of room necessary for a minimum level of comfort.

Robert felt uncomfortable in his role as pet on board. What did the captain say? Penang was their destination. In his mind, he looked at a chart of the world. That was a long way to go. It would take many months at the pace they were travelling. During all this time he would have to establish some relationship with the crew. Even a cat gets stroked on its back and purrs.

He stood aside when a man came past. Nobody on board wore any sign of rank or identification. The man stopped and looked at Robert.

"I'm Oberleutnant Schneider," he introduced himself and extended a friendly hand. "I'm the Number One on board."

"I'm Lieutenant McKay." Robert shook hands. "I'm grateful that I don't have to swim out there."

"Yes," the officer chuckled. "Aren't you lucky? The way you hitch-hiked a ride was quite unique. Something to tell your grandchildren one day."

"I'm surprised at your good command of English," Robert commented.

"Well, that is no surprise. I was a merchant man before I was drafted into the Navy. All merchant men speak English."

"Then you were in England, too?"

"I was everywhere, even in Scotland, where you seem to come from."

"Did you like Scotland?"

"I like the people there. I like to listen to you. I like the Scottish burr. It gives a strong colour to the English language."

"The captain did not seem to share your sentiments. He was most reluctant to pick me up." Robert took a liking to this man and felt like talking. "There was a time when I feared that he would throw me back into the sea."

"Do you blame him? To him, you are just a bloody nuisance. This boat is fine-tuned, with all supplies, and you're another mouth to feed. It will be a long trip, that."

"I feel awful to be a nuisance."

Schneider smiled broadly.

"At least you're still alive. As long as we are, that is."

"You think you'll make it?"

"We better, but that you have to ask the captain. We all have to trust him. With him, we'll live or die."

"Like you trust the Führer?"

Robert had heard much about the insidious political activities in Germany. Papers were full of ridicule and cartoons about the enemy. These men on the U-Boat did not fit that image and he wondered what made them tick.



Schneider frowned in anger.

"The captain decides if we take risks or not. Whether we live or die is dependent on the decisions he makes. What has the Führer to do with it?"

"He brought the war upon us in the first place."

"Is that what they tell you in England? Funny you should say that. They tell us in Germany that England declared war on Germany. What did you expect when your government did that? A protest note? You should have realized then that declaring war means bombs and fires and death and misery."

"You wish the war to end?" Robert smiled thinly, remembering that only hours ago he had feared that the war might end before he had a chance to distinguish himself.

"Doesn't everybody? Let's not talk about politics. From earliest childhood all people are politically primed, and we are primed differently and never would agree. I, too, sometimes listen to the BBC news broadcast and know what lies they tell you, and I know what lies *our* government tells us. We blame you and you blame us. The winner of this struggle will be the righteous one, like always in the past. Might is right in world politics. The two of us cannot bring a change to that."

He sat down on his bunk and invited Robert to do the same.

"By the way," he changed the subject. "Do you speak German?"

"A bit. I learned it at high school and was quite good at it, but I would be a bit rusty now."

"Well," Schneider smiled, "here is a chance to improve it. You never know, it might come in handy when we survive the war."

"I hope we will. The captain said he will hand me over to the Japanese when we get there. That's a pretty dim future. Is there no German prison camp?"

“No, we have no rights at all down there in Asia. We’re just guests of the Japanese. Our bases are leased and granted under these conditions.”

“Well,” Robert rose. “I think I’ll start my German lessons. You think I can make a tour of the boat?”

“Go right ahead, Lieutenant. Just don’t get under anybody’s feet.”

“I’ll watch it.”

Robert turned and went aft, drawing curious looks as he passed through the *Zentrale*.

For the moment he was safe, but the prospect of ending up in a Japanese prison camp disturbed him. Maybe the war would end before then.

A thin smile curled around his lips, in a face that already needed shaving. A few hours ago he would have hated for the war to end before he had acquired a few more stripes on his uniform—now he could not get it over quickly enough.

## Chapter 6

The weather had deteriorated.

They were still traveling on snorkel, and Adam was on duty. Idly, he sat on the deck between the switchboards, next to Joe. Proceeding under snorkel in this weather was most uncomfortable. Every time the snorkel head cut under a big wave—and that was often—a valve sealed the air intake of the device and the mighty diesels sucked their air out of the boat. They were causing a vacuum inside, which would snap back to normal pressure as soon as the snorkel poked its head out of the water.

The crew went about their duty open mouthed, trying to keep the pressure on their eardrums equalized.

The fresh water distiller, too, could not be operated. The boiling point of water depended on the ambient air pressure, and with that fluctuating violently, the fine-tuning of the delicate machine could not be maintained.

With nothing to do, Adam had trouble keeping his eyes open. They were now a week under way, and his body had not yet adapted to the four hour sleep cycle. Whenever he relaxed, his eyelids drooped and his brain tried to switch off.

Somebody approached and he brought his eyes back into focus. It was the prisoner, that Englishman he had heard about. Funny he should be English—he looked just like anybody else.

"*Guten Tag*," the man said with a heavy tongue when he saw Adam idling on the deck.

"Hallo, good day," Adam said in English and rose. "I can speak a bit English, too. I know a lot of words and have read many books, but I never spoke to anybody. I would like to learn to speak and understand. Once I listened to an English radio station and did not understand a word. Maybe you can teach me."

It was a long speech, spoken with a heavy German accent and awful pronunciations.

"I see what you mean—no sweat!" Robert smiled.

"Sweat?" Adam's eyes widened.

"Ah, well, I mean I will be glad to," Robert tried to express himself in simpler terms. "I have the same problem. I know a bit of German and want to improve it."

"Plenty of time for that. None of the others can speak English. You can practise on them."

Adam extended a hand. "I'm Adam West," he introduced himself. "I'm the electrician here."

"And I'm Robert McKay, the prisoner," Robert shook hands with Adam.

"Now, that I understood," Adam beamed. "As I said, I have read many books and have a good vocabulary, but it is one thing to read and write a language, and quite another to understand it. I have to get my ears used to it yet."

"We'll get there, we'll work on it."

Adam was pleased.

Sometimes he had already pondered his future. There was life beyond the Navy. Like it had been for millions of other people, the war had interrupted his education, and being a sailor was something he was stuck with only during the war. One day that would be over, and he would have to chose some civilian career. Being fluent in another language was a good step toward it.

\* \* \*

Proceeding under snorkel had become intolerable. Even Henning, with his urge to run, had had enough. He sent up the rear periscope, which was down in the control room. It was an old-fashioned type, without a hydraulic seat to sit on, but this lens could also be angled up to search the sky for aircraft, while the main periscope in the conning tower was used only for attack.

The sea was empty and so was the sky. They had done enough mileage from the battlefield and were now out well into the Atlantic.

"Prepare to surface!" Henning called out. "Lookouts, Naxos to the bridge!"

He donned his oilskin and climbed the vertical ladder, always to be the first one out.

"Surface!" he called, when all the men, dressed in their weatherproof gear, had assembled in the tower.

The L.I., standing behind the planesmen, who held the boat level at snorkel depth, had his eyes on the depth gauge. There were two of them, one calibrated to indicate a depth up to three hundred metres, and a second one only down to twenty-five metres, to be used when travelling near the surface.

"Blow ballast tanks, forward planes, up ten degrees!" the L.I. commanded.

With a violent hiss, compressed air now blew into the ballast tanks and pressed the ballast water out through the flood gates in the bottom of the boat. These flood gates were always open when out at sea, ready to crash dive at any time. Only the air in the tanks kept the ballast water from entering.

"Fifteen metres!" The L.I. counted out the depth while the boat was rising.

In the meantime the captain, with the lookouts behind him, had already climbed the ladder to the top. The moment the L.I.'s depth reading indicated that the top of the bridge had cleared the surface,

the captain unscrewed the hatch and pushed it open. He hurried out, and the lookouts behind him sprinted into their positions.

The boat lifted up sluggishly, with the deck still awash and thrashing in the waves. The big diesels never ceased rumbling, and the exhaust valves of the big machines were now set to feed their pressure into turbines, which pumped low pressure air and exhaust gas into the ballast tanks to preserve precious compressed air.

Slowly, the boat lifted higher out of the water, while in the diesel room the compressors sprang to life, to top up the compressed air bottles, which had been used for surfacing.

It was reasonably safe to proceed surfaced, because the sea was getting very rough, and even the most modern enemy radar would have difficulty detecting the low silhouette of the boat in these heaving waves.

As the day progressed, the wind increased rapidly and turned into a storm. They sailed straight into a westerly gale, which seemed to exhibit personal spite with every blow it dealt them. The U-boat staggered and rolled drunkenly in the giant waves north of Biscay.

First the powerful diesels would push the boat up a wave, where it would hang a moment suspended on the crest, its bow sticking out in the air, with the bow planes exposed like the ears of a charging elephant, then it would dip the bow and race down the slope to bury its head into the foot of the next wave. The boat nearly disappeared, with water thrashing over the bridge in spite of the deflectors. At last, the boat would pop up again and start to climb the next wave, while water crashed against the hull with explosive sounds.

The Type IX-D2 boat was one of the biggest of its kind, but even this one was tumbled by the sea like a little dinghy drifting in a storm.

The lookouts and the captain were lashed to the boat to prevent them being washed overboard, because they were submerged

with every wave that washed over the bridge. The bridge hatch was closed, with only a split open to let the Naxos cable through, and that split permitted every wave to pour gallons of water into the control room.

While Henning, as the captain, had to be on duty around the clock, his place was not necessarily on the bridge, and he could have left the place to Number Two, who was lashed on next to him. He could have ridden out the storm in the comfort of his cabin, but he felt himself to be the only one responsible for all of them and remained outside in these dangerous waters.

On the bridge the men did not use their binoculars. With naked eyes the men stared into the storm, dreading the waves, which would deprive them for a moment of their precious breathing air and seep into their clothing until they emerged again. Struggling up and down the waves, the boat proceeded on its course, with the bridge crew isolated from the cosy interior of the boat.

A lonely sea-gull overtook the boat. Without much horsepower, hardly flapping its wings, it flew against the wind smoothly, without effort. It was faster than the struggling boat and disappeared beyond the turbulent horizon.

The captain had looked at it with envy. That was the way he longed to escape to safety. He could have dived the boat and proceeded under water. Down in the deep, there were no stormy waves. The boat would travel peacefully, but his mind was set on escaping these dangerous waters. The hunters on his heels were more dangerous than the elements of nature. In fact, the whole Atlantic was a dangerous battlefield. Only when he had reached the Indian Ocean could he relax and enjoy life again.

Down below, the men were unafraid of storms. The weather was hell only to the men on the bridge. Inside the boat, the men were as safe as if sealed in a ball. No matter how the sea raged and tried to swallow them, their ball would always pop up again. It

could not sink. The only inconvenience was that the deck disappeared under one's feet, only to slam up again the next moment.

The crew consisted of selected men. No timid soul could stand such punishment. All in their late teens or early twenties, they were already men of steel, in the prime of their lives. Even the three junior officers were barely twenty-two. With men like these one could move mountains. They had no fear of the sea. They trusted their machinery. Inside the hull they felt protected, like in their mother's arms. The boat was in its natural element and they were part of it.

They were all young, but they had shed their boyhood and their past, save the dialect that coloured their speech. Now they were U-boat men, feeling the pride, belonging and brotherhood that all these men held for each other. From amateurs they had graduated to become grimly competent professionals, with skills and toughness, who could perform their specialized tasks in any kind of weather.

For hours on end the boat battled with the elements of nature.

Finally the captain had enough. He thought that he had put enough mileage between the last battlefield and his present position. Between each breaker the hatch was opened, and he sent the men down one by one. Finally, he closed the valve to the voice pipe and went down himself. The boat's cosy interior felt like heaven to the bridge men, who eagerly peeled out of their wet clothes.

"Take her down to 200 metres!" the captain shouted down, from the top of the ladder.

He closed the hatch above him, shutting out the weather, and descended into the control room, where he shed his clothing.

\* \* \*

Admiral McCain was frustrated.



Already it was May, and he still had not killed that blasted U-boat—or either of the other two, for that matter. He knew now for certain who his quarry was. It was U-Henning that he was chasing.

Not that the boat had disappeared and could no longer be found. He knew *exactly* where it was. The green line was clearly marked on the chart, and followed the boat like a trace of leaking oil. The Admiral's dilemma was that he had to be economical with his forces deployed in the Atlantic. Protecting convoys had to take priority, and he had to wait his turn, when the green line came near his attacking forces. There still was plenty of time. No need to panic. He could afford to lie down like a cat in front of a mouse hole and wait his turn.

The Admiralty would take a dim view of it, and declare him incompetent, if he should send his whole force out to chase a single U-boat—although he had often felt like doing so. There had been times when he had sent a destroyer out to sniff along that green line, or had sent special aircraft out when it was convenient, but so far nobody had succeeded in sinking the enemy. In the wide Atlantic he sank U-boats right, left and centre—but not this one.

It was inevitable that he developed a healthy respect for the skipper of that hunted boat. To him, the chase had become a personal challenge. However, that altered nothing about the fact that he wanted this boat sent to the bottom of the sea to join *Dauntless*. Every morning, when he came on duty, his first task was to check that green line, which advanced with every day that passed.

The boat popped up sporadically and reported its position, as if mocking him, like in a children's game of hide and seek. It served only to bring the green line up to date. It did not contribute toward its downfall.

McCain groaned and looked at the picture of Robert, which he had lately put on his desk. It would remain standing there until he had avenged his death. There he still was, standing proudly in his

blue uniform with the two golden braids around his sleeves. Lieutenant Robert McKay, in all his life-like splendour.

It had been an ordeal to notify his mother. She had been crushed, and still had not recovered from the shock. Now she was in hospital, being treated for a nervous breakdown. This bloody war!

An eye for an eye. He would not let Robert down. In the end, that German skipper would have to pay!

\* \* \*

No gale of this force lasts forever, or the very fabric of the globe would crack. Totally exhausted, the storm ran out of steam and the boat could safely surface again.

There was no moon. The stars flickered golden from a clear, black sky, and a soft breeze blew over the gentle waves from the south, as the boat proceeded surfaced under full power. Now she was charging her batteries, which had been exhausted during the lengthy underwater travel. There was little danger at night, with the U-boat-hunting aircraft operating mainly during the day.

The captain decided that this was a good time to take his bearings by the stars and check his positioning against his dead reckoning track below. He asked for his sextant to be sent up to the bridge. The weather conditions were perfect. The horizon was still visible as a crisp line, the stars were bright and the boat rocked little.

They had weathered the rough waters of the northern Atlantic, had left behind the blockade guards, and from now on everything should go downhill. The water would get warmer. During the day, the white-capped grey of the northern waves had changed to a pleasant blue, and there was no need to wear oilskins any more. With the water warming up, they soon could have a shower now and then.

Receiving his sextant, Henning set it up, scanning the sky for a suitable star to shoot. Reading off the angle above the horizon, he

shouted the results down to the control room, where petty officer Braun's pencilled lines on the chart eventually converged into a small triangle.

"Two hundred miles west of the Azores," he reported the position up to the captain.

"Steer one-seven-zero!" The captain shouted down the new course and handed the sextant down to be transferred to his cabin. It was now confirmed that he had left the north Atlantic, with all its hardships and inconveniences, behind him.

Now the boat proceeded on a southerly course. On the bridge it was Oberleutnant Schneider's watch, but the captain remained up and let the soft breeze caress his face, which already had the beginnings of a sprouting beard.

It was one of those starry nights poets write about, but it was neither the time nor the place to write poetry. The war was still raging, and this was only a temporary lull.

Henning's thoughts returned home. With his aloof, impersonal attitude, it was hard to imagine that he, too, had a private life and liked to dwell on it. Sometimes he was dreaming of the future. There was Barbara and Nicole. Back in Germany they were becoming desperate in their need for soldiers. They were drafting them at ever younger age groups.

In the past he had seen so little of them. He wondered how he would adapt to a life ashore, being on duty from nine to five and then spending the evening with his family. That was very attractive. He certainly would not miss the icy Atlantic breakers, but what about these balmy nights at sea—the fulfilling companionship of a crew that looked at him as a father figure? He would have to hand in his commander's cap, which gave him unlimited authority.

Listening to the radio broadcasts from home, which already were heavily censored by Goebbels, he realized that it was high time to end the war. To continue it could only lead to total disaster.

He hoped that someone was bright enough to find a formula to stop it. It definitely had to happen before the enemy invaded German soil. He cringed at that thought. He was sure that all German people wanted the war to end, but had no idea how to do it. They found themselves on a treadmill, with no way to jump off.

As a military man, Henning had never been approached to join a political organization, but he was brought up to be a fiery nationalist. He loved Germany and its colourful history. He was trained to defend it with his life, but at the moment it was hard to determine what was right or wrong. He was not yet primed to question the actions of his government, which determined what was politically correct.

Home—ah—home!

The face of that white-capped warrior on the bridge assumed a dreamy expression. Wouldn't it be nice if he could be the head of his family, instead of heading 60 sailors? His daughter needed a father desperately. His three-monthly flying visits had no effect on her.

Actually, most German children missed out on the proper parental support. They were groomed to blindly follow their appointed leaders.

"Target at two o'clock!" the starboard lookout cried suddenly, interrupting Henning's contemplation.

The captain trained his night binoculars onto the indicated direction. In spite of the black night, a bright line of the sinking sun still lingered over the rim of the southwestern horizon. Clearly against that line he could make out a ship traveling on a north-easterly course.

For a moment Henning was torn between his desire to run for safety and his duty to fulfill his job as the commander of a U-boat. He had more than twenty torpedoes on board and was expected to dispose of them in the most rational manner. The crew, too, expected him to act his part.

With his glasses trained on the target—target? Why was he shooting targets? The war had been lost at Stalingrad, and they should taper down, but he was a soldier—a German officer—and had to act like one. Quickly, he assessed the situation. This was a single, lonely ship, traveling without an escort. That made the decision easy.

“All below!” he commanded. “Steer two-three-zero!”

He watched the crew tumble down the ladder, while the boat heeled over with the change in direction.

“Dive!” he called, and closed the cock to the voice pipe. He followed the lookouts and slammed the hatch shut above his head.

He remained in the conning tower and shouted down, “Fifteen metres, both half ahead!”

Acknowledgements, more commands from the L.I., and a quick rush of men to their action stations followed. Every man knew what to do and nothing was forgotten.

They were all human beings and had their individual weaknesses. Sometimes they even indulged in day-dreaming, but when action was required, they were tuned to perfection. With this intricate machinery one had to be extremely dependable. Everyone was a cog in the finely greased functioning of *U-859*.

With his standard stance, arms folded before him, the L.I. stood behind the planesmen, giving clipped commands. The ‘half ahead’ speed was enough to keep the boat level using the planes, without worrying too much about trimming with the ballast tanks to compensate for shifts due to movement of the crew.

Henning sat in his revolving chair, with his eye glued to the lens of the periscope.

Down in the control room, Schneider had extended the rear periscope, while the Number Three stood next to him with the thick volumes of Groener books, which contained the silhouettes of all ships in the world for identification.

This ship would be hard to identify in the darkness of the night.

Suddenly the ship traveled across a bright spot on the horizon and Schneider got a good look at it. Quickly his expert merchant sailor's eye compared it with the pages in one of the books and he called out, "One to captain—freighter's name is *Colin*, 6,200 tons!"

"Flood tubes one to four!" came the captain's command.

Henning had not taken his eyes off the target, which was heading right into his open arms. All he had to do was wait. It was a single freighter—must have become complacent with the Allied supremacy at sea. The hunting U-boats had, by now, been driven from the sea, and what refused to go was sunk with great efficiency. Maybe this ship had missed the deadline to join a convoy, and now Henning had it on a platter.

With the gunner artificer, Neumann, on his right to read off the aiming data from the periscope, and torpedo artificer Schultz on the calculator, Henning continued to study his victim, which had closed the gap between them and was clearly visible in the deadly hair line of his optics. He started aiming.

"Bearing—now!" he called out to Neumann, who read it off the periscope and passed it on to Schultz, who entered the data into the calculator, which was operated by cranking a handle.

"Ready number one and two torpedoes!" called the captain.

The command was relayed to the forward torpedo room by telephone, where the torpedo crew now flooded the two upper torpedo tubes. They blew high pressure air into the shooting tanks, and turned the bow-cap levers to open. The indicators showed that the circular doors in front were open to the sea, and they removed the safety pins from the firing levers.

"Set target speed at fifteen," the captain dictated in the conning tower, and Schultz cranked the handles on his calculator.

"Bearing, is—now! Range is—now!" the captain could be heard and the calculator cranked again, while a mile away a ship with its crew was unaware that they were doomed to misery and possible death.

"Check director and stand by!"

The periscope bearing was now adjusted to match the movement of the target. When it came across the hairline of the periscope, the captain would start firing, spreading his torpedoes from bow to stern—torpedoes and target running on a converging course on a mathematically determined track.

"Fire one!"

From forward, there could be felt a slight thump as the first torpedo was blasted out of the tube. It armed itself a few seconds later, as it built up speed under its own propulsion, which made a little propeller in front spin. That armed the detonator.

"Fire two!" The second one was on its way.

This was no convoy, and for the U-boat there was no need for evasive action. There was no escort to fear. The captain remained in his seat. It had been a close range shot, executed like on the training grounds in the Baltic Sea.

"Steer one-eight-zero!" Henning commanded, without taking his eye off the lens, while the boat turned around.

*Wham!*

The men down in the boat were pleased. They had no biological connection with what happened on the surface of the sea. They were a shooting weapon, and they had scored a hit.

*Wham!*

A second hit. A few cries of triumph could be heard. That was what U-boat men were trained for. The boat was a success, and they were part of it.

The captain had watched his torpedoes hit.

"Sound to captain—breaking-up noises from the target," Müller reported from the hydrophones.

The sounds he meant were the bulkheads caving in as the ship sank under the load of water. It would not float for long now, with the sea already breaking in, crushing everything.

Henning kept his eye on this first target of his trip—where the decision to attack was his. He was glad that this was a freighter and not a tanker, although tankers were the prime targets of U-boats because they carried fuel for the bombers that devastated German cities.

When a tanker was hit, it caught fire easily, turning the surrounding water into a sea of flames, making escape for the crew nearly impossible. To serve on a tanker was as dangerous as to serve on a U-boat. In both cases, the ship usually went down with all hands still on board.

At the periscope, the captain watched a lifeboat pull away from the stricken ship. It was dimly illuminated by a fire that flickered on the target's deck. He liked to think that the crews of the ships he sank had enough time to save themselves. No ship, except a U-boat, sank in seconds. There was usually enough time to launch lifeboats before the ship went under.

He refused to think about it, and closed his mind to what was going on over there. U-boat commanders were specifically installed to sink ships and that was what he was doing. Pondering about consequences could only result in endless arguments.

"Surface!" he called, and sent the periscope down into its well. "Both full ahead!"

Time to make tracks again. He was sure that in the morning they would search for him. With the lookouts behind him on the ladder, he waited for the L.I. to give the necessary commands to surface the boat.

\* \* \*

Without further incident they proceeded south and crossed the equator. All work stopped for the usual boisterous ceremony of



crossing the line, when King Neptune had to initiate those on their first crossing into the brotherhood of seasoned sailors.

During the last two weeks the temperature had been rising. The annoying condensation along the hull had dried, and the air in the boat was pleasantly warm. Back aft, however, the heat had become too much to bear when they ran on the diesels, which would radiate their heat into the aft quarters, which were already hot in that tropical climate.

They made good progress now, traveling more on the surface than ever before. Henning expected that this area was less densely patrolled than the north Atlantic and he would have more elbow room to evade the enemy.

Robert was no stranger on board any more—no alien. He was just one of the men, although he was the only one without a chore. His meals were taken in the forward quarters, and he had melted into the crowd, becoming one of them. His command of their language had become quite fluent now. He found that it was similar to English, having evolved from the same source. Once he had it in his ear it came rapidly back to him.

He found a recessed corner in front of the galley where he could curl up whenever he was tired. Like the men of the technical crew, he did not know night from day. He had soon abandoned all attempts to look at the clock, trying to establish if 12:00 o'clock meant midnight or midday. He just slept whenever his biological clock called for it. He curled up in his corner like a pet, or a ship's mascot.

He smiled at that thought. He certainly was no mascot. Quite the contrary. He was well aware that, in the wake of this ship, there was a purple line, invisible to the lookouts on the bridge, but glaring on the chart in his uncle's office. When he had been at the Admiral's office, Robert had the distinct impression that his uncle had a special interest in this boat. Creating the belief that it had

killed the Admiral's nephew was certain to aggravate this situation.

Robert rose from his sleeping quarters. He would go aft and visit Adam. He looked at his watch, which still functioned after his swim in the sea. He tried to figure out if Adam would be on duty, which required some concentration. It wasn't easy to keep track, with the seamen on eight hour shifts and the machine crew changing every four hours.

He crossed the control room. It was always crowded and busy, but by now nobody wasted a second glance on him. He was like a familiar part of the pulsating machinery. A prisoner? Every U-boat should be equipped with a prisoner. This was a war, wasn't it?

The captain was sitting at the chart table, walking his dividers across the chart. Enviously, Robert looked at him for a moment. If he had been still in *Dauntless*, he would have been engaged in a similar activity. He was a navigator, and destined to command a ship one day. Fat chance of that now! All he had saved was his naked life. There was a gap in his career that would be difficult to bridge.

Through the bulkhead hatch Robert went into the diesel room. Here the heat was near unbearable. The crew was naked, stripped down to some flimsy perforated, short underpants and one man stood at the head of each diesel, ready to stop it in an instant, should the diving alarm be given.

The 4,000-horsepower machines rumbled with an ear shattering noise, and the rows of big valve tappets on each side of the slippery aisle rocked threateningly.

At the after end of the diesels, the big drive shafts were exposed, and the big clutches turned near Robert's feet as he passed by. There was danger lurking everywhere, and every man had to be at his most alert to protect himself.

Robert went through the open door into the electric room. Here the temperature was still hot, but not as bad as in the diesel

room. He found Adam down in his corner, operating the fresh water machine.

"Come on down," he invited Robert. "I see that you are sweating like a swine."

"Don't call me a swine," Robert corrected him. "You meant to call me a pig."

"What is the difference?"

"To call me a swine is an insult, to say that I sweat like a pig—I might just agree with you."

"I see," Adam laughed. "It looks like I have still a lot to learn before I become an English scholar."

"You'll get there. Anyhow, you're quite right when you observe that I'm sweating, but then this heat is murder."

"Murder?"

"Just an expression to describe this murderous heat. No humans are created to live in these conditions."

"Humans can do anything when they put their minds to it," Adam smiled. "This not the worst yet. You should be here when the alarm is given, when the cooling water to the diesels is shut off and the ventilation stopped. The heat of the diesels remains here. Added to the outside temperature, we can easily have 65° Celsius, with no wind blowing to cool us. You're lucky up front. The seamen's quarters are always nice and cool. Back here, we must be sometimes near the boiling point of flesh, can you imagine?"

"No, I can't imagine," Robert admitted. "I noticed that up in the north Atlantic you benefited from it. Here it was always warm and cosy, while up in front we were shivering."

"Yeah," Adam agreed. "Nothing is perfect. We always have to compromise."

Adam's command of English had improved dramatically these last few months. He had a good ear for the language, and spoke with confidence. To Robert's amusement, his pronunciation was

tinted with a Scottish accent from listening to Robert, who deliberately let himself go and made no attempt to disguise his heritage.

"Tell you what," Adam said presently, "this is a luxury cruiser. No other boat in the Atlantic has our amenities—only we long-range boats heading for the Pacific. I have a shower here, next to my water machine. You can have a shower now to cool yourself down."

"You have that much water?"

"A whole ocean full."

"You mean shower with sea water?"

"Of course," said Adam. "Here the water is warm and we have a special soap that lathers in salt water."

He handed Robert a cake of soap and a towel.

Robert stripped, and for the first time in months went under a shower, relishing the refreshing, equatorial water. There was no shame in exposing his naked body. Nobody hid his body on a U-boat.

## Chapter 7

Admiral McCain was in the surveillance room. Fowler was on duty and stood ready to rattle off any information about movements in the Atlantic as he might require.

Worried, the Admiral looked at the lines west of Africa, which should have been terminated long ago. Nearly all the lines were short ones and stopped abruptly in mid-ocean, but there were three lines which advanced persistently. The American Liberators had kept a close eye on the elusive enemies, but had so far failed to sink them.

Now another ship had been lost.

“He’s a stubborn fellow, that,” Eve Fowler complained. “He doesn’t stay exactly on our purple line. His track is a bit erratic, which makes it hard to nail him.”

“Yeah, we didn’t anticipate that he would bump into the *Colin*.”

“He turned south, sir. We had no way of estimating exactly when he would turn south.”

“There must be some way—” The Admiral’s voice trailed away as he considered what steps to take next.

He was getting desperate. He was running out of time and out of Atlantic. Once the boat rounded the Cape it was out of his jurisdiction. He was responsible only for the Atlantic. On the other side

of Africa it fell under Indian Ocean and Pacific Operations, and it was up to them to catch the enemy and exact his revenge. It was not the same.

The Admiral's finger went to the chart.

"This is Saint Helena," he said. As I remember, we have a lot of aircraft stationed there. There are also some destroyers waiting for convoy three-one-six coming from the Cape. Put them on his trail. I want that U-boat sunk. Now! I'm putting you in charge of this project, and you will be relieved of all other Atlantic duties."

"I will be pleased, sir."

"Good." The Admiral felt better now that a decision had been made. "I'm glad, you look pleased, too."

"Oh, I am, sir, I am. I have a personal axe to grind."

"Oh?" The Admiral looked surprised. He had thought he was the only one to take it personally.

"That young Lieutenant from *Dauntless*. I had a date with him, and I was really looking forward to it. U-859 put an end to that. If I could lay my hands on that captain, I could strangle him cold-bloodedly."

"That's the spirit!" the Admiral growled, secretly appraising the girl who might possibly have married into his family had Robert been alive.

What a pity.

Eve Fowler was made of the stuff he admired. He would have liked to embrace her into his paternal arms.

"There's another thing." The object of his contemplation interrupted his thoughts. "The American aircraft carrier *Solomons* is in that area. If you could persuade them to join in on the hunt, then—"

"Good girl!" the Admiral cut in. "I always knew you're not just a pretty face. We'll do that. They'll also have their share of destroyers to escort them. With all our combined forces, this is like

a wall in the path of the enemy. If all of them can't stop him, I'll eat my hat."

For a moment he reflected that perhaps his wager was a bit on the reckless side, but then he decided that with such forces up his sleeve it was impossible to lose. Just to be on the safe side, he crossed his fingers behind his back.

The U-boat was sure to head for Cape Town, and for a big carrier like the *Solomons*, bristling with Avenger aircraft, specialized for U-boat hunting, it was an easy case of ocean blockade. He could not fail.

Piece of cake, he thought.

\* \* \*

Adam was in his bunk, the place he loved best, because there he could dream of peaceful times. There he could look at the picture of Monika—no, it was Susi—just the same, she was beautiful and she was real. He knew, he had been in bed with her and she had been delicious. A sailor's life on these long stretches of water would be hell if it were not for such sweet memories.

"Hello, Adam," it was Robert. "I see you're off duty now. Want to have some sleep?"

"Not just yet. I need some time to simmer down. I'm just day-dreaming."

"Of that girl on the wall, I bet? Is that something permanent?"

"I like to think so," Adam smiled faintly. "If I remember correctly, I asked her to marry me, but then I have asked quite a few girls that question. It always fizzled out. One never knows what one will find when one comes back from a long trip."

How true, Robert thought. He might have asked Eve that question, had their a date eventuated, but now it all was lost.

"It's getting cooler," Robert changed the sad trend of his thoughts.

"Yes, I know," Adam agreed. "It is mid July. At home it is summer now, but we're heading into the southern hemisphere,

where it is mid-winter. Trust Dönitz to send us from one icy ocean into the other.”

“To all crew,” the intercom suddenly came to life. “Attention all crew! This is an important message from the supreme commander of all armed forces—”

“The end of the war!” Adam was breathless. He jumped up and bumped his head on the hull above, then he fell back into his bunk.

“An assassination attempt on the Führer has been made in his East Prussian headquarters,” the speaker continued. “Luckily, fate has spared our beloved Führer and he is in good health. Since this despicable attempt has been made by a clique of contemptible, treacherous Army officers, I feel it my duty to restore the Führer’s trust in us and renew our allegiance to the Führer. To demonstrate this, we will delete the military salute and replace it with the outstretched hand of the German salute. Heil Hitler!”

The speaker fell silent.

“Shit!” Adam exclaimed.

“What’s the matter, Adam?” Robert wondered. “Don’t you like the Führer?”

Was Adam angry about the military salute, or the assassination attempt on the Führer, or the failure of it?

“*Scheisse!*” Adam cursed again in German, and then reverting back to English, he continued, “I don’t care about the Führer one way or another. He is just the government, but I *do* care about the military salute. For chrissake, I practised long enough to perfect a jaunty way of doing it, and now this. I’ll feel like a damn fool—like being back in Hitler Youth.”

Protests and curses were now heard all over the boat. Nobody seemed to be pleased about the news.

“I have the distinct impression that nobody here likes the Führer,” Robert observed.



“Oh, I wouldn’t go as far as that, but most of them don’t care one way or another.” Adam groaned and his fingers touched his head, where a big bump was rising slowly. “He’s just the government. You don’t have to love your government to do your job. You just do what they tell you. Did you shoot at us because you loved Churchill?”

“Well, no,” Robert chuckled. “I just did what was my business to do.”

“You see—same here. We just do what we’re supposed to do. Sinking ships is our business. That’s what our government tells us to do, and you can’t buck the government.”

“Some officers just did,” Robert smiled.

“Yeah,” Adam agreed, “and see where that got them. If I know my Führer, they’ll all hang from a meat hook. In Germany you can’t open your mouth. Even listening to the BBC carries the death penalty.”

There was silence for a moment, Adam deep in thought. Suddenly he turned and faced Robert. “Shit!” he cursed again. “Now that I come to think of it, that was really a stroke of bad luck. Just imagine, if that assassination attempt had succeeded, the war would be over. We would be turning around immediately and travel surfaced home straight to Hamburg into the summer. It wouldn’t take more than a week and we could embrace our girls. It all sounds tempting, like a fairy tale,” he sighed regretfully. “It all was just too good to be true.”

His head fell back on the pillow and he closed his eyes.

“Yeah,” Robert agreed. “Sweet dreams, Adam.”

Adam had to sleep, and Robert went forward again through the round bulkhead hatch. Everywhere he heard curses and the men discussing this news event. Many seemed to pity the luckless would-be assassins, but even here opinions were guarded. Nobody else came out with it as clearly as Adam, but then he had spoken in a language not understood by his comrades.

\* \* \*

The captain was not happy either. He was a U-boat commander, a glamour boy in the armed forces. Many photos of him circulated in the news media. Nearly all these photos showed him with his hand on the gold-rimmed peak of his cap in a military salute. He had aquiline features, and this was his favourite pose to make himself more photogenic. And now this! He could just picture himself being photographed shouting ‘Heil Hitler’ with arm outstretched in a salute. It would make him feel like a member of the Nazi party, the SA, or the SS, which he did not take to be his equals.

He had not much sympathy for Hitler, either.

The conspirators had been high-ranking Army officers. Even Rommel was suspected of being one of them. Henning's way of thinking was more in line with them than with the civilians, who might still be under the spell of Goebbels and the charismatic attraction of Hitler. As a cool strategist, Henning could surely see that Germany under the leadership of Hitler was heading for an abyss.

He was sure that most people in Germany would like to see Hitler dead rather than alive if it meant an end to the war. He seemed to be the only person who stood in the way of peace, but that was spoiled now. A good opportunity had been missed. With the tight grip of the Gestapo on everybody's collar, a chance like this could not be duplicated. They all had to bite into the sour apple and continue with the war—hope for some secret weapon to be developed to turn the cards on the table.

In the meantime, the boat approached Saint Helena. This was British occupied territory and called for extreme caution. The boat surfaced only at night, long enough to charge the batteries, and mostly proceeded at half ahead submerged. There were aeroplanes to fear, and Henning could not be sure how many of the enemy had already been equipped with the new type of radar. The aeroplanes

were still detected by the Naxos. He could only hope that this new radar had not filtered through to here yet.

Up at the Rose Garden had been the first time that he had struck this new device, but since then his Naxos had reported each approaching enemy faithfully.

It was early in the morning, and they had just submerged with full batteries for a long stretch under water. They were running at both ahead one-third, with all unnecessary lights switched off to preserve energy for emergencies.

The boat was running at periscope depth, in case they should bump into a lonely target like the one a week before, which had been easy pickings. Henning was cautious, but he felt that knocking off a lonely freighter was no big deal if it was alone and ran into their lap.

The Watch Engineer, Leutnant Klopp, was supervising the planesmen, balancing the boat at periscope depth, whilst the Number Three, Petty Officer Braun, was on the rear periscope in the *Zentrale*.

Like a lonely lookout, he turned and turned the lenses to observe the whole circle of the horizon and the airspace above. Suddenly he stiffened, his periscope frozen in a single direction.

"Watch to captain," he reported in excitement. "Target, bearing two o'clock!"

The captain shot out of his cabin and instantly took over at the periscope. Intensively he snapped the handles up and then sent the periscope down.

"W.I., take her down to 200 metres and rig for silent running," he said.

He sat down at the chart table and looked down at his track for a moment, while the boat inclined her nose down, and the needle on the depth gauge rotated towards the 200 mark, where the boat levelled out.

“That was no target, Braun,” the captain criticized, “that was doom. That aircraft carrier is not moving. He is sitting and listening, most likely waiting for us. Years ago, in our swashbuckling days, we would have taken him on and probably would have sunk him, too, but now we can be tickled pink if we manage to save our skin. Probably a lot of destroyers are out there, too. These things never come alone.”

In the meantime the L.I. had joined them in the control room. Like the captain, he felt it to be his responsibility to be available at all times of the 24-hour day, independent of the watch cycle. These men slept shallow, like predatory animals. The slightest difference in the attitude of the boat was detected in their sleep, subconsciously evaluated, and their brain alarmed if necessary.

“What’s going on, John?” he asked. “Why are we rigged for silent running?”

In his sleep, his brain had alerted him that there were some noises missing.

“We might be in trouble, Hendrick,” said Henning. “There’s a carrier out there waiting for us. I need some time to think.”

With his elbow on his knee, and his chin propped up in his hand, he sat for a few seconds, brooding. ‘Never rely on split-second reactions when you can come prepared’ was his motto and now he considered all possibilities open to him.

“Number Three, give me the current chart for this area. And L.I., keep her quiet. I don’t want to hear a single bleep out of the boat. No toilets to be used until further notice.”

The toilets on a U-boat were a sore spot and could do with some improvement. They functioned very well when surfaced, but when submerged, the sewage had to be pumped out with a hand lever against the outer water pressure. It was a contest between the excretor and the ocean as to who was the stronger. When the valves sometimes failed, the ocean spat the waste matter back with explosive noises at the culprit who had tried to pollute it. It was a

noisy device, with the sewage flopping out and back when the valves failed to close properly. Everybody in the boat knew when a toilet was used, and so did the enemy.

Braun had produced a stack of charts and they started to select the proper chart that covered this area. For a minute the captain studied it, the frown in his face brightening.

"That's it!" He looked at the L.I. "Take her down to 250 metres. Stop all engines and auxiliary motors. Switch off all unnecessary lights. All crew, go to sleep to preserve oxygen. No sounds. No talking whatsoever."

"Two hundred fifty metres," the L.I.'s frown was doubtful. What was the calculated destruction depth of the hull?

"Two fifty!" the captain confirmed.

"I still have to use the trim pumps."

"No trim pumps!" the captain ruled. "You can have some of the crew running barefoot fore and aft to trim the boat."

"This is stone-age stuff," the L.I. chuckled.

"The only way to go these days," the captain smiled, too.

"What course, sir?" the helmsman asked.

"Forget the course. Without speed you can't steer. Go to sleep, man."

"Without forward thrust, I cannot hold my depth," pondered the L.I.

"Save me the details, Henk," Henning said. "Use your trim tanks. You can do it."

All along the boat the lights went out. The L.I., with a handful of men, balanced the boat with air from the bottles and it floated silently along at that bone-crushing depth, drifting on the current like a dead fish.

There was total silence now. For the men, used to only four hours rest after a duty cycle, it was a heavenly change. The luckiest men had been the ones who had been off duty. They had the bunk to sleep in, while those who had been on duty had to find a

space on the deck to curl up and make the best of it. Only the officers and petty officers had a bunk all to themselves.

Henning went to the hydrophone operator and put on his headphones. Turning the dials, he listened for a short time to the faint noises of the waiting fleet. If he could hear them, they most likely had heard the U-boat, too.

He nodded shortly and handed back the earphones. They had to drift away before the enemy became suspicious and started searching for them with Asdic. He hoped the current charts were accurate.

Robert had no trouble. He was used to sleeping on the deck. He had no idea what was going on and just acted like the others. The only thing he knew was that everyone had to remain silent and was prohibited from moving around. Since, at the time of the alarm, he had been at rest in his place he just remained where he was.

He assumed that Uncle Hux was to blame for this. He must have cooked something up, and now the U-boat was in danger. He thought about the purple line. He was now part of it. The enemy above was his enemy, too.

For ten hours they drifted without being molested, and the crew enjoyed the long, uninterrupted sleep. They had left the enemy noises far behind, and their own motors were running again at slow speed ahead, giving the boat sufficient way to respond to its steering gear. The boat awakened with clattering noises from all corners, the toilets and the galley. The men stirred, many with bones aching from sleeping in contorted positions on the deck.

With sleepy eyes they consulted the clock to establish who was on duty. Their regulated cycle had been thrown out of orbit.

Caruso was up, too, his pots and pans clanking as he hummed a happy tune. His nickname was localized to the rear quarters only. To the rest of the crew he was the Smut. He had 67 men to feed, and his galley was little more than one metre square. One had to be

an artist to do the job. Any housewife would be horrified if she saw this kitchen, but Caruso managed very well. To him this was all routine.

They were still in the tropics and he decided on a light meal. Just sandwiches and cold drinks would do. It also would save electricity by not using the big pots. The bread was already sliced. He only had to butter it and put some cheese between the slices.

He poked a can opener into a tin of Camembert and did not notice that the tin was buckled. Startled, he jumped backwards as the tin exploded with a vicious hiss, like a U-boat surfacing, or steam escaping from a locomotive.

In an instant, a cloud of gas spread and filled the boat with an ugly, rotten stench. With the galley in the centre of the boat, every man got a good lung full of that dreadful smell. Like men drowning, they longed for the boat to surface and ventilate, but it was still daylight outside and the captain would have none of it.

He went to the wireless room. Müller was on duty. With an empty, turned-inward expression he concentrated on the whole world of sound outside, twisting the dials automatically.

"What is it like out there?" the captain touched him on the shoulder.

"No hydrophone effect for the last six hours, sir," Müller consulted the clock on the wall.

"Fine," said the captain and turned back into the *Zentrale*. "Resume duty with starboard watch. Both half ahead. Steer one-eight-oh. L.I., bring her up to periscope depth."

After a few commands from the L.I. the boat inclined nose-up and went toward the surface. At the proper level Henning went to the rear periscope and looked around.

"All clear." He smiled at the L.I. "I wonder where we ended up."

"Shouldn't we take her up and ventilate? We've been under for more than ten hours and our air is used up. The potash cartridge

filters are saturated. I can see that from the short breathing of the crew.”

“Too early yet. It is still daylight outside and we’re creatures of the night.”

“The crew is suffocating.”

“So am I, Hendrick, so am I. But it is better suffering in the stench down here and living than to be killed above in nice clean air. Up there, they’re still operating aeroplanes and would find us in no time. I suggest you open some more oxygen bottles.”

All lights had been switched on throughout the boat, wiping the sleepy, off-duty impression from their mind. All men were again at their stations. The stench had been evenly distributed by the ventilation, but the air was still thick and could be cut with a knife.

“I suppose we left that aircraft carrier far behind, John?” the L.I. asked, when Henning sat down by the charts.

“According to my current charts we should have, but one can never be sure. German charts are not really up to scratch, and our British friends hold on to theirs. We cannot surface yet, we might be still within easy range of aircraft. It takes only one fleeting detection and we have the whole fleet down on us again. In a couple of hours it will be dark and then we’ll know where we are. Take her down to 50 metres.”

The two hours stretched endlessly, with the crew coughing, their eyes drifting to the clock, whose hands never before turned so slowly. However, everything comes to an end and at last darkness descended on the waves outside.

“Okay, take her up, L.I.,” the captain ordered at 1900 hours local time. “Lookouts, Naxos to the bridge.”

There was no need for oilskins in this region and he climbed up the ladder. As soon as the tower broke free, he was out and was the first one to breathe fresh, heavenly clean air.



The diesels came to life and immediately sucked the stench out of the boat. Life returned to normal with the crew, relieved from their ordeal and now joking about Hitler's new secret weapon, the Camembert, and speculating on how to inflict this on the enemy.

Up on the bridge the captain took his bearings by the stars and was surprised that the deep sea current had carried him far south. He could not have done better with his electro-motors on both full ahead. He had gained a hundred and fifty miles without using any fuel.

\* \* \*

"I think we've got him, sir," Fowler beamed, when the Admiral arrived early in the morning.

"You've got whom," he asked, not quite daring to hope what he was thinking.

"We got the one you once called Houdini. This was his last trick and we've got the culprit. I could just scream! I must have some Sicilian blood in me."

The Admiral was elated.

"Fat chance, with a name like Fowler," he smiled thinly, "but I know how you feel. What do you think this will do for me? It adds at least ten more years to my life, but are you absolutely sure? After all our disappointments that seems too much to hope for."

"Fairly sure, sir," Fowler was enthusiastic. "It was *Solomons* that did it. A flight of Avengers sighted the boat on the surface. It was already 500 miles south of Saint Helena, right smack on our purple line. The boat must have been desperate to charge their batteries, or their captain was spoiling for a fight. It did not dive and the Avengers attacked. They are geared for hunting U-boats. When they approached, the U-boat went for its anti-aircraft guns. I'm still shivering when I think that the boat was already so far south and nearly got through."

She folded her arms in front of her and shook like a dog drying off its wet skin.

"Well, go on, go on," McCain grunted, his eyes brightening.

"It must have been a fight," Fowler continued. "The U-boat shot down the first two Avengers, but the third one got him with a bomb and sank it."

"And you are sure that this was our boat? The one we were hunting all those months?"

"Fairly sure, sir. Who else would be travelling on our purple line at that time? We'll know more later on. We have only the first dispatch from *Solomons*. I understand they're still running to the scene because some survivors have been spotted by the aircraft."

"You're right," the Admiral agreed readily. "Thank God that this is over."

He turned and went toward his office. He would not have to eat his hat after all, he thought grimly. With no news from the battlefield he had already become anxious, because with all the forces at his fingertips that boat should have been sunk long ago.

He sat down in the chair behind his desk and with a satisfied grunt he looked at the photo of his nephew. His secretary—or was it Fowler?—somebody always placed a vase with fresh flowers next to it.

"There you are, son," he mumbled to himself. "An eye for an eye, just as I promised. Nobody kills you and gets away with it."

He unlocked a drawer at his desk and produced a bottle of Scotch. He filled a glass and waved it to the picture of Robert. "Cheers, son," he toasted. "See you in Valhalla."

He gulped the whiskey down, then he locked the bottle up again and pocketed the key.

Heavily, he rested his head in his hands and thought of Robert. Out there in the Atlantic there were still more U-boats to be hunted, but that could wait. His most important task was finished for today. Later, he would again concentrate on his strategies in the Atlantic.

He had spent an hour absorbed in thought when Fowler reappeared, some papers in her hand. Her eyes were red and she seemed to have been crying which was completely un-Fowler-like. The girl was over-worked.

"Yes, Eve, what is it?"

The Admiral's heart melted at the obvious distress of the girl.

"From *Solomons*, sir—we have some additional news."

"More good news, I hope?"

"No, sir. They picked up some survivors from the U-boat. They had been on the bridge at the time."

"They picked up the captain?"

"Yes, sir, they did."

"Then what's wrong, what are you on about? I want that fellow here in London!"

"It was the wrong captain, sir."

"What! What are you babbling there! A U-boat has only one captain!"

"I mean to say, it was the wrong boat, sir."

"What!"

"I'm afraid you will not like this, sir. The boat they sank was U-Büchel. Our boat reported itself to be outside Cape Town."

An inarticulate cry, like that from a dying grizzly, escaped the Admiral as he tore at his hair. "That can't be true," he groaned. "Nobody has that much luck."

He swivelled his chair and looked up at the chart, a hopeless expression on his face.

"*Solomons* reported that they nearly got him, sir," Third Officer Fowler broke the silence. "They had a U-boat on their hydrophones. It was four days earlier, and could have been U-Henning. It was coming toward them and then suddenly disappeared and could not be found. Not with hydrophones, nor with Asdic. So they flew Avengers around the clock and found U-Büchel."

“Story of our life,” the Admiral groaned. “We nearly got him and then he got away. *Dauntless* nearly got him, too, and see what happened.”

“Must be some captain on that boat, sir,” Fowler ventured. “If he was not an enemy I would wish him to be on our side.”

“Don’t you dare to slacken. That boat has to be sunk. If that fellow gets through to Penang I will personally go out and garrote that—”

Quickly, he checked himself. He should not let his emotions run away with him. Already he had made enough light-hearted promises. It was time that he became an Admiral again and worked out some strategies.

## Chapter 8

It was mid-winter again. Like before in northern waters, the boat had to endure the wild seas around the Cape of Good Hope, where two oceans met and clashed against each other. The waves were huge, and storms lashed the boat in a week of wild punishment. Finally they headed north again and the sea abated.

The crew was glad. Not only had they reached calmer waters, but they also were now members of that exclusive group of old salts who had rounded the Cape. As the legend goes, now they were entitled to sit in their chairs with their feet on the table like those hardy men from the time of the old windjammers. Rounding the Cape had been an achievement among sailors since time immemorial.

For Henning this was a confusing time. News from Germany was disturbing, but the assassination attempt on Hitler had not caused a ripple and was shoved under the carpet by the German propaganda machine. Nothing seemed to have changed. Communication with Dönitz went on as before, and Henning felt compelled to prove himself as a warrior.

For a week he had moved along the coast near Cape Town. During the day he saw Table Mountain, and at night the city, which was illuminated like a Christmas tree. There was no fear of air raids here.

Nothing moved. There were no targets to be found. It was as if the port had been warned that the big bad wolf was lurking outside. After prowling unsuccessfully for another day he gave up and sailed north for warmer waters, on a track along the Mozambique that would bypass Madagascar.

In the meantime, he had received news about the sinking of *U-860*, and he still got goose-pimples when he thought about the close shave he had had when slipping through the bottle-neck past the *Solomons*.

They proceeded without hurry. They were in the Indian Ocean and did not expect to be hunted. The U-boats' graveyard of the Atlantic was left far behind, and here he could expect more leniency from the enemy because U-boats were few and far between.

If he had his way, he would now have headed east on a straight course for Penang and got this trip over with, but he still had a load of torpedoes and they had to be sent on their way. Still, Henning was never reckless. None of the technical crew was ever permitted up on the bridge. The boat had to be ready to crash-diving at an instant's notice. The stokers had nearly forgotten what a blue sky looked like.

Being a sailor usually meant going out to see the world—to see the wide blue sea—foreign shores and romantic islands. None of this was applicable for the U-boat crew. Electric light and noisy machinery were all they saw. The thundering noise of the diesels lulled them to sleep and woke them up again when it was time for duty. Like a hunted, grazing animal in Africa, they developed the ability to snatch odd moments of sleep whenever possible, independent of the cycle of the sun outside. For the rest, they were capable of staying awake for an astounding number of hours without losing the edge of their alertness. The duty cycle of four hours sleep and four hours duty might have been predetermined, but lunch time always fell on the off-duty cycle, and sleep had to be skipped.

Their skin was yellow from lack of sunlight and washing with sea water, but in the light of the electric bulbs all that seemed normal. Shaving with sea water was painful, and fresh water was for drinking only, so all of them had grown bushy beards ranging from deepest black to the lightest blond. They all looked like pirates of the Caribbean Sea, although most of them were barely out of their teens.

The round walls of the hull, now dry and warm, had become home to them. The bunk felt heavenly after four hours duty, no matter who had slept in it before. They became accustomed to each other's sweat and smell. Every gauge and pipe had become a familiar part of their surroundings—a familiar part of home.

The assassination attempt on Hitler was forgotten and the routine of being part of the German war effort took over again. Now they all expected targets and did their job as expected of them.

\* \* \*

Sadly, Admiral McCain sat behind his desk and looked at the picture of Robert. He always did this when there was a lull in his activities. Today somebody had put violets into the vase next to the picture.

McCain was not married. Having dedicated his life to the Navy, he had no son he knew of, and Robert had been a fine substitute. He had seen in him a younger version of himself. His death had hurt him deeply, and no glib phrase about king and country could soften this blow. An admiral had feelings and was human, too.

These last four months had been hell for him. He had set his mind on revenge. With both hands he had gone for the enemy, but now the enemy had slipped through his fingers. Now the culprit had managed to slip into the Indian Ocean, which was outside his jurisdiction. He found it an intolerable handicap that he was restricted to the Atlantic, although that was the most important area for British shipping.

With a tired groan he rose, called Third Officer Fowler, and the two went along the corridor to another section of the British Admiralty. Here Admiral McGregor, another red-blooded Scotsman, was in charge of the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Large charts, decorated with coloured pins, were plastered on the walls like in his OIC section. However, here there was no maze of green and purple lines. There were not sufficient U-boats here to warrant special attention.

“Good morning, Horace, how are you?” Admiral McCain greeted McGregor, who rose and thrust out a big hand.

“Good morning, Huxley, I’m fine, and how are you? What brings you here?”

He came around the desk. His voice was resonant, and the grasp of his hand hard. He was a barrel of a man.

“Haven’t seen you for some time now. Sorry about your boy. I heard about it. I thought—”

“Well, it couldn’t be helped,” McCain interrupted McGregor. His steely blue eyes hardened. “These things are to be expected at all times. It’s all part of being in the Navy.”

He did not like to talk about it to anyone for fear of losing control of his emotions. His pain was locked deep down in his chest and touching it could crack the enclosure. It was unthinkable to see pain on the face of an admiral, even amongst colleagues.

“What’s the U-boat traffic in the Indian Ocean now?” McCain asked. “Much trouble with them there?”

“Hardly,” said McGregor. “You catch most of them before they get a chance to round the Cape. We have half a dozen stationed in Penang and Batavia, but they rarely venture out of port. There’re a couple of useless Italians, and the Japanese go only into the Pacific and are dealt with by our American friends.”

“You have enough deterrents?”

“Plenty. We have our Task Force 66 in the Indian ocean, some loose destroyers and, for the rest, nearly all the coastline belongs to



the British empire, whence we get air cover. There's also a fleet of submarines operating out of India and Ceylon."

While he spoke he walked, with his hands behind his back, around the tables, looking with satisfaction at his charts. He presented the picture of a man totally in control of the task he had to fulfill.

"Sounds good. So your shipping lanes are safe?"

"As safe as one can expect. We have occasional losses. There's the odd U-boat, of course. The Italians are no threat anymore. Since the collapse of Italy, their submarines have been confiscated by the Japanese and are lying idle in Penang."

"You seem to have no worries." McCain now pointed at Eve Fowler. "Let me introduce my aide, Third Officer Fowler. I would appreciate it if we could attach her to your staff for a few days, just as long as it takes to nail a couple of U-boats. Two of them slipped through my hands and are now aiming for your shipping lanes. I'd like to keep my own eyes on them for personal reasons, if you don't mind."

"Ah!" McGregor gave McCain an understanding glance. "That the culprit?"

"One of them is the culprit," McCain confirmed. "I want him sunk before he can do any more damage."

"Ah, well, in that case I shall be pleased to accommodate your aide. I'll give her my full cooperation."

"Thank you, Horace. You're a pal. I knew I could rely on you."

McGregor went back and produced a bottle of whiskey and two glasses, which he filled. He handed one to McCain and took a probing sip from his.

"Ah, well," he said and held his glass up to the light. "Let's have a dram. We're both Scots and know a good drop when we see one. Let's drink to success and the annihilation of the culprit. Cheers!"

“Cheers!” said McCain and drained his glass.

\* \* \*

Being safe in the Indian Ocean, the boat proceeded mainly surfaced. The captain was on the bridge, and the lookouts felt like they were in paradise. Back in the north Atlantic they had the worst job on board, being exposed to the savage weather, but now this situation was reversed. Now they were richly compensated for it. They were the only members of the crew to enjoy fresh air and sunshine.

After heading north from the Cape, the gentle breeze felt like the touch of a lovely girl on their bearded cheeks. Dolphins were playing around the bow, and flying fish were soaring away from it. Once they saw a giant turtle navigating toward the mainland.

“Aircraft ahead!” The call from a lookout suddenly disturbed the peace on the bridge.

The captain trained his binoculars toward the horizon. Indeed, in the far distance he could make out a lonely aircraft crossing his track toward port. It might be heading toward the mainland, and probably had not seen him yet. The Naxos had reported no detection. It travelled slowly, most likely an amphibian aircraft.

The U-boat’s firepower was more than a match for a single aircraft. Most likely the enemy would not dare to approach the boat. Of course, there was the danger that the aircraft would betray their position, but it was already too late to prevent this. Henning had been ordered to operate in these waters, and soon his presence would be felt. It might be to his advantage to pluck that aircraft from the sky.

“Air raid alarm!” the captain called, and immediately the crew hurried to their stations.

Nobody was off-duty now. The duty crew were in their places, manning the machinery, and the others rolled out of their bunks and formed a human chain from the ammunition storage up to the guns on the bridge. The gunners took their seats behind the barrels

and swivelled around in anticipation of the action. Everybody had his predetermined place.

Adam's place was on the bridge, right next to the downward hatch. A sailor standing on top of the ladder handed him some 3.7-centimetre shells, which he handed through to the man next to him, who swung them toward the gunner. When the hoppers on the guns were filled with ammunition, the supply line stopped. Now Adam had time to look around.

At first, he was nearly blinded by the bright light of the day. He had forgotten that the world could be so beautiful. The clouds were golden and the world looked peaceful. Then, in the distance, he could see the aircraft that had initiated this alarm. It seemed to be no threat and remained cruising in the distance, out of range.

Except for the captain and the lookouts, all the men were nearly naked. Having just rolled out of their bunks, they wore only underpants. Some wore only the woollen belly cover, with their balls hanging out from underneath. The doctor had insisted that in the tropics one needed to have the belly covered, else one risked getting some foreign bugs inside their bowels. Only a very few men took him seriously and wore it.

*Ack! Ack!*

The semi-automatic three point seven probed the sky with a burst of fire. Two fluffy black clouds puffed in front of the aircraft. It proceeded west, and then came around to port, maintaining a respectful distance. It was still out of range of the two-centimetre guns, which were itching to get a shot at it.

All eyes followed the aircraft, which advanced slowly. When the boat's guns remained silent, it came slowly closer. Drawing abeam to port it suddenly turned and bore down on the boat in a suicidal charge.

"Fire all guns!" cried the captain. One more report from the three point seven and then silence.

"What's the matter!" cried the captain. "*Shoot—shoot!*"

“Three point seven jammed!” came the report from the rear platform.

“*Scheisse!*” the captain spat one of his rare curses, “Two-centimetre, fire!”

Now the two-centimetre hammered away with all four barrels at the approaching foe. The tracer bullets could be seen heading straight for the enemy who, *Kamikaze*-like, dived down toward the boat, firing with all his guns. As soon as he had passed overhead, he pulled up in a steep climb, firing from his tail guns. Again a hail of bullets rained down on the boat, with the boat’s tracer bullets following him.

No damage was done so far, neither to the boat nor to the aircraft. The plane had moved fast in the dive, and had lost all its former sluggishness. The boat, too, moved with both diesels full ahead, and for both sides it was not an easy target shooting exercise.

Henning had heard that the U-boat-hunting planes were armoured on the underside, and he would need the three point seven to do some real damage to the aircraft.

“Repair that bloody gun!” the captain cursed again and tried to find some cover behind the steel plating of the bridge.

In the meantime, the plane had made a stall-turn at great height, and again came bearing down on them to force them under water, so it could finish the boat off with its depth charges. All the time the boat’s two-centimetre guns fired, while the three point seven, the main anti-aircraft weapon, remained silent. It was frustrating. A single hit from that gun would finish off the enemy, but that gun did not participate in the battle.

Adam took shelter behind the bridge bulwark. He had a heavy three point seven shell cradled to his chest and he now disposed of it for fear that it might be hit and explode in his lap. In his position he was still relatively safe. He saw the gunner, Bolke, collapse, his belly torn open by exploding shells, his body destroyed beyond

repair. The gunnery officer and Number Two, Leutnant Lim, was bleeding badly from the head and staggered toward the hatch, where he was helped down by the crew.

The captain cursed. He could not dive while the aircraft was attacking. In the process of diving, the boat was at its most vulnerable. He had to wait and pick precisely the best moment for this evasive action. It was a crying shame to run from a single aircraft, but without his main gun he felt unsafe.

"L.I., stand by to crash-dive—all crew below!" the captain screamed, when the aircraft had made another pass and started another climb.

"Leave the body outside!" the captain screamed, when somebody tried to collect the body pieces of gunner Bolke.

To the body it made little difference if it was sewn in canvas or left naked when committed to the deep. U-boat men never went through the ritual of being parcelled in canvas when dead, or sent along to heaven with the comforting words of a prayer. When it was time to die, they just went down with greasy hands.

Everybody now tumbled down the ladder except for the captain, who remained on the bridge, facing alone the attacker, who had turned around again.

It came diving down from port, more brazen than before. It must have detected that there were no gunners left on the boat, and Henning felt like a sitting duck. Silently he cursed his earlier decision not to submerge in time, but to engage the aircraft with his guns. Again it passed over and turned when high up in the sky. This time Henning noticed a vapour trail clinging behind the aircraft. It was seriously damaged and was losing fuel. It could not continue the attack much longer.

With all guns silent, the captain suddenly heard the dreadful whine of bombs and saw four glittering spots coming towards him. "Steer hard starboard!" Henning screamed down to the helmsman and stared up at the bombs which were aimed at him. The aircraft

must have become desperate to finish him off, because he could still take evasive action. He looked behind into the big curve of his boat's wake, which foamed white on the dark blue of the sea. Involuntarily, his head pulled in between his shoulders as he saw the bombs exploding near the boat.

"Crash-dive!" the captain screamed immediately.

*Wham! Wham! Wham! Wham!*

The boat shuddered like a beaten dog as the roar of the diesels died and the boat went under in a steep decline. The captain was already in the *Zentrale*, standing by the chart table and wiping the sweat from his face, glad that the boat had once more escaped by the smallest of margins.

That would have to stop! he swore silently to himself. The war was heading toward its end. There was no point in dangerous heroics.

Adam was still frozen in the control room when the four bombs struck. There was silence now. The main lights were out and the ghostly sheen of the battery-operated emergency lights illuminated the area of destruction.

Glass had splintered from light bulbs and gauges, and water was spurting from some split pipes. The crew was racing to repair the damage with greased efficiency. "Take her down to 100 metres," the captain told the L.I. "Both one third ahead."

Concerned, Henning looked at the depth gauge. They were already passing the 100 mark and the boat was still sinking. He looked at the L.I. There was no panic in his face.

Now the lights came on all through the boat as the damage crew found the faulty fuses and light globes and replaced them. The boat had already gone past the 200 metre mark.

"All crew stand in your place—nobody moves!" the L.I. shouted, his eyes on the depth gauge.

When submerged, a U-boat has to be finely balanced to stay level. Every man has his station, and minor movements of the crew

can be compensated with the planes. However now, with the men all over the boat in the most unexpected places, the boat was badly out of trim. The planes, too, were not operating. They were jammed at a down angle, and the boat could not be controlled with the hydraulics.

"Put the planes on manual," the L.I. now called out, louder than he intended.

Inscrutability at all costs, he reminded himself, while the boat proceeded on its downward incline toward the bottom of the ocean. He, more than any of the crew, knew that the boat was in mortal danger. When a boat dives, the weight of the water compresses the hull and makes it smaller. That, in turn, makes it heavier relative to the displaced water. The deeper it dives, the heavier it becomes and the faster it sinks. This has to be realized and compensated for. "What are you doing. Henk," the captain asked concerned, watching the depth gauge pass the 200 mark.

"Damn!" the L.I. cursed. "The boat is out of trim with the crew all over the place! I always knew that the planes were much too small."

"Everybody back to their station!" cried the captain.

All the stokers ran to their sleeping quarters and the boat tilted backwards like a see-saw plank.

Already the planesmen were turning the big wheels that controlled the planes, and the L.I. had the motors started again.

With the light restored, the crew held their breath and, fascinated, watched the depth gauge in front of the planesmen. The glass was broken, but the needle had kept on turning until it stopped at 250, with the boat most likely still sinking. What was the calculated destruction depth? Many U-boat men knew, but did not live to tell. Already the hull was groaning and crackling and nobody dared to speak as they listened to the noises of the tortured hull, which was straining under the weight of many tons of water.

With the boat's nose up again, the motors started pushing. A little later the needle on the depth gauge came alive again and turned anti-clockwise. A sigh of relief could be heard all along the boat. The L.I.'s stony face had not fooled anyone.

When the boat levelled out at 100 metres, the captain and the L.I. looked at each other in silence, unable to put any expression into their stiff, drawn faces, yet somehow acknowledging each other's competence. In their minds, they took a backwards glance at many years of facing death together.

Kapitänleutnant Henning sat down behind his chart table. "Both one third ahead," he commanded. "Steer zero-five-zero!"

He had just received the damage report and assessed it. It was all minor, and the crew went on with their business of setting things right. Any damage to the outside would have to be investigated and repaired at a later date.

He was not very happy with himself. That had been an unnecessary risk. He should have been more careful, especially since only a few nights before he had been informed that U-Büchel had been sunk by an aircraft. U-Büchel—a sibling. Captain Büchel had been a friend of his. Only a few months ago they had met in Kristiansand and had a drink together. Now he was most likely dead, crushed by tons of water, like they themselves nearly were a few minutes ago.

An aircraft was not worth the risk. Shooting one down did not contribute much to the reputation of the boat. One confronted an aircraft only when it could not be avoided. Already, before his departure, he had heard rumours that his experience with the three point seven was not an isolated case. That weapon already had the reputation of letting you down when you most needed it. Each time the boat dived, the guns were under water, exposed to the corrosive chemicals of the sea.



It was true that every time the boat surfaced, the gun crew greased their weapons and test-fired them, but the mechanism was complicated, and too sophisticated for a U-boat.

With a groan Henning realized that he was an old hand at this game, and still he was forever learning. One was never finished. Prien and Schepke, both old hands in the game, were both dead. They had learned their last lesson, and had paid with their lives while still learning. How would he go? Would he make it home? He most certainly had already had his share of bad luck. Sometimes he had the feeling that somebody had singled him out to get him. At least he was out of the Atlantic. With every added day he became more sick and tired of the war at sea. It was high time for him to quit and get ashore and become an admiral—or at least a captain first. One did not become an admiral while commanding a U-boat. For that, one needed a good fat desk.

Changing the trend of his contemplations, he thought of the lonely body of gunner Bolke, who had been left outside. That floating body disturbed him. In the interest of safety for the boat he had to abandon that corpse, which now was committed to the deep without a Christian ritual.

It made little difference to the body, but there was something out of tune with the man separated from the boat. The crew of a U-boat was a single unit. They all had to die at once, or they were all entitled to return to their families. One did not expect to get separated from that unit—to get singled out and die.

Henning rose and went to the officers' quarters. There, the doctor was busy operating on the Number Two, Leutnant Lim. That officer had received a head wound. A bullet had grazed his head and, being of a heavy caliber, it had cracked his skull and exposed the brain.

Back home the doctor was a gynæcologist, treating only women and their ailments, but here he had to cover the whole

range of medical science. He could even be expected to operate as a dentist.

Right now he was a brain surgeon.

Skilfully, Doctor von Giesen rearranged the fractured skull and secured the pieces of bone into their place, where he threaded them together to cover the exposed brain. Then he placed the skin on top of it and tied the lot together with a bandage.

"How's it going, Doc?" Henning asked and looked down on his Number Two who lay, still anæsthetized, in his bunk.

"Going fine, he'll live," the doctor answered. "However, he's still in serious condition and must not move. We'd better not get any water bombs for a while."

"I'll put that request through to our enemies." The captain smiled thinly, then he turned and went into his cabin. Captains, too, must sleep from time to time.

\* \* \*

Admiral McCain spent much of his time in McGregor's office. His own Atlantic operations ran like clockwork now and needed little supervision. During the last year he had increased the air surveillance and the Atlantic was now covered without a single gap. No mouse could move without his knowledge. The chances of a U-boat threatening his ships there without detection were very small indeed.

And yet, his bitter enemy *U-859* had slipped between his fingers, and the other one, *U-861* had gone through as well. Both these commanders must be men of great skill and experience—he could not deny that. Nobody has that much luck. One more reason to give these two his full attention. Let loose in the Indian Ocean, they could do a lot of damage.

"Hello, Huxley," McGregor greeted McCain, as he entered his office in the morning. They always met first thing in the morning for assessment of their common enemy before concentrating on their own parts of the world.

“Good morning, Horace,” McCain greeted. “And how are we doing this morning?”

“Well, no success to celebrate yet. Your boat got away again. We had him pinned down by a Catalina south-west of Durban. The boat was surfaced and tried to shoot it out with our aircraft. Nobody got anywhere. The aircraft dropped bombs, but missed and the boat dived away.”

“Yes,” McCain groaned. “The same old story, we nearly got him and then he got away. Surely, his luck must run out some day?”

“We’ll see to that,” McGregor nodded. “Anyhow, they must have had some casualties. After the U-boat dived, there was one body floating in the water. It was badly damaged.”

“A body?” McCain’s eyes widened with hope. “Could it be the captain, by any chance?”

“No such luck,” McGregor crushed his hopes. “The dead man was naked. I could not imagine the captain going naked on the bridge. It was most likely a gunner who rolled out of bed when they sounded the alarm.”

“I agree.” McCain was disappointed. “At least we did some damage. Couldn’t you have fished the body out? Maybe it would have given us some clue?”

“We did send a boat out, but by the time they got there, the sharks had swallowed all of it. The U-boat damaged our Catalina, too. They barely made it home.”

“Where do we go from here?”

“I’m sure your girl Fowler will take care of them. She’s a genius at tracking U-boats. I had no idea that we could harness female intuition in the hunt. She seems to be anticipating the enemy’s movements quite accurately.” With a satisfied smile he sat down on his desk. “We have to give him a few more days and see what he’s doing. If we’ve damaged him severely, he might head east and make a bee-line for Batavia or Penang. If he seeks some action

he'll head north, towards our dense shipping lines. He might be heading for the Suez."

"Do you have much traffic there?"

"Oh, yes," McGregor smiled grimly. "Not much goes around the Cape these days. With the Italians out of action since their surrender, the Mediterranean is all ours and all traffic goes through the Suez. If he was in the Arabian Sea, he would be like a fox in a hen house. Our ships there aren't used to travelling in a convoy, either, because there is little danger from the occasional U-boat. It's every man for himself. The boat would have a ball up there."

"How do you protect your ships then?"

"As I said before, normally they don't need protection, but now that we know that your boats are there, we'll have to warn them to watch it. More urgently, we have to get your boat, of course. I'll send some destroyers after him as soon as your girl has determined his track. No need to alert our Task Force 66 yet. That would be over reacting."

"Task force?"

"I have an aircraft carrier with a lot of ships planted in mid-ocean, ready to be dispatched to wherever I should need them. We are in total control of our waters."

McCain was pleased.

"Well, if I know Third Officer Fowler, she'll stick to him like chewing gum. She won't let him get away."

\* \* \*

Henning was in no hurry. The boat progressed slowly from there on. Running submerged during the day, they made little headway, and at night, too, they surfaced only to charge the batteries. The boat headed north and crossed the equator again. With the crew already properly baptized by King Neptune, no more ceremonies were required.

A few times the Naxos reported radar signals, but the boat always managed to dive away in time. The weather was always

fine, and these conditions would have been ideal to travel using the snorkel, but this device had been holed during the air attack and could not easily be repaired.

In the aft quarters, Adam rolled over in his bunk. Impatience made him itchy. Five long months under way, he counted off on his fingers. A long time since he had last seen Germany, a long time since he had seen the sun. He thought of the beautiful world outside, of which he had seen only a short glimpse during the air attack.

Not always could he sleep easily during his rest periods. For hours he could lie, tossing and turning, whiling his off duty time away, listening to the other men talk until it was time again to rise.

Across the aisle on the same level Steinpilz lay on his bunk and snored. As usual, he sported an erection. He seemed to have a limitless supply of sweet dreams. One bunk further aft, Caruso sat and practised some difficult passages on his banjo, and on the bottom bunk sat Joe, with two others, using their off-duty time for a game of skat, thumping their trump cards with emphasis on the box between them. Adam listened. He did not like to think.

At times, when all slept and he was awake alone, he would stare at the hull. His bunk was below the water line and behind the flimsy sheet steel of the boat, only inches from his face, the grueling blackness of the water sluiced past, storming at the hull and the rivets that held the plates together. That plating might be nearly one inch thick, but it was hard to forget that it was all that stood between him and the deadly water outside.

He could easily imagine a torpedo out there, running straight for him, and then that dreadful clang!—the explosion, then the sudden inrush of water, crushing everything. It was better not to think of what was going on outside. He had to sleep when he had his turn and keep his nerve. He could do that only if he ignored the dangers.

Better to think of that girl back home.

“How does it go?”

It was Robert who interrupted his thoughts.

Adam didn't mind being interrupted by Robert. As long as there was no action, there was plenty of time for dreaming. He liked to talk to Robert, and being able to understand him now gave him a sense of achievement.

“Long trip, that,” Robert commented.

“Too long,” Adam agreed. “Couldn't be much longer anymore. I guess that we're stocked up with supplies to last us six months. It all has to come to an end.”

Again he counted on his fingers. He had made a mistake before. It must have been wishful thinking. It was only four months since they had left Kiel.

Anyhow, the day when they would run out of food and fuel was not far away.

## **Part Three**

### **Raiders**

#### **Chapter 9**

Number Two was still in his bunk, but the bones and skin on his head had healed reasonably well. The enemy had given the crew ample time to recover from their shock. The battle with the Catalina was forgotten as the boat proceeded slowly under water. Three weeks of peaceful travel had erased all worries from the crew. They were closing in on the Arabian Sea.

“Fast propeller noises ahead!”

Like a thunderbolt from a blue sky, the voice of the hydrophone operator demanded immediate attention and reminded all that there was still a war to be fought. The off-duty crew in the artificers’ mess, who had been playing cards, dropped everything and listened.

“Turbine engines approaching,” Brimstein added. He was the second hydrophone operator.

Turbines could only mean a U-boat hunter—a destroyer, or similar warship. In an instant, the captain emerged from his enclosure and went to the sound operator’s room. He took the head-

phones and listened for a moment, twisting the dials. Then he gave the headphones back to Brimstein.

For a moment he looked at the L.I., who had also emerged from his bunk, blinking his eyes, which were still clogged up from a restful sleep.

"L.I., take her down to 100 metres," Henning said, after a few moments' consideration. "Both slow ahead."

He sat down at the chart table and looked down on his track.

"We're already in the Arabian Basin." He seemed to speak to the L.I., and was deep in thought. "It is very deep here—mostly 6,000 metres. Lots of space. I wish we could dive that deep."

"At the pace we're developing, maybe one day we will," the L.I. consoled Henning and chuckled, amused.

"I'm afraid we can't wait that long," Henning smiled, too. "Load T-5 in tube six and *Kobold* in tube five. Rudder, hard starboard. Steer nine-zero!"

The command was relayed to the after torpedo room, where Hein rolled out of his bunk, opened the tube, and slid the last torpedo in, preparing it to meet the foe.

"Are we going to attack?" the L.I. asked.

"Not if we can sneak away," said Henning, "but this time we'd better be ready if there is no other way. These last three weeks have been too good to be true."

The propeller noises had come closer. Like an approaching train, they could already be heard faintly by the crew.

"Propeller noises approaching fast," Brimstein reported unnecessarily and took his headphones off.

"I can hear it." Henning was irritated and listened.

Maybe the destroyer was not hunting, but was just heading for some other destination. Maybe it would pay no attention to the lonely U-boat playing dead beneath the surface.

"Stop all engines, rig for silent running—no talking," the captain called, and immediate silence followed.



A minute passed while the approaching noise increased. The crew of the whole boat was alerted, and even the sleepers in the bunks pointed some anxious ears.

*Ping! Ping!*

No such luck. That destroyer was hunting, and was already breathing down their necks. It was on the warpath, and had probably been alerted by their encounter with the Catalina. It was no use playing dead anymore.

“Both engines, one third ahead.”

For a moment, Henning considered his command, then he changed his mind. “Both full ahead!” he corrected, and the boat surged ahead.

“Rudder hard port and keep her there!” was the next command. The boat heeled over in a continuous turn.

“Steer east!” the captain called, when the boat had made a full turn.

*Ping! Ping!*

The boat had just made a full circle, with a violent wake of bubbles, which would reflect the enemy’s Asdic like a boat. While the enemy was homing in on those bubbles, the boat had a chance to slip away.

The crew had their ears cocked and listened. They knew all about depth charges, and could distinguish the different sounds. They winced when, at last, they heard the splashes of the big canisters as they hit the water. They pictured them sinking, then the click as the pistol strikes and then:

*Wham! Wham!*

The explosions which, sledgehammer-like, hit the hull and rocked it in spite of the distance they had already travelled from the bomb site. At last came the swishing sound, as the water rushed back into the cavity the bombs had torn in the sea.

There were six explosions, reasonably far away. They had escaped this time, but above them was a hunter, determined to find them again.

A minute passed while the enemy searched the sea for wreckage. Suddenly an ear-piercing sound joined the fading propeller noises of the Destroyer.

"There goes our T-5," the captain smiled wistfully at the L.I.

The destroyer had just thrown a noise buoy, a Foxer, which made more noise than the propellers of his ship. Any acoustic torpedo would now go for the dummy and not for the propellers.

Henning's face furrowed as he sat down by the chart table and racked his brain for inspiration. That man up there might be far from home, but he obviously had been kept up to date with the technical developments in warfare. He could not be fooled easily, yet he had gone for the bubbles. How many times could he repeat this? The batteries certainly put a restriction on that manoeuvre. It would be no simple task to shake him off.

Shooting it out could not be considered. The chances were never better than 50/50, and Henning did not accept such odds. It would be the same as the flip of a coin, and he would not flip a coin on his life—or that of his crew.

*Ping! Ping!*

There it was again. His foe up there must have figured out what he had done. He, too, had made a big circle and had found him. Like in an underground station with the train approaching, the propeller noises grew in volume.

All Henning could do was squirm. He could run a circle again, or throw a knuckle to escape the Asdic, but how often could he do that? The boat's battery would soon be depleted by such punishment.

*Ping! Ping!*

Although the Asdic sound reflecting from the hull was a dreadful sound, heralding doom, there was some comfort in it. As

long as the sound could be heard, they were out of range of the deadly water bombs, for Asdic could transmit only forward and sideways. It did not beam straight down. It was when the pinging stopped that the destroyer was straight overhead, and heads were pulled between the shoulders, when eyes widened, when death was near.

In the changing world of warfare, even that could not be relied upon any more. While normally the depth charges were thrown behind the enemy, the newly developed Hedgehogs were thrown out to the front, and groped for the U-boat like a giant hand, with all fingers spread.

What did the captain say? Six thousand metres? Nobody gets out of here, should they be hit by a bomb. Better not think of it. It couldn't possibly happen to me!

"Braun, give me the chart of temperature gradients for this area," the captain now ordered the Number Three. He had come up with a new idea, but he needed time.

While Petty Officer Braun searched for the required charts, Henning rose. "Both full ahead!" he commanded and, a moment later, "Rudder hard aport. Steer north!"

*Wham! Wham!*

He had thrown a knuckle to confuse the Asdic, but had delayed his command too long. There was a thunderous roar as six depth charges exploded near the boat. Henning was thrown off his feet and immediately regained his balance as his hand groped for a pipe to hold on to. He fumbled for his chair and sat down again. He had a queer sense of detachment, like a boxer who was hit on the chin and knocked down to the floor. Had he bumped his head? He could not remember. His head was spinning, and his ears were ringing from the abuse delivered by the bombs. Quickly, he checked himself. He had to come up with some answers fast.

"L.I., damage report," he came to life again.

"Damage minor, no water leaks," the L.I. Reported.

In the meantime, the boat and the destroyer had drawn apart. Henning needed time to work out a plan for his escape. Another shakeup like the last one could destroy the boat and, with 6,000 metres under the keel, that was not an attractive prospect. Already he could hear the destroyer turning around for another charge. "We are still at full speed ahead," the L.I. reminded Henning. The drain on his precious batteries caused him physical pain.

"That's good, keep it that way. Shoot a *Kobold* immediately."

The enemy was closing in fast on the *Kobold*, but the boat was heading away at top speed. By the time they heard the bombs exploding in the distance, the boat was far away and out of Asdic range.

Still, Henning was convinced that the man above could not be fooled forever, and soon his Asdic would have the boat in its grip again.

"Still full ahead?" the L.I. asked, with a painful grin on his face.

"Both one third," said Henning, without looking up from the chart that Braun had given him.

"He's coming back," said Brimstein, poking his head out of his room.

He was a square, bull-faced fellow, always ready with a joke. He wasn't joking now as he put his headphones down. Everyone could hear the approach of death now.

"What is that idiot up there trying to do?" the doctor complained. "Doesn't he realize that he'll kill us all if he keeps that up?"

Nobody laughed. He was the only one who had kept his sense of humour. Maybe it was because he was not a technical person, and was used to trusting the crew implicitly.

"Both full ahead—right full rudder!"

The boat surged into another knuckle.

The noise overhead, combined with the sound of the Foxer, was deafening now. How much more life was there in the batteries? Desperately, Henning compared the charts with the track of his boat.

*Wham! Wham!*

Six bombs. Again they had evaded them. They fell too far astern. Henning looked at the depth gauge. The glass had just been renewed and the new bombs had not yet shattered it. The boat was at 100 metres. Maybe they should go deeper. The deeper the boat, the longer it took for the bombs to sink, and in a current they might drift off their target. In the early days of the war all enemy bombs exploded no deeper than fifty feet. Now the bombs went deeper, and the enemy had learned how to measure the depth the U-boat was hiding in.

"Hydrophone effect, moving fast," Brimstein reported. "Making wide circles."

Henning's finger traced the chart in front of him. He pointed to where the Mozambique discharged into the Somali Basin and was cut in half by his track.

Expectantly, the crew looked at the captain. They had escaped the Asdic once more, but all knew that they could not make knuckles forever. Apart from the drain on the battery, the enemy above would soon catch on and compensate for that evasive manoeuvre. Already, the screw noises above were increasing.

"Both half ahead," the captain called absentmindedly, and the boat slowed down.

*Ping! Ping!*

"That's it!" the captain suddenly called, and rose. He did not mean the threatening ping of the Asdic. He had come up with an answer.

"L.I., take her down to 300 metres," he said. "Steer three-one-zero."

"Three hundred?" the L.I. looked doubtful. No boat went down to such a depth voluntarily.

"Yeah, 300," Henning confirmed. It was either this or being pulverized upstairs by the destroyer's bombs.

The temperature gradient chart had given Henning the answer: The oceans's water is subdivided into large layers and masses of water, with different temperatures or density, which do not mix with each other. One such mass of water in the Atlantic is known as the Gulf Stream, but all oceans are full of such currents and water masses. Especially in tropical regions, and where it is very deep. Henning's charts showed the temperature and sound conditions in different areas of the world. If the temperature difference is high enough, it could be a barrier to Asdic transmissions, and the boat could dive under that layer like a soldier disappearing into a trench.

The boat pulled the layer of different water over her head like a blanket and let the destroyer ping away on it.

"Both one third ahead, rig for silent running."

White-knuckled hands released their grip, frozen smiles melted and men recovered their voices. They had made it once again, thanks to a good skipper, which was the best life insurance.

Now all Henning had to do was to conserve his batteries. It would be a while before they dared to surface again. Once the enemy above had figured out what had happened they would stop their noise and start listening. These modern ships had sensitive listening devices. They could hear the fish talk under water. By that time, they had to be far away.

\* \* \*

Although McCain saw McGregor every morning before commencing his own work in the Atlantic, first he went to his own office to look at the picture of Robert. This was the time when he still had hope. At such times he felt like a man plagued by debts, holding a lottery ticket due to be drawn in the near future. As long

as it is not yet drawn there is hope. He can still make plans to spend the money, before his hopes are crushed at drawing time. Equally, McCain expected every morning to enter McGregor's office and be greeted with the good news that *U-859* had been sunk. It had to come sooner or later. However, so far, every morning he was to be disappointed.

This morning was like any other. First it had looked promising, when it was McGregor who came into McCain's office instead of the other way around. McCain rose, and his face brightened as he looked expectantly at his colleague, but his hopes were soon crushed.

"I see what you mean," McGregor said on entering. "This fellow Henning—we had a good grip on him and then he slipped through our fingers. He simply disappeared."

"That's my boy." McCain managed a thin smile. In a way, he was glad that it was not only his own nose that was twisted by that bastard. "What happened?"

"I had him covered by one of my crack destroyers." McGregor sat down in front of his colleague's desk. "That captain is one of my best men. They played with him for hours, threw depth charges until the sea was foaming like a bubble bath and then, all of a sudden, the fellow just disappeared from our Asdic. It was like King Neptune had wrapped him in a blanket and carried him away."

"Maybe you sank him?" McCain ventured hopefully.

"That's what we thought, too, at first, but then he popped up a hundred miles further north. We got him on radar for a moment, but as soon as we detected him, he disappeared and couldn't be found again. Now that he's in the Arabian Sea, he's on an erratic track and will be hard to find."

"Fowler will stick to him. That girl is a genius." McCain was confident. "It only takes a bit more time. Normally, it isn't that hard to kill a U-boat, but this fellow knows every trick in the book."

"That is true," McGregor admitted. "The sea is his ally. At least we've figured out how he got away. That area is crisscrossed by large blankets of temperature gradients. He must have ducked under one of them. Once he's under, there's no chance that we can find him. We just have to wait until he pops up again."

"Maybe it was lucky for all concerned that he could get away," McCain pondered. "That fellow is like a snake, which strikes when he's pinned down. Up in the Atlantic I had him cornered and he sank my best destroyer. Lost 250 men that way."

He sat down behind his desk.

"And my boy," he added wistfully, with a glance at Robert's picture.

For a moment they both stared at each other in silence.

"So what now?" Admiral McCain asked, after a while.

"Well, we just have to wait. We know where he is, and your girl will cling to him. No use chasing him where he is now, since he can duck away at any time. We just have to bide our time and bait a trap for him in an area where he can't get away."

"You have some plans?"

"Not yet. We know he's heading for Penang. I have a good aircraft carrier in my Task Force. At the most suitable place I'll put all those ships across his track to Penang."

"That should do it," McCain was hopeful. Still, he was not quite convinced. Once before he, too, had put an aircraft carrier across the U-boat's track and had failed to get him.

"He slipped past my aircraft carrier once before." McCain looked doubtful.

"Not this time." McGregor was positive. "Firstly, my Task Force has two carriers, *Begum* and *Schah*. Along with them are the frigates *Findham*, *Parrett*, *Taff* and *Nadder*. Try that for size. That's six ships. At the risk of looking ridiculous, I could add HMS *Falmouth*, *Genista* and *Jasmine*. Let him try to sneak past that fleet."



“Wow!” McCain was left open-mouthed.

“Well,” McGregor said, and rose, “if worse comes to worst, we have our submarines operating from India and Ceylon. We can put one of them at the gates of Penang harbour. He hasn’t the slightest chance of getting there.”

“Yeah,” said McCain, and McGregor left the office.

\* \* \*

“I heard the news broadcast on the intercom. It doesn’t look all that rosy for you.”

Robert had a shower and was talking to Adam, who was on duty at the fresh water machine.

“Well, yes,” Adam admitted. “I heard it, too, but all that is only a temporary set-back. Something surely will come up and change things around. Your people, too, were once pushed into the sea at Dunkirk and that was not the end of it.”

“You’re an optimist, Adam. Don’t you even consider that Germany will lose the war?”

“Of course not. Such thoughts never enter my mind. Peace, yes—I dream of peace. Something like a treaty—I hope that some people have enough sense to put an end to all this.”

“But the situation! Don’t you see that you have no chance? Italy is out, the Russians are closing in on your eastern borders, and now this—Allied troops have landed in France and are advancing.”

“That is only a temporary setback,” Adam insisted. “Our scientists are working on some secret weapons, and then the boot will be on the other foot. This is not a war of manpower. This is a war of the scientists and, as you should know, our men are far from being morons.”

Adam thought for a moment and then continued, “You must understand the German people. We are motivated. When I was a young boy and went to school we learned all about politics. During reading lessons we did not read novels, but the Treaty of Ver-

sailles. There the teachers drummed into us what is politically correct, and how the Allies mistreated Germany after the war and mutilated our land. We were still suffering from it when I was a little kid. Then came Hitler, who corrected all that. He made promises, which he did really keep. As an eleven-year-old, I was angry with my parents because they did not vote for Hitler. All the young ones were enthusiastic about him.”

“Are you still enthusiastic about him?”

“Well, for some years Germany blossomed and made us proud of it. It was the best country in the world. Then came the war and it all collapsed. Now I’m a bit confused. Now I don’t know what to think any more, but you look around—we all are young. Our average age is twenty at the most. All of us have been groomed under Hitler in the politically correct way. How can you expect us to suddenly condemn him?”

“When I walk along the boat and listen to the men, I gather that your boat is now on the prowl, hunting ships. Don’t you think this is wrong at this stage of the war?”

“No, we shoot merchant ships to equalize the English blockade on Germany. I don’t feel bad about that. A ship never sinks all of a sudden. It takes at least half an hour. The crew and passengers go into their life boats and sail to safety. It is all materialistic. I don’t want to kill anybody, so that is no load on my conscience.”

He made some adjustments to his machine and then continued, “Of course, what you saw the other day with the destroyer is a different story. We both were out to kill each other. That is bloody murder. I still have to come to terms with that.”

“Well, you can’t expect to shoot and not be shot at in return.”

“That is true,” Adam admitted, “but so far we haven’t done much shooting. Sometimes I get the distinct impression that somebody up there does not like us.”

That’s uncle Hux, Robert thought. If only he knew that he is after *me*.

He lathered his body from head to toe and then rinsed off, with the water running through gaps in the steel deck plates into the bilge.

"Maybe, if your scientists fail to come up with a wonder weapon, Germany will be wiped out and there will be no Germany to return to."

Startled, Adam looked at Robert.

"Don't say that," he said. "That is sacrilege. It is true that our politicians keep telling us that our enemies don't want peace, that they're out to destroy Germany completely. That is why our soldiers are supposed to never surrender, but to fight to the death. We have to fight to defend our world. For me, a world without Germany is not worth living in."

Robert fell silent. What Adam said made sense to him. He would not want to live in a world without England. Politics was an intricate business. At home, they had made it easy for themselves. They simply called all Germans Nazis, who then could be shot dead like rabbits and other vermin. One had no bad conscience about that. They were not human beings, they were Nazis. Yet, in reality, they were all people like himself and uncle Hux. He had learned that much during the last few months.

Robert closed the valve on the shower and dried himself. Now he felt clean and refreshed. He was glad of his contact with Adam, for this was the only shower on board. Everyone who required a shower had to come down here. Of course, the men who came here were mainly stokers, who were sweating and had to work with the hot machinery. The U-boat men from up front could live for three months or longer without a shower and survive.

Robert dressed again. He felt like talking and sat down on the step and looked at Adam. "It all would have been fine if Germany wouldn't have started a war to conquer the world. Who wants to be enslaved by Germany?"

"Is that what they tell you in England?"

“It is true, isn’t it?”

“Not really, that is where you’re wrong. Let me tell you, when I was at school, what the teacher kept drumming into us. With the Treaty of Versailles, the enemy took away our colonies and some of our land. Now we’re a people without living space. We need room to expand. We need space. In the west they are crammed full of people, we can’t expand that way, but in the east, there are wide open spaces. We will extend our borders that way.”

He reflected for a moment and then continued. “So, you see, the East had good reason to fear Germany, but the West being invaded by Germany is pure fairy tale.”

“But—”

“No buts. If you follow the way the war went, you will see that Germany went out of her way not to antagonize the West too much. At the beginning of the war, U-boats were not permitted to shoot at French targets, and with all other targets they were to surface first, and they could only shoot after all crew and passengers were safely in the boats. Of course, that did not work out in the long run because our enemy took advantage of such chivalrous behavior. Even at Dunkirk, German forces could have butchered you, but let you go in peace. Nonetheless, U-boats continued to give assistance to survivors of stricken ships until the *Laconia* incident, where a U-boat was attacked during rescue operations. I still wonder why they picked you up. It is against the law.”

“I gave them no choice,” Robert chuckled. “I just climbed aboard.”

“Aren’t you lucky.”

“I still hope that it was lucky, but back to our discussion. So your government wanted to conquer the East. You think that was right?”

“Well, I didn’t give it much thought at the time. I was just a little kid. The way the media and the teachers put it, it sounded

quite acceptable to me, especially since they portrayed the people of the East as somehow inferior, and not up to our standards.”

Robert chuckled. He understood. The English media, too, had a way of describing Nazis as a bunch of smirking, gloating murderers.

“Basically, we are what our government makes of us.” Thoughtfully, Adam scratched his beard. “If your bombs would have blown us to heaven back there in the Atlantic, I’m willing to bet that you would have jumped with joy. Do you really want to murder me, or any of my mates?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Of course, you wouldn’t. In hindsight, everything looks different. I do not agree with Hitler’s foreign policy. I think the world would be a better place to live in if no country was permitted to poke its nose over its own border. It’s foreign policy that is the root of all the evil.”

“So you realize now that Hitler is bad for Germany?”

“It is easy to be wise in hindsight. Today, I would be glad if I never laid eyes on Hitler, but generally speaking, who is there to judge what’s good or bad? As you must have learned at school, even Socrates had his difficulties in determining that. If a pride of lions is killing a buffalo, they’re doing something good, because they can feed themselves and their young. Of course, it does not look so good from the viewpoint of the buffalo. All governments are like the lions. They don’t mind walking over corpses. Not Hitler, not Churchill, nor anybody else in power. The German people themselves did not want the war—not with England, or France or America.”

“But you attacked Poland.”

“With them, we had an axe to grind.”

“So they told you.”

“So they told us,” Adam admitted.

## Chapter 10

Kapitänleutnant Henning had become restless. It was already mid-August, and it was high time that he came up with some results. He was the commander of a U-boat and had to live up to that position. He had to sink ships. There was a load of torpedoes to be disposed of in the interest of Germany's war effort. The assassination attempt on Hitler was forgotten and the war continued as before.

A few days ago he had caught a message from Korvettenkapitän Oesten, the captain of U-861, who had lagged behind, but had also reached the Indian Ocean. He had caught a convoy near Madagascar and out of it had sunk the *Berwickshire*. He had also torpedoed the 8,000-ton tanker *Daronia*.

He seemed to have done his duty, and was already headed east toward Penang. Henning was glad that the actions of that sibling boat had taken some of the heat off his own tail. He became more daring.

He placed his boat right in the centre of the Gulf of Aden. The water was shallow there, and he let the boat sink to the bottom of the sea, with all engines stopped, while he listened for targets.

There were strong currents underwater and the boat was dragged along the muddy bottom. Lurking for two days, he expected ships bound for Suez to pass by and steer right into his

arms, but no such luck. At last his patience came to an end. He had also had second thoughts about placing himself in a vulnerable position, with limited elbow room to escape, and he sailed east toward the island of Sucotra.

It was shortly before midnight when Müller reported propeller and reciprocating engine noises from the hydrophone. In a flash the captain was in the *Zentrale*, with the L.I. at his place behind the planesmen.

Earlier in the evening the boat had surfaced, charged batteries, and then submerged to give the sound men a chance to listen for targets.

For a moment, Henning sat down by the chart table and studied the grid pattern, into which Navy Command had subdivided the oceans of the world. Those grids made finding convoys easier, and resulted in shorter wireless messages.

U-Henning was in square MQ41, which hugged the main shipping line toward the Suez Canal. All ships bound for Europe had to pass through that square. Henning rose and went up the ladder into the conning tower.

“Both half ahead—up to periscope depth,” he called down.

From bow to stern the alarm bells sounded, while the boat lifted her nose and climbed toward the surface. Neumann and Schultz were already in their places, to assist with the calculations.

Henning sat down, sent up the periscope, and gave the seat a full circle spin by operating the hydraulics with his feet. Immediately, he saw the dark shadow of a tanker, although it was too dark for identification. No need for that anyway. These days all ships that roamed the oceans were carrying supplies for the enemy.

“Flood tubes one, two, three and four!” Henning called.

Suddenly the target turned away. It was heading approximately northwest. That was toward the coast, but there was no port on that heading. The ship must have been warned about U-boats and was on a zig-zag course.

“Steer two-seven-zero,” the captain called. He would meet the target when it came around again. Coming from the Persian Gulf and heading for Suez, the tanker carried fuel for England and was a worthwhile target.

For the next 30 minutes the boat surfaced, putting itself ahead of the unsuspecting tanker, and then submerged again, waiting like a spider for a fly.

“Hydrophone effect at four o’clock,” Müller reported a few minutes later.

The captain grunted in satisfaction. The sea was already narrowing towards the Gulf of Aden. The ship had very little room for evading him. His eye went to the lens, and he saw the shadow approaching from the direction Müller had indicated.

He crossed his fingers and hoped that the torpedoes would run straight. They didn’t always do that. At the beginning of the war he had fired many duds. They simply did not run straight, or even failed to fire on impact when they hit the target. All that had improved by now, but, still, there were the odd failures.

Henning’s eye never left the target. There was no moon, and the sea was calm, with gentle waves. Years ago he would have attacked while surfaced, but now he had to watch for radar at all times. With Neumann and Schultz, Henning worked out the aiming angle. Neumann was reading off the data from the periscope, with Schultz feeding it into the calculator, cranking the handles.

“All set— one!” the captain called, when the bow of the tanker approached the hairline in the lens.

“Fire one!”

The torpedo artificer, Krause, confirmed the order and pulled the small lever back. With a thump, the first torpedo blasted out of the tube and the L.I. immediately pumped ballast water up front to keep the nose of the boat from surfacing.

“Fire two!”

“Fire three!”



The orders came in quick succession. All through the boat, the crew, blind to the actions of the outside world, cocked their ears and sensed the vibrations of the boat. Everyone knew that torpedoes had been fired and waited for the result.

“Torpedoes running, sir,” Müller reported from the sound room.

Henning had his eyes on his watch. These had been short range shots. In daylight, he would have done it with only one torpedo, but in this darkness he had fired a fan of three to be on the safe side. With the torpedoes running at 40 knots, it should be about—now! His eye went back to the lens and he just caught the first explosion—then another.

Two hits—the crew was jubilant. They were unconcerned about the misery on the tanker—they were the crew of a successful U-boat, such as was glamourized by the news media at home. This was what serving in a U-boat was all about—this was what a U-boat was built for, shooting targets. They were hunters on the prowl, and every ship sunk was but another trophy.

Henning looked through the lens again. The hairline cross was clearly visible now, with the northern sky in flames, which could be seen for at least a hundred miles.

Henning sent the periscope down and rose from his seat.

“L.I., surface!” he called down. “Steer one-one-zero, both full ahead.”

He had drawn even with Korvettenkapitän Oesten from *U-861*. He, too, would head for Penang now.

\* \* \*

It was Adam’s birthday today. Birthdays were never forgotten on board. On such days, the birthday boy was presented with a strawberry pie, in addition to his usual meal. He shared that special treat with his comrades from the same off-duty watch in the aft quarters. A birthday was always a welcome interruption in the dreary routine as their trip stretched on for hour after endless hour.

“Supplies are getting low,” said George the cook, munching on a piece of Adam’s strawberry pie, because he, too, had his bunk in the aft quarters. “I can already see the bottom of the barrel. We will have to be in Penang soon, otherwise we’re on rations of bread and water.”

“Hurrah!” Hein shouted.

“Hurrah!” others joined in.

“Best news I’ve heard in months,” said Adam.

They all were getting weary of the trip. Normally a U-boat operated in the Atlantic. They weren’t pleasure trips, but one always has the assurance that he would be home after a few weeks, and the tension of being a target for U-boat hunters was to be endured for short periods only. Now they were under never ending stress for many months and, in the long run, even steel snaps under fatigue.

“At least one bright spot on the horizon,” said Adam. “All the news from home is gloomy—makes you wonder.”

There was a depressed silence for a while. Adam had touched a sore spot. These days one needed an unshakeable trust in Germany and its wonder weapons to still believe in a rosy future. Most of them suspected that all the news was predigested before it was read to the public, and the true situation could be much worse than what was released over the radio. In the words of the German propagandists, every defeat at the front was hailed as a victorious retreat.

Hitler was not their idol any more. Many would have liked him assassinated. Most of them had the feeling that the war was maintained by just one man, and that man was Hitler. Only he stood between them and peace.

Germany, they knew now, was in the vise-like grip of the Russians in the east. The once victorious German forces were retreating on all fronts, with the enemy pounding on the German borders. In the west, too, the Americans were approaching fast, with the

Germans “retreating victoriously.” Few people were fooled by that phrase, but they had to close their mind to it. The truth was too dreadful to conceive.

For Adam, the war was not fought on the U-boat alone. He was affected badly by the news from home. East Prussia was threatened by the Russians. That piece of earth had a special place in his heart. Its landscape and people were as different from the rest of Germany as Scotland was from England. That was the place of his roots. For ten thousand years his ancestors had lived there, and now all that was threatened.

The news mentioned that Rudolf Hess had flown to England. Maybe he had tried to negotiate a treaty? Then why was there no peace yet? Maybe it was true that the enemy was not interested just in peace? That was what the German government had said all along. Maybe it was true that the intention was to smash Germany to pieces first. It was better not to think about politics.

Nazi propaganda had pictured the Russians as something sub-human—not like ordinary people. After all, Germany had intended to colonize their country, and whoever lived there did not count. Germans got all their information from the politically correct media, as in other countries, but, beyond that, Russian hordes were well known. Already, during the first world war, the Tartars had invaded East Prussia, and their cruelty and sub-human behavior were still well remembered. So far the picture fit.

In spite of the delicious strawberry pie, today the mood in the aft quarters was subdued. This trip had taken too long, and the news from home was too gloomy.

Caruso reached for his banjo and tinkered with it. When in the mood, his stubby fingers could produce astounding passages of staccato notes as they danced on the strings.

The meal finished, Adam climbed up into his bunk. He turned and faced the pin-up picture of his girl. Whenever he looked at her image, all his worries vanished. There were so many delights in the

world still to be explored. How could one roll over and give up like a beaten dog?

\* \* \*

Kapitänleutnant Henning was in a similar mood. To cheer himself up, he had invited the L.I. and the doctor for company. The three had become friends during the past year. Now they were playing the German card game Skat to keep themselves from brooding.

The L.I., although the same military rank as the captain, could never get command of a ship. He had chosen a technical career and that was a big handicap. Now a mere Leutnant could command a U-boat, if he chose the navigational branch for his career, but a technical man could only aim to become an L.I.

"How's Number Two coming along, Doc?" Henning asked the doctor, counting his hoard of cards. "He should be up by now. When can we roster him in on our watch?"

"I would like to give him one more week of rest. He can walk again," said the doctor, dealing a new round of cards. Then he added, "We'd better have no more water bombs. That last lot shook him up a bit."

"We'll see to that," Henning smiled, looking into his cards. The doctor had dealt him all four jacks. "I think it is time we high-tailed it out of here. I've already ordered a course set for Penang."

"That *is* good news." The doctor was pleased. "A long trip like this plays havoc with one's nerves. I think the crew cannot go on forever without daylight. Like the proverbial drop of water on the stone, everything wears down in the long run."

The three men started bidding against each other. The L.I. became annoyed. He had a perfect nullovert in his cards, but the captain beat him with his four jacks.

"Propeller noises to port, reciprocating engines at nine o'clock!" came a message from the sound room. Annoyed, the cap-

tain folded up his outstanding hand of cards and threw them on the table.

“Shit!” he exclaimed. Henning only cursed when it was absolutely necessary, but now he really was annoyed. He would have liked to play his Grand, but as the captain he now had to act like one.

“Up periscope,” he said on entering the control room, and the W.I. brought the boat up near the surface. Throughout the boat nobody had heard the message, but the sudden upward angle of the boat heralded that something was going to happen.

Henning sent the rear periscope up and folded the handles down. With his eye on the lens he quickly made a 360-degree turn, checking the surface of the water. Then he turned the lens up to check the sky as well. Another look along the water line, then he saw the target. It was daylight and the lonely ship could be clearly seen.

The captain took his eye from the periscope.

“Flood tubes one to four!” he called, and went up the ladder to the conning tower.

Neumann and Schultz, who had heard the message from their quarters, were already up at their stations, and Schneider, the Number One, took over the rear periscope to monitor the attack. Braun, with his books, stood next to him and the two started to identify the target.

“American,” said Schneider and Braun flipped the pages to the American section of the book. They worked together, with Schneider alternating his attention from the periscope to the pages of the book until he had the target identified.

Henning, in the conning tower, kept looking at his victim. The ship did not seem to suspect that it was already centred in the deadly hairline cross and its days at sea were numbered.

“It’s the *John Barry*, American freighter, 7,000 tons!” Schneider called up through the hatch into the tower.

Suddenly Henning rose from his seat.

"Surface!" he called down. "Steer five-oh, both half ahead. Lookouts to the bridge!"

The *John Barry* had veered off to the north, as if she had felt a premonition of approaching doom. When the boat broke surface, the ship was already out of sight. She was obviously on a zig-zag course, and Henning had to put on more speed to place himself in front of her and get into a favourable shooting position.

No wonder the target was cautious. Only the previous day he had sunk a tanker in this area, so all shipping would have been alerted. One cannot sink a ship and remain undetected.

Dusk was descending quickly, and soon they were proceeding in darkness. The *John Barry* was at a disadvantage, because she would come from the north-west, clearly visible against the rosy horizon of the sinking sun behind her, while the lurking U-boat was enveloped in blackness.

Henning sat high up on the bridge and enjoyed the warm, tropical breeze, which blew the oily smell out of his clothes and dried the sweat from his blond beard.

He had intended to make a bee-line toward his destination, but if a target sailed straight into his arms, how could he refuse? His torpedoes had to be expended and he could not take them home again. Once the torpedoes were gone, his fighting days were over. He could not restock in Penang. The Japanese eels were of a different calibre, and did not fit into German tubes.

It was still three hours before midnight when he gave the order to dive again. He was far enough ahead, and from here on he could follow the target's track with his hydrophones.

"Sound?" he asked, looking down the hatch after he was seated behind his attack periscope.

"Hydrophone effect to port, eight o'clock, sir," Müller reported from below and added, "Propeller noises approaching slowly."

It took another five minutes before the target came into sight. The ship was clearly visible against the last sheen of the horizon. Quickly, the men in the tower went through the calculating procedure, which was then fed straight into the torpedo gyros.

“Fire one! Fire two!”

Henning decided that two torpedoes should do the job and left the other two in their tubes.

Throughout the boat, the crew waited tensely. They had all felt the missiles leave the tubes. The boat shuddered as it catapulted them toward their target. Now they waited for the results. Their depressed mood of only moments ago was forgotten. Let the enemy know that they were not defeated yet. Here they were still fighting, and making themselves felt.

*Wham!*

The distant explosion could be heard and felt. Now they waited for the second one, but that was all. The second torpedo must have missed, or failed to detonate.

Henning kept his eye on the lens. This was how he liked it. Attack at night, with plenty of darkness to clear the area. He felt a twinge of sympathy for the people he could see running everywhere on deck. They were working on the life boats. Already the *John Barry* was listing.

“Steer oh-one-oh,” he said after a while. “Number One, up to the conning tower.”

Schneider came up the ladder and poked his head through the hatch.

“Sir?” he asked.

“Come up here, Schneider,” Henning said. “With only one hit, she might not sink. Go round the other side and wait until the boats are clear. Then give her another shot. Tubes three and four are still readied.”

“Yes, sir!”

The captain vacated his seat at the periscope and Schneider took his place. Being the Number One, it was his turn to become the commander of a U-boat. When this trip was over, he would be transferred to the Commanding Officers' School in Pillau and then get his own boat. For him, it was an advantage to get some target practice.

It took half an hour until he had worked the boat into a good shooting position. The ship was still afloat and the life boats had left the area.

This time there wasn't much calculating to be done, because the target was stationary. One torpedo should do it.

"Fire three!"

The explosion followed soon after. The ex-merchant man watched his first shot in anger and hoped that nobody had lagged behind on board. He, himself, had served on such ships and loved everything that floated. He found sinking ships a terrible waste of beautiful equipment.

"Surface—lookouts to the bridge!" the captain called, and climbed up the ladder. "Steer one-two-oh, both full ahead!"

Two ships sunk in two days. The enemy would not take that lying down. Most likely some destroyer would be put on his tail again. He had to proceed with speed and caution.

\* \* \*

Robert was no longer living in his corner, sleeping on the floor. After the death of Gunner Bolke, half a bunk had become vacant. The duty cycle for the seamen up forward was six hours on duty and six hours sleep. Now he had a bunk for a heavenly six hours to sleep in. He was now an off-duty part of the forward quarters. He shared their meal, and also the strawberry pie if it was someone's birthday.

The man he shared his bunk with was Tony Edelmaier, a boy of only eighteen, with a face that could not hide his lack of years.



Even his beard, no matter how tenderly groomed, refused to sprout properly, which put him on the receiving end of cruel banter.

Although he had been with the crew since the beginning in Stettin, he could not participate with them when it came to discuss Navy topic number one—women.

He simply had no experience, and that was a serious defect in a sailor. How did you pick them up? What did you say? How did you tell a prostitute from an ordinary girl? All these questions he could not figure out. He spent his time between hope and despair.

Girls seemed to be easy to get. Other sailors had them, and were doing all sort of things with them, as he could gather from their talk. Only *he* had to wait until the right one came along. In the meantime, he could do nothing but get drunk until they carried him aboard.

Robert often talked to him when Tony came down from his shift on the bridge and he had to vacate the bunk, but most of the time Robert was idling. He had plenty of time to think. He, too, had heard that the supplies were running low, and that soon they would reach their destination. Then the honeymoon was over. Then he would end up in a Japanese prison camp.

That thought gave him the hives. He had heard much about that when he was still in England. Bad food, hard labour and little chance to survive. Luckily, the war was fizzling out. He had heard the occasional news broadcasts over the intercom and drew his own conclusions.

Germany was about to fall, and the Japanese couldn't last much longer without the Germans, who still engaged the Americans in Europe. He would go aft and talk to Adam, who was the only man on board with whom he felt a close friendship.

He had reached the control room when Brimstein called, "Hydrophone effect to port. Reciprocating engines."

Oh, no! Robert thought, horrified. Not again! Reciprocating engines meant a merchant ship. A warship always had turbines.

It was only two days since they had torpedoed the last one. If the U-boat kept on shooting like that, their enemy was bound to come down on them like a ton of bricks.

The captain was already up in the conning tower and Schneider, with Braun and his thick volumes of books, were going through the procedure of identifying the target.

“Blue Funnel liner,” said Schneider, and then elaborated, “Blue Funnel liner *Troilus*—7,500 tons.”

Robert watched the procedure of commands and confirmations from the crew as three torpedoes were fired and two of them hit the target.

The crew was jubilant. At such moments all worries about the Germany’s plight were forgotten. They basked in the success of the hunter. This was just another trophy. Another colourful flag flapping from their periscope when, at last, they would victoriously enter their port of destination.

Robert thought of his own destroyer days. His crew would have reacted similarly if they had sunk the U-boat. Both sides were the same. It was all acted out in the name of God and country. Both called on God, and prayed that their deadly missiles would hit their targets.

In reality, a war was an unholy game. It didn’t matter what name you gave it. Whether you called it fighting for your country, or saving the world from the Nazis, it was a miserable loss of life and a senseless slaughter—just a practical extension of misguided foreign policy.

The rear periscope was abandoned now and Robert took a look through it. For a moment his eye was blinded by the bright light outside. It was his first glimpse of daylight since he had come aboard. Then he saw the stricken freighter. It was already listing badly. Nearly a hundred people were running about on the upper deck, crowding into the lifeboats. They were quickly lowered, and

Robert watched them move away before the big ship sank. It appeared as though they all had scraped through.

Robert turned and went aft. He needed a few seconds to adjust his eyes to the yellow light inside the boat. With the deck beneath him rolling and rocking, he stumbled along the aisle between the noisy diesels and found Adam on duty behind the fresh water machine. He sat down on the steel steps next to him.

"I just saw the sinking ship through the periscope," Robert started talking. There was no longer any need for him to speak slowly for Adam to understand. Adam was now fluent in the English language, except for an accent which his Prussian tongue would never be able to erase.

"Oh yeah? What was it?"

Adam was interested. The technical crew never knew exactly what went on outside. Theirs was a world of sound and touch. Like moles, who were in no need of eyes, they were exposed to noises and vibrations from the hull and had to draw their own conclusions from those clues. As a blind man, deprived of his eyesight, has to sharpen his remaining senses to compensate for his loss, so the crew inside the boat pieced together what went on outside by what they felt and heard.

"It was a big freighter with passengers. About 100 people aboard."

"Oh? What happened, did they all get away?"

"I think so. The ones I saw all went into the lifeboats and got away."

"Lucky them," Adam smiled wistfully. "If we should get it, there would be no lifeboat for us."

"What would you do? How would you react if this boat ever got hit. Did you ever think about that?"

"I try not to, but I suppose somewhere in a remote rear corner of my brain there's already a survival plan." Adam thought for a moment and then continued, "I trust myself to survive to a depth of

maybe 600 feet. It could be on the optimistic side, but we all have good strong bodies. The only quick way out of here is through the conning tower, provided that's open. There are other hatches, too, but it takes time to open them. They could only be used when the boat sinks to the bottom in less than 600 feet."

"Now we have 20,000 feet."

"There you are—the only way out is through the tower. I would have to sprint to the *Zentrale* and get out before we have sunk so deep that the water would crush me."

"Sounds pretty impossible. You would have to run against a stream of water."

Adam chuckled with a wry smile. "Don't be so explicit. In this game you must not work out the details before it is absolutely necessary. Everything is possible. Leave me *some* hope. Did you ever see Popeye jump over a mountain in a cartoon?"

"Yes, Popeye can't be killed."

"You see? That's me, Popeye the sailor man."

"Wouldn't you need some breathing apparatus to get out? Even Popeye would drown if he found himself 600 feet under."

"Well, yes," Adam admitted. "We all have one hidden under the mattress of our bunk. We're all trained in the use of it. With that we can breathe under water for a while, but if we should get hit right now for example, can you picture me running back to my bunk and fumbling there for that blasted thing? Popeye wouldn't do that. He would run straight to the *Zentrale*, jumping over bodies if necessary."

"So would 60 other men."

"Now you're getting too explicit again. I would run and swish like a rocket to the surface."

"And you would get out without breathing?"

"You need good lungs for that, to hold your breath, but there's no shortage of good lungs here. Look around. We're all some kind

of athlete.” He looked at Robert and added, “And optimists. Otherwise, ten horses could not drag us to serve on such a boat.”

“Now you scare me.”

“Well, you brought it up. I never dare to have such thoughts. Come to think of it, you just missed a golden opportunity. You saw the life boats sail away. You should have asked the captain to put you in one of them. I bet he would have been tickled pink to get rid of you so easily.”

“Bloody hell!” Robert exclaimed, annoyed with himself. “I should have thought of that.”

“Let’s hope we shoot another target.”

“Yeah,” said Robert, and immediately had a twinge of bad conscience. How could he hope to sink another ship just to save himself? He suddenly realized that man was but a primitive creature under the skin. One’s own survival was all that mattered when death was threatening.

Robert rose. “Well, see you later.” He smiled at Adam and turned to go. He was in a hurry to put this proposition to the captain before another target came in sight. He wasn’t hoping to sink any ships, he defended himself. All he wanted was to hitch-hike a ride in a boat.

\* \* \*

Robert had spoken to the captain and he had agreed that it would have been a good idea, but now it was too late to turn around. He would have to wait until they bumped into another target, although that was unlikely. The captain seemed to be less enthusiastic about another encounter than was Robert. Still, there was always a chance.

In high spirits, Robert went forward to take possession of his bunk. Tony was still there when he reached the seamen’s quarters. He was sitting on the lower bunk, his head supported in his hands. He was brooding.

“Anything wrong?” Robert asked.

“No, nothing. It’s just those bloody women. Can’t figure them out.”

Robert understood. He had talked to Tony about his problems before. He must have just been teased by some bully. During the past months he had seen the boy, who was called baby-face, often on the receiving end of cruel banter. He had never been seen in public with a girl on his arm, and that was a serious short-coming for a sailor. It was true that he had not yet found the proper approach to catch a girl, but his comrades’ accusations were not entirely justified.

Two days before their departure from Kiel, he had gone alone to the movies. Just before the end of the show there was an air raid alarm and he ended up in a small, but crowded, air raid shelter. All the people from the theater were crammed into a small bunker and Tony found himself being pushed against the back of a girl.

With her sweet scent in his nostrils he found himself aroused as the crowd pushed him against the softness of her curved buttocks. She raised her hand to smooth her hair that tickled at his nose. He saw a wedding ring on her finger. That was no girl, yet his arousal persisted. Suddenly she detected what was pushing against her and annoyed she turned around.

When she saw the boyish embarrassment of the youth, her angry brows lifted, and an amused smile curled around the corners of her mouth. She was a mature woman—maybe in her late twenties—and she was beautiful.

The crowd in that confined space kept pushing, and soon they were in contact again. With her eyes closed, she did not seem to notice this time and Tony’s excitement grew. He felt the urge to lock his arms around her buttocks and pull her toward him, but he did not dare. It was much easier to blame the crowd for their intimate contact.

She must have been tired, for she had closed her eyes and did not seem to be aware of what he was doing. The crowd behind her

was probably pushing too, for he felt her hips moving to press against his sensuous touch.

He hoped the air raid would last forever, and could not bear to see the end of this. As far as he was concerned, the bombers above had his blessing to smash the whole of Kiel to pieces.

Suddenly the air raid siren wailed. For a few seconds longer the girl did not stir, and remained standing, as though asleep, with his protrusion still wedged between her thighs, while the crowd dispersed. Suddenly she opened her eyes, as though awakening from a dream. With a fleeting look at him, she turned and walked towards the exit. Tony was disappointed, and followed her like a stray puppy dog. He could not believe that this sweet encounter could have such an abrupt end.

Out in the open, she suddenly stopped and turned. In the dim light of the moon Tony saw that she smiled as she looked up to him. Without a word she took his hand and they went down the street. At the dark entrance of an apartment building they went in and she stopped behind the door of the entrance hall.

Standing with her back to the wall, she let him embrace her, and he kissed her without restraint as they proceeded from where they had left off in the air raid shelter. But there was more. With a delicious shiver he felt her experienced hands exploring, stroking—guiding. They were showing him the entrance to heaven and he went in.

When it was over he stood stunned. Adjusting his pants, his face was shining, like that of a child seeing the Christmas tree for the first time. It really had been the first time for him, and he never dreamed that the sweet depth of a woman could be that delicious.

Overcome with gratitude he groped for the woman again in the darkness of the hall and suddenly he noticed that she had disappeared. Buttoning up his sailor pants he ran after her, but the shadows of the night had swallowed her.

Who was she? He didn't know. During all that time, neither of them had spoken a single word.

The next day he had taken shore leave. He felt that he was in love and had to find that girl. For hours on end he roamed the streets in the area where he had last seen her, but he could not find her. They had not talked, and now he could think of a thousand words he should have said. Now he did not even have a name to give his love.

The next day again he stood leaning against a tree, looking up and down the street, but to no avail.

Ever since then he had been brooding when off-duty with nothing to do. When all this was over, he was determined to go back to Kiel and search for her.

"Girls!" he growled helplessly, into his sparsely growing beard. If you approached them with clever lines they just laughed at you. If you said nothing, they gave you all you wanted.

He just could not figure that one out. He could not even tell anybody about it. Nobody would believe him.



## Chapter 11

Admiral McCain was morose. He should have been elated, because he was a national hero. It was recognized that he had restored Britannia's superiority at sea and beaten the U-boats that had been threatening England's supply lines for so many years.

Depressed, he sat behind his desk and stared at the picture of his nephew. In a weird way, his thoughts had strayed from his job to take excursions along his family tree. And what a splendid tree it was, but it was dying. Robert had been the last green branch of that once spectacular tree.

Now the realization that he should have been married long ago hit him with full force. He should have had children himself, to do his duty and keep that tree alive. He couldn't even think of any wild oats he might have sown in his younger years. He had left the duty of propagation to other members of his family while dedicating his life to the Navy, like a single-minded priest. He had pinned all of his hopes on Robert, who was to carry on the family tradition and walk in his footsteps. Now he was dead. The final blow had come when he had to relay the news of his death to Robert's mother. She had been quick to put all the blame on him for having allowed Robert to be exposed to such danger, but out there was a war to fight. Many men were getting killed.

Well, Robert was not any man. He was Robert.

All his successes in the Atlantic gave him no satisfaction any more. Here he was winning a war, but he could not get the better of that one blasted U-boat.

McCain looked up as the door opened and McGregor came in. During the past month he had given up on making a visit to McGregor his first chore of the day. There wasn't much news to be expected, and the two men didn't see each other as often any more. However, when they saw each other, just one thought flashed through their mind: U-Henning. That was one problem they both had in common.

"Good morning, Huxley," McGregor greeted him. "How are you this morning?"

"I'm fine," McCain lied. He was far from fine, but it was the usual thing to say. "How are you?"

"Miserable," McGregor stuck to the truth. "Lost five ships in the last two weeks. Three of them in just three days to our friend. It looks like I've taken a whipping. I'm not going to stand for it any longer. It's high time for it to be my turn to crack the whip. The *John Barry* was loaded to the rim with silver to back up our currency in India. And now this!"

"Yeah," McCain said weakly.

His once ferocious anger against that boat had been diluted by a dose of respect for his opponent. He was too much of a Navy man not to admire the feats of a brave adversary. He was torn between a fierce desire for revenge and the laid-back attitude of an expert spectator who watches a fair fight.

"Any loss of life?"

"Not much—six went down with the *Troilus*, but all the others were saved. There were more than a hundred people on board. Anyhow, the whole Indik has turned into a disaster zone. These two have now been joined by *U-862* and *U-198*—all of them are sinking ships. The world is rejoicing that we've won the war

against the U-boats and here I've just lost a dozen ships. If that can't be stopped, they'll retire me."

"Oh?" McCain was sympathetic.

"Yes, oh! I'll have to do something urgently."

"What are the odds that U-Henning will make it into Penang?"

"I wouldn't bet a shilling on it. This thing has become priority number one to me. This has to stop."

"Oh?"

"I have mobilized my Task Force 66. They are now standing by with two aircraft carriers and a complement of destroyers and cruisers." McGregor paused to light his pipe and then continued. "I put all of them across his track to Penang. They'll finish him off. I have them waiting for him around the Maldives. Your girl keeps a good track of them, so we know exactly where to put our task force."

"Looks good," McCain admitted and his beetled brows smoothed a bit.

\* \* \*

Kapitänleutnant Henning had become extremely careful. The boat surfaced only at night, just long enough to charge the batteries, and then went down again. They proceeded slowly on a southerly course. Instinct urged him to greater speed, to have done with the crawling five-knot pace, which took his boat only slowly away from the place of his recent targets—the place where the enemy would search for him, but Henning, case-hardened by years of experience, curbed his desire to surface and flee faster.

He had sunk three ships in as many days and was convinced that his enemy would not take that lying down. In the Atlantic, nobody got away with that any more, and down here they weren't stupid, either. The way that destroyer had thwarted his T-5 torpedo with his noise-maker buoy should have been a lesson to him.

As far as Navy Command was concerned, Henning did not need to display any more heroism. Most of his torpedoes were

expended, and his own tonnage record had topped the hundred thousand mark, enough to qualify him for that coveted Knight's Cross. Now he had joined that exclusive club of U-boat aces. He should count his blessings and be grateful to still be alive. He had done his duty and could afford to avoid all further risks. He even decided to let all further targets slip through, should they be unlucky enough to run into his arms.

Not that the Knight's Cross mattered that much any more. That glamorous reward had lost some of its sheen. Any man intelligent enough to count to ten on his fingers could figure out that the war would be over by the time they were back home in Germany. Only nitwits, and members of the Hitler Youth, believed in Hitler's wonder weapons and the rosy promises of Goebbels. It had to be some weapon to turn the impetus of this war around.

In a defeated Germany, the Knight's Cross wasn't worth a crumplet. Henning's main priority was now to emerge from this trip with his naked life. The crew depended on him and his decisions, and he wanted to bring all of them home again. There would be no more targets.

The sea in this area was 18,000 feet deep. It would be dreadful to be trapped here in a sinking boat, fighting for one more breath of air until the hull was crushed under tons of water—sinking to the black depths of the cruel sea. Drowning must be the worst way to end one's life.

Henning shuddered. He, too, sometimes indulged in realistic thoughts as to what could happen. Thank God he was on a straight track to get to Penang.

As more days passed by without being hunted, the boat surfaced more frequently and, at last, made more mileage. The L.I. always kept the boat in shape. From time to time it had to be trimmed and balanced to compensate for consumed fuel and supplies, so the boat would respond easily to the actions of the planesmen.

The sea was smooth and calm, for it was September, and the trade winds were on holiday at that time in the Indian Ocean.

Henning was on the bridge, enjoying the soft air of the tropical night. Beyond the bow, just over the horizon, he could see the three upper stars of the Southern Cross, while at his back the North Star was still high up in the sky. It reminded him of home.

He was glad that the last few days had been uneventful and the knot in his stomach eased off more with every day they travelled south. Now he enjoyed the night as he looked back on their wake, where the fluorescent water fanned out in an ever widening stream, and the diesels puffed out their exhaust in a reassuring, deep-throated roar. It was a perfect night and Henning was not tired. He wanted to remain on the bridge.

Not far ahead to port were the Maldives, and Henning suspected that there could be danger from enemy air cover, but he felt reasonably safe at night. Still, as soon as he received the report that the batteries were full, he decided to dive again.

He opened his mouth to give the command, when the Naxos operator reported, "Radar signal, two o'clock, sir."

"All below, crash dive!" the captain shouted and closed the voice pipe.

The lookouts scrambled from their platform and slid down the ladder with practised ease. Henning took one look around but did not see anything. He could hear the air whooshing from the vents as water rushed into the ballast tanks and the boat headed for the deep. Quickly he stepped down the ladder and slammed the hatch shut above him. The thunder of the diesels faded, and was replaced by the subdued whine of the electric motors, as the captain let himself drop down to the *Zentrale*.

"Leave her at periscope depth," he told the L.I., and went to the wireless room. He took the headphones from Brimstein and listened for a while, then he put the headphones down and sat down by the chart table, studying his track.

"Doesn't look so good, Henk," he said to the L.I., his face furrowed in thought. "A whole reception committee is there waiting for us. Looks like the whole British fleet is there."

He looked around at his men in the *Zentrale*. It was a reassuring picture—the prompt, but unhurried, teamwork of a seasoned crew. His eyes went down again to the chart, as if searching there for a way to escape the lurking danger, then he rose and went to the after periscope.

"Keep her level, Henk," he said. "I don't want to show too much stick. Some lookout might see our asparagus feathering. We have fluorescent water out there."

He adjusted the handles and looked around, turning a few times, then he sent the periscope down into its well.

"Take her down to 200 metres, Henk. Rig for silent running. Both slow ahead."

"Both slow ahead, sir," the helmsman confirmed and reset the machine telegraph. "Rig for silent running."

The message went through the boat and all auxiliary machinery was switched off.

"How much under the keel, Brimstein?" the captain asked.

"Five thousand metres, sir," Brimstein read off the echo-sounder. "Bottom seems to rise here."

"Switch off the echo-sounder," the captain ordered.

Like a predatory cat on the prowl in the African savannah, the boat proceeded in total silence, trying to sneak past the waiting enemy. A faint, eerie sound could be heard in the far distance. It was a sound like a church organ being played across the valley. It was a threatening noise, generated by a dozen warship turbines, and it did not go away. Slowly it increased in volume, like approaching doom.

"Take her down to 250 metres, Henk."

"Two hundred fifty metres, John," the L.I. confirmed, screwing up his face in protest, but gave his instructions to his men.

The boat assumed a nose-down attitude and went down, followed by the rotating needle of the depth gauge. Gently, at 250 metres, it levelled out and the bubble settled in the centre. With the needle stopped on nearly the maximum it was a hair-raising experience, but the boat had twice before been that deep and survived. Again it was groaning under the strain.

“Keep her going with both slow ahead.” The boat was making just two knots.

The sound above had become louder, and vibrated the hull like a church organ introducing a hymn before a prayer. The men’s eyes went along the curves of the hull, which amplified that dreadful sound. That hull was all that stood between life and death for them.

Suddenly they were all thrown off their feet as the boat came to a sliding halt.

What was that? Had they hit a whale?

“We’ve run aground.” Henning mumbled into his beard.

“In 5,000 metres?” the L.I. asked, incredulous.

“There’s a ridge here.” Henning looked at the chart. “It is the Lakadive Plateau. It must be some uncharted elevation here. Stop both engines.”

“Stop both engines, sir,” the helmsman confirmed.

“We’ll leave her here for a while, Henk,” Henning ordered. “We’ll just keep listening and hope for the best.”

He sat down by the chart table and, brooding, he looked down on the Lakadive Plateau, which should have been 500 metres below the surface, but had elected to rise to 250 to envelop him in its arms. He chuckled inwardly. If this was not a sign that there was a merciful God, then he did not know what to believe. When he got home he would have to look into that more thoroughly.

“They’re coming,” he said to the L.I., in a low voice. “You can hear the fast propeller noises and turbines. Big machines. Something like a whole fleet with aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroy-

ers. Looks like the whole of Britain has risen to put a stop to our cruise.”

“They might not be after us,” the L.I. ventured hopefully. “Maybe they’re heading somewhere else—maybe to India—and are just passing by.”

“Maybe,” Henning admitted. “Let’s think positive. I’m only disturbed that they had us on radar, even if it was only for a moment.”

The humming sound of the turbines was now accompanied by the throbbing of their propellers, which vibrated against the hull of the resting boat. The noise was steadily growing in volume, like judgment day descending on the resting boat.

The widened eyes of the crew kept scanning the hull, which threatened to crack under the resounding sound of a dozen trains approaching. Then the Asdic joined in, transmitted from several sources.

The crew felt their hair stand on end when the noise above shook the boat, rising to an ear-shattering crescendo. The fleet was right overhead, and the men pulled in their heads. No bombs were falling.

“We must have merged into the mud,” Henning observed. “That way the Asdic didn’t find us.”

The sound above decreased steadily, as it had increased before, indicating that the enemy had not detected them and had kept on hunting. It was high time that they made tracks before the enemy turned around for another search.

“Both slow ahead and take her up to 100 metres,” Henning said, and rose when the noise had faded away.

The boat did not move.

“Both slow reverse,” the captain corrected his command.

The boat vibrated as the propellers spun half-blade deep in the soft mud. Vainly, they tried to pull the boat from the suction effect of the muddy cradle into which it had been driven.



“Both full reverse,” called the captain.

The boat shuddered, with the propellers spinning at full speed, but still the boat did not move.

“Stop the engines,” Henning called, and looked at the L.I. Silence, more ominous than reassuring, told the crew in the command room that they were trapped. A thin jet of water from a leaking rivet hissed into the hull like a cutting torch. Being on the fringe of the calculated destruction depth made the boat extremely vulnerable to additional stress.

They could not even abandon the boat with their breathing apparatus, as rehearsed at U-boat school. They were too deep.

Henning considered their situation. The elevation at the bottom of the sea had been a blessing when it rescued them, but now it could spell their final doom. The engines had failed to pull the boat free, so now it was a job for the L.I. and his ballast tanks.

“Pull her out, Henk,” Henning said calmly.

“Blow ballast tanks!” the L.I. commanded, and compressed air hissed into the ballast tanks and pressed the water out. The L.I. hoped that the mud hadn’t clogged up the flood gates at the bottom of the ballast tanks, and quickly stopped blowing before the pressure in the tanks became dangerously high.

The boat shuddered, but still refused to rise. The suction of the silt had a tight grip on the boat.

“Pump aft trim tank forward,” the L.I. ordered.

The electric pump was humming for a few minutes, then the command: “Both full reverse!”

The boat stirred, then abruptly rose by the stern. Men and loose items tumbled toward the forward bulkheads as the boat pulled free and rose.

Calmly, the L.I. restored the boat’s balance with pumps and air and directed it up to 100 metres. The boat was under the planesmen’s control again. The L.I. released his crossed fingertips, kissed them and placed them on the bulkhead. “Good girl,” he

voiced his thoughts. "I knew I could rely on you." He produced a handkerchief and wiped the cold sweat from his face.

"Both full ahead!" came the sudden command from the captain. At this moment he did not care about batteries and endurance of the boat. He simply felt like a man chased in a bad dream, and he had to escape his pursuers at all cost.

Robert had watched the last manoeuvres from his bunk. Being a naval officer himself, he had a fair idea what was going on. They lived dangerously, his enemies. When he had first set foot on this boat, he had not known what he was letting himself in for. Had he known all that before, maybe it would have been better to just disembark there in the icy waters of the Rose Garden and take his chances of being rescued there. Now it was too late. Now he was trapped along with them, for better or worse, and with Uncle Hux chasing them relentlessly.

Anyhow, Henning seemed to have slipped through yet another blockade. This was something to be grateful for. Not for Uncle Hux, of course. But then, for the time being Robert's ambitions were not on the same level as McCain's.

If he ever got home again, he had a lot to tell the Navy. By now he knew all about U-boats. Their electrical designs were different and, especially, their rated diving depth was staggering. English boats were rated to go down to 200 feet. This one he had watched go down to a frightening 900 feet. He wondered if depth charges would be all that effective at that depth. They, too, had to work their destructive explosives against the immense pressure of the surrounding water.

Too bad that he couldn't apply his knowledge in this war any more. By the time he was back in circulation the war would be forgotten. However, he could wait for the next one. History had shown that there was a war every 20 years without fail. You could go back in history to King Somebody the Great to prove it. Humans seemed to have a need to shoot each other dead.

In the next war he would, perhaps, be an admiral, maybe sitting at Uncle Huxley's desk and looking at lines on the chart. The difference would be that he would know that there were people attached to those lines. Would he ever be able to do that job with the same detachment as Uncle Hux?

He thought of Adam's description of survival methods. He shuddered. Utterly fantastic! One had to be an optimist to set foot on a boat like this—to believe that one could ever escape the clutches of a sinking U-boat.

The silence was depressing. He needed cheering up and rose to see if Adam was on duty.

\*            \*            \*

Admiral McGregor had always kept a close watch on the Monsoon U-boats—that is what they were called—those 1,600-ton, long-range boats that left Germany for the Indian Ocean. They rounded the Cape, and could reach Japan, without restocking supplies or refuelling. They carried vital war materiel for Japan and were supposed to return to Germany, loaded with equally vital materiel.

Few made it out all the way, and even fewer made it home again. Of the 40 boats sent out, only two would ever see Germany again. The ones that had made it all the way to Penang, McGregor could count off on the fingers of one hand.

Their presence, too, could hardly be felt. Seldom was a ship sunk by a German U-boat. The few remaining boats stuck to the harbour at Penang and rarely ventured out. The Indian Ocean had been a tranquil place until this boat came along. It was most annoying.

It should have been dead by now. The waiting task force had him pinned down on radar. Sinking him seemed to be a piece of cake, but when the fleet bore down on the boat, he had simply disappeared.

### *U-859*

He had planned the operation with great care and had selected a venue for the ambush which had no temperature gradients for the boat to hide under. Still, he was left holding an empty bag. Fowler had confirmed it when she found *U-859* further south.

Granted, there was a ridge at the bottom of the sea to hide in, but that was 1,500 feet down. For chrissake, a U-boat couldn't dive *that* deep. Even so, he had deployed a whole fleet to chase a single boat, and with that the enemy needed an exceptional helping of good luck to get through.

Just the same—he had to face it. The enemy had once again got away and he had to take steps. It was a small consolation that the fleet had stumbled upon *U-198* and sunk it. He had promised U-Henning to McCain and he was going to get it.

He did not want to go to McCain and find someone to commiserate. That man was already sufficiently depressed and needed cheering up. U-Henning was his own baby now. He had to throw everything he had into the finale. He had to contact Ceylon now for some submarines and blockade the entrance to Penang.

Thoughtfully, he lit his pipe and looked at the chart on the wall, where Fowler had pencilled in the track of that annoying enemy.

## **Part Four**

### **Finale**

#### **Chapter 12**

Lieutenant Commander Arthur Hezlet was due on patrol in the warm, tropical waters of the Indian Ocean. It was his first sortie there, after having arrived with his submarine, navigating the long trip from his home base in Scotland.

His 1,100-ton T-class submarine, HMS *Trenchant*, didn't have the long range of a German far-east U-boat, but then, he did not have to go around the Cape. He could slip at leisure through Gibraltar among friends and later through the Suez Canal.

Now his boat was attached to Admiralty in Ceylon at the submarine naval harbour of Trinkomalee. His men were recuperating, and had had a wonderful time after that long trip down. Time ashore, strange sights, native women, rickshaws, elephants and snake charmers, all this was new to them and made every day an event to compensate for the hardships they had endured since leaving home. In the meantime, the boat had been restocked and refuelled for another trip. Now they were heading for the Malay peninsula.

The crew was itching to get into action. There were no targets in the Atlantic any more, and they hoped that in these waters there would be some enemy traffic. So far there was no specific target. The first assignment was to unload a commando team in Malaya, which was to blow up a bridge, vital to the Japanese supply lines. It might not do much damage to the Japanese, but it would prove to the natives that Britain was still alive and kicking.

It was all routine, except that now the boat was crammed full of men until the commandos could be disposed of. The submarine was built for a complement of 57 men, and now there were 80. That took some organizing, and Hezlet hoped to get rid of his passengers as soon as possible.

Dusk was spreading across the harbour when HMS *Trenchant* drew away, stern first, from the trot of submarines alongside the depot ship. Sitting high up on the bridge, Hezlet was as eager as a hunting dog on the trail of a fox. These days targets were as rare as gold nuggets and he knew that in these waters the Japanese sent shiploads full of loot back home. Now, at last, there was a chance to prove his marksmanship with his torpedoes. In the Atlantic they had been useless, but now he was determined to leave his mark.

Impatient to reach open water, he navigated the boat through the minefield at the harbour entrance. He watched the casing party coming up from the deck, climbing over the fixed rungs on the outside of the bridge. They had stowed away the ropes and cables used to tie up the boat to its moorings in harbour. The coxswain was the last one to drop down the hatch and slide down the ladder.

Hezlet stooped to speak into the voice pipe: "Fall out harbour stations, patrol routine—three-six-oh revolutions!"

He looked up. Number One had come up to the bridge.

"Nice weather, sir," he said. "Reckon the monsoons will be starting soon."

"Yes, but we're toughened by our Scottish weather, aren't we? That shouldn't bother us."

"That is true," Number One agreed.

*Trenchant* was now beginning to roll and lunge a bit in the long swells on the open sea—her long fore-part slamming into the white-streaked humps, with spray flying to leeward, driven by the wind.

After reaching deeper waters, Hezlet went down and left it to Number One to make the trim dive. Now Hezlet took the microphone of the Tannoy intercom to inform the crew about the purpose of this patrol. The men had already wondered about the many passengers on board. In a submarine, one was not used to making room for other people.

The trim fine-tuned to satisfaction, the boat surfaced again. There was no urgent need to dive, because there was nobody to hunt them. Like a lion in Africa, they had nobody to fear.

Down in the hull, the crew was glad that the boat was now ventilated and they could smoke in their quarters. Evening meals were served, and afterward the crew relaxed, sitting on their bunks. They played games, rolled dice or just talked about the girls ashore.

Hezlet looked around, then he lay down on his bunk and shut his eyes. What a contradiction, he thought. From the inside, a merry bunch of young men, and looking from the outside, a dangerous predator prowling in the black of the night.

\* \* \*

When Robert shot through the hatch into the rear quarters, Adam was in his bunk, but not asleep.

"Not a bad effort, mate," Adam applauded, referring to Robert's entrance through the hatch. It took a special skill to negotiate that hatch. It was round, about three feet in diameter, with the top rim about chest height. At first, Robert was creeping through with one foot first, then his body and at last dragging the remaining foot behind. The proper way to do it was to grab the handles above with both hands, shoot through with both legs together and land on the

other side in a fraction of a second. It took some practice, but it was necessary. In case of an emergency one couldn't bottle-neck that hatch by slowly creeping through.

"You shoot through that hatch like one of us—like a real sailor."

"I *am* a real sailor," Robert chuckled. "I come from a long line of sailors. Most of the men in my family have been sailors."

"Where do you come from? You never told me that before."

"I thought you might have guessed by my accent. I come from Scotland, a little island up north, Kirkwall, if you know where that is."

"Scapa Flow, I think," Adam guessed. He had been very good at geography in school.

"Right on the button. My family comes from there. My grandfather still spoke Gaelic in preference to English. He boasted that we were descendants of the Vikings. He had a flaming red beard and looked like Eric the Red."

"Well, you yourself—"

"I know," Robert fingered his beard. "My beard is red, too. I cannot deny my heritage. I must have something of the Viking in me, too. By the way, what happened to all of you? I hardly recognise you or any of the crew. What happened to your beards? You all look like a bunch of frogs."

Robert looked around and shook his head in disbelief. All the rough, bearded pirate faces were clean shaven, and had turned into the soft faces of teenage boys. Most of them were not yet 20, and only the beards had given them that rough, *macho* look.

"Well, in a few days we will be arriving in Penang, and for that the beard had to come off. We're not permitted to arrive with beards ashore."

"I see." Robert fingered his own beard. "I suppose that better come off, too. I don't like to look different. Can you lend me a razor to shave it off?"



"Sure, come to the shower when I'm on duty. I'll tap off some fresh water for you." He stretched his limbs in his bunk and then added, "Two more days and we will be in paradise."

"Good for you, but not for me, it isn't. They want to put me into a Japanese prison camp."

"Sorry, mate, I wish I could help you."

"Maybe I can jump overboard and swim ashore when the boat enters Penang Harbour."

"Sounds hair-raising. Where would you go? The war couldn't last much longer. At least until now we've fattened you up. You can last a while in prison camp. By the time you've starved down your fat, the war will be over. I wish I could help you."

"Nobody can. I just have to cop it."

Robert looked around in the narrow confines of the after quarters. "Is there a way out of here?" he asked.

"Of course there is," said Adam. "You see the ladder tied to the overhead above the entrance hatch? Above that is the torpedo loading hatch."

Robert looked through the rungs of the ladder at the hatch.

"To load the long torpedoes that hatch has to be on a slant," Adam explained. "The long slant weakens the hull, so there is a reinforcing steel beam fastened across the slant. It is as thick as your thigh. We call it the match stick."

"Some match stick," Robert commented, and looked at the steel beam, which was held in place with pins. "When does that ladder come down? When do you open that hatch?"

"As soon as we're tied up in the harbour. We can't all disembark through the tower hatch. They have the same torpedo hatch in the forward quarters."

Robert was pondering, looking at the ladder above.

"Gives me an idea," he said at last. "If I'm in the aft quarters when we arrive in port, then I could escape through that hatch and hide until it's dark."

"Getting out is easy. It's what comes after that worries me."

"Yeah, I have to think of something."

"Of course, you could hide under the casing. Plenty of room and hiding places there."

"Yes." A scheme started to develop in Robert's mind. "And when all have gone, I just sneak ashore."

"So far so good. You could pass for a German sailor ashore, but not for long. What then?"

"I could steal a boat."

Adam chuckled.

"I see," he said. "That is the Viking blood in you. You could sail for India—in that case you should leave the beard on, to look the part."

"Don't joke about it," Robert protested. "It's a scheme worth considering."

"A harebrained scheme, I would call it. Something to tell your grandchildren when you spin a sailor's yarn. I still would opt for the easy way of prison camp."

"It's still more realistic than your plan to escape the U-boat with 20,000 feet of water under the keel."

"I agree." Adam was serious now. "We'll see what we can do when the time comes. Of course, I'll help you. When you're under that casing, I'll get some food and supplies for you."

"Well, that's that, then." Robert relaxed. "All we have to do is wait. By the way, Adam, I must say that your command of English has improved dramatically, although you sound more like a Scottish sailor from associating with me."

"I like that."

\* \* \*

HMS *Trenchant* was travelling west. Proceeding all the way surfaced, it had not taken long to reach their destination. The Malayan coast was in sight—in sight of the boat's radar, that is. Visibility was down to nearly zero. A tropical storm bore down on

the boat and water dropped down on them as if poured from buckets.

Hezlet was up on the bridge and guided the boat around the southern tip of Lankawi Island, until he reached the lee side of Dayang Bunting. This was the point to release the 25 men of the 'Codfish' commando. They were to blow up the railway bridge over the Sungai Padang Terap river—a link that would disrupt Japanese supplies.

Tropical rains do not last long, and as the downpour eased, the engines stopped and the men, their faces blackened, came up on deck. There they inflated their grey-green rubber rafts, launched them on the lee side of the boat, and silently jumped in.

Hezlet watched the four fluorescent wakes disappear into the darkness. The rain had stopped completely now. He took one last look around, then he had the diesels started and set course back around Lankawi and headed north again. For a couple of days he would have *Trenchant* to himself, until it was time to pick up the commandos again.

The boat rode smoothly in the long, pre-monsoon swell. They were passing many islands, dotting the ocean toward the equator. They were all things of beauty, designed by nature for peaceful living, with sandy beaches and swaying palms. Most of them were totally unaffected by the war.

The submarine might have been in Japanese occupied territory, but they were the rulers of the sea. There was no Japanese radar, and air surveillance was non-existent. A submarine could go out shooting like a squire hunting rabbits on his own property.

"Message for the captain, sir." A leading seaman poked his head through the hatch and handed Hezlet a decoded wireless message.

With a pursed mouth, Hezlet lit a torch and looked down at the paper.

“Changed patrol instructions,” he read. “Defer pick up of commando. Proceed to Penang. Two U-boats expected to arrive on September 23. Intercept at all cost.”

Hezlet read the message with mixed feelings. It meant that he would have to put the fate of his passengers in jeopardy by missing his appointed rendezvous. It also meant that he was at last to find some worthwhile targets.

He slipped down from his elevated perch on the bridge. “We’re going to shoot some U-boats,” he told his Number One, who had the conn, and folded the message up. “We’ll dive on the watch.”

To dive on the watch meant that the boat would dive without sounding the alarm that ordered the crew to their diving stations. The off-duty crew could remain asleep.

He looked at the men behind him, one on each side, with their binoculars to their eyes, scanning the water around them in the hope of finding a target.

“Clear the bridge. Down you go, lookouts,” said Hezlet.

Watching them tumble down, with Number One following, he stooped to the voice pipe. “Stop together—out both clutches.”

The thunder of the diesels died away, and the boat slowed down, with the sea splashing against the casing, filling it with water and then, with a hissing sound, draining out through the perforations along the curves of the hull.

He brought his glasses up again, carefully searching the horizon for some sign of life, but there was nothing. He was prowling in empty waters, where all he could see was the occasional fishing *prahu*, with its dirty brown sails. He was glad that Navy command had at last guided him toward some targets.

He bent down to the voice pipe again. “Half ahead together. Open main vents!”

He shut the cock on the voice pipe, then he slid down the ladder as the vents on top of the flooding tanks dropped open in a suc-

cession of drumbeats all along the length of the ballast tanks. Spray rose as air rushed out. Trenchant was going down, with the sea rising to engulf the bow. Some of the spray was showering his head before he slammed the hatch shut and dogged the clips down.

"Forty feet," he called down to Number One. "Shut main vents!"

He climbed down into the control room, adjusting his eyes to the bright light inside. From his cabin he got a towel and wiped the spray off his head, then he threw the towel back onto his bunk.

"Forty feet, sir," the coxswain, now in the after planes control seat confirmed, turning the brass wheel around to give the boat a nose-down angle. On the other side of the control room, the engine artificer of the watch slammed the vent levers shut on the diving panel.

Hezlet looked at the rotating hand of the depth gauge. The coxswain was already taking the downward angle off the boat by turning his wheel and the man to his right made similar adjustments. The depth gauge crept to a halt at 40 feet and the bubble in the spirit level settled in the centre.

"Forty feet, sir," the coxswain reported.

"Fine, group down, slow ahead both."

The telegraph clinked as the helmsman relayed the command to the engine room.

Grouping down put the batteries into parallel configuration instead in series. The voltage supply was halved—the motors had less power, but also consumed less of that precious energy. It was all very technical, but the men were trained to do the job and each stoker was a genius at his place.

Down to a speed of three knots now—just coasting along. Hezlet could now sit down and make preparations for his attack.

Checking all around, Hezlet lifted his head in a silent question to the Asdic operator. The operator's ears were sealed by his ear-phones. He would have to take at least one off to hear a question.

The Asdic was switched into the passive mode now. It was sending out no pings, but was only listening to the deep water outside.

"Clear all around, no H.E., sir," he reported, understanding Hezlet's requirements.

Hezlet nodded. Having one last look at the men in the control room, then over the helmsman's shoulder at the gyro, he turned to Number One. "Okay, Number One, she's all yours now. Give it a couple of hours and then go up to periscope depth and look around."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Hezlet sat down at the chart table and looked at it. He had a definite target now. In two days time they would have reached their destination—he could make it in one. There was plenty of time to intercept.

He looked down on the zig-zags of his own track. Armed with dividers and ruler he probed the space between the islands, trying to figure out where his target would be by now. He had followed the news, and knew of some casualties due to U-boat activities in the Arabian Sea. The culprit would be coming from the north. He would give him a surprise.

Many ways lead to Rome, and just as many to Penang. He cursed the Admiralty for giving him such scanty information. At least they could have given him the present location of his target. He tried to think what he would do if he was in the enemy's boots.

He saw himself rounding the north coast of Sumatra, which was occupied by the Japanese, crossing the Straits of Malacca, and then cruising south along the Malayan coast.

Of course, there was the added difficulty that he would have to catch his prey when surfaced. It would be near impossible to intercept if he was submerged. For this, he would have to chose a point very close to Penang, when the enemy had dropped his guard and felt safe—when he was on his final run, with all flags flying in the wind.

That place was found easily, but it also meant that he would be very vulnerable in shallow waters in a narrow strait. He would just have to trust the fact that the Japanese were not geared for chasing submarines.

He reached for his ruler and plotted a hypothetical track, along which his enemy might try to get through to Penang. His pencil jotted down numbers as the planned attack took shape. Finally, with a faint smile, he pushed back his chair.

On paper, with a theorized target and textbook torpedoes, he could not miss. The enemy was dead. He looked at his watch.

"Number One," he told his first officer, "surface now and steer one-two-five. Head for Phuket Island. We should be there at dawn. I'll turn in for a while. Wake me at 0500 hours."

"Aye, aye, sir."

## Chapter 13

The boat had surfaced for the last time. In 45 minutes they were due to turn in to Penang Harbour. They had made it. They had crossed the Straits of Malacca and were now running along the Malayan coast toward Penang.

On the bridge the Number Three, Petty officer Braun, had the watch. The periscope was extended high up, and from it a row of five colourful flags flapped lively in the wind, indicating the success of the patrol.

Abeam to port, the distant coast of Malaya was in sight and, closer still, a string of dreamy islands, with coconut palms swaying in the wind. They waved and greeted the weary traveller after his long journey. It looked like the entrance to paradise.

There were few clouds in the sky, and the sun burned down on the gentle waves and the emerald green water of the tropical sea. The boat's sleek bow cut effortlessly through the water, which was creaming along the sides and joined behind to form a white, foaming wake, with the diesels rumbling as strong and reassuringly as at the beginning of the trip.

The lookouts around the bridge railing had their binoculars glued to their eyes. They each had to watch their allocated sector and could not, under threat of court martial, abandon this and look elsewhere. Now they were nearly safe and home. They were in



friendly waters. Their eyes strayed toward the nearby islands in search of life. Tony strained his eyes. There should be girls under those swaying palm trees. They had a piece of heaven hidden between their legs.

They had heard all about Hawaii and Tahiti and the enticements of the tropics. Here was adventure! Like velvet, the equatorial wind brushed along their clean-shaven faces.

The captain was down in his quarters. There was much work to be done. He had summoned all of his officers for a final meeting. In 45 minutes they would arrive in Penang. They had to make their preparations for that.

"Close the bulkhead hatch!" he called to Brimstein, who was passing by. There was no need to put up with the noise of the diesels. The hatch to the control room could remain closed.

Now Henning sat down and relaxed as he felt the burden of his responsibility slowly ebb away. It had been a long trip. Twenty thousand miles he had made—that was nearly once around the entire globe, always being chased by relentless enemies, and now all this would be over. Peaceful times lay ahead.

He should be jubilant that he had made it, but he was angry. By wireless, it had been arranged that he rendezvous with *U-861* at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca and meet escort vessels there. Together, they would have proceeded as a convoy to Penang. However, now there were no escort vessels, and *U-861* had already made it across from Madagascar and was now docked in Penang. He was on his own.

Besides, there was trouble with the crew. He had threatened the stokers of the aft quarters with court martial as soon as they reached Penang. They had fished a few tins of strawberries from under the floor boards and eaten them. Then it was somebody's birthday and there were no strawberries left to bake a pie.

The food on the boat was strictly administered, and was fine-tuned to last to the end of the trip. Consumption of food by the

crew, outside their allocated rations, was a serious crime. Stealing food was easy, and it was tempting, because it was stored in every nook and corner from bow to stern.

Of course, there was still plenty of food left, and nobody had to starve. Also, the crew had proven to be excellent, but there was the principle to be observed. The men must be punished to learn their lesson.

One by one the officers filed into the captain's cabin. There were six of them. Number Two was well again, but he still had a bandage around his head. Once arrived in Penang they would all be busy. Repairs to the boat would have to be made, the mercury and other freight unloaded from the keel, and new freight taken on for the trip back home. The boat had to be refuelled and restocked with supplies, while the crew got a well-earned rest and recuperated in the fresh mountain air of Penang Hill.

They would load tin and quinine and bales of natural rubber to take back to Germany—all items which were in short supply. Duty rosters had to be established, because the officers, too, were entitled for a holiday ashore. The L.I., too, like his stokers, had not seen daylight for six long months.

Native workers would be permitted on board, and there had to be members of the crew present at all times to keep an eye on them. Now the officers had all arrived, and had only standing room as Henning prepared to address them.

"Permission to go to the toilet, sir."

Leutnant Klopp, the watch engineer, stood to attention.

"What a time you pick!" Irritated, Henning looked at the young officer. "You had all day. Can't you wait until we're finished?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Well, off you go then, and make it snappy. Be back here on the double."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Klopp turned on his heel and left for the toilet, which was near the forward bulkhead.

\* \* \*

Trenchant had reached the planned destination early. There was no Japanese radar worth bothering about in this area, and they had arrived surfaced at 0200 hours on the 23rd of September. If the estimate from Ceylon was correct, then they were in good time to intercept the U-Boat.

The waters here were shallow, with little room to hide. They waited submerged, and now proceeded slowly south at 100 feet, with only 50 more feet under the keel.

All night there had been no moon, and visibility was poor, so they decided to surface and lay lurking, listening to their hydrophones, hoping for the target to arrive.

Hezlet had turned in, but he lay awake and sleep evaded him.

"Keep on listening," he said, and closed the curtain to his cabin. "If I'm asleep, shake me out at 0630 hours."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Hezlet tossed and turned in his bunk. He was supposed to shoot a submarine. It was a bit disturbing. He liked shooting ships. That was what submarines were built for, but lately there were no ships left to shoot at. He was a submariner and liked his job, but shooting at another submarine was a bit like shooting your own brother. You knew what the inside looked like, how it crawled with life—what a torpedo would do to them.

At 0630 hours he rolled out of his bunk and went to the chart table, checking tracks and distances. Impatient and worried, he touched the Asdic operator on the shoulder.

"Nothing all around, no H.E.," the man reported.

Hezlet wondered if he might have missed the target, or still be in the wrong position. Maybe he should have been closer to Penang. The closer he was to that harbour, the less chance there was that his target should by-pass him. Undecided, he sat for a

moment and idly doodled on a pad with his pencil while the boat, without propulsion, rolled in the gentle waves.

Suddenly determined, he put the pencil down and climbed up to the bridge. The boat lay idle on the waves, with the lookouts scanning the surrounding water. The sun had already crept over the horizon, and the water was empty.

For a moment, Hezlet was tempted to switch on his radar and look for the enemy, but then he checked himself. He already knew that the Germans could receive radar signals, and his radar would only drive the enemy under water, like a rabbit hiding in his burrow.

“Control room!” Hezlet called into the voice pipe. “In both clutches, full ahead together, steer one-eight-oh!”

Immediately, *Trenchant* picked up speed. Just out of sight from the mainland, she proceeded further south. There was no use listening here. They could hear the target only if it travelled surfaced. Should the U-boat decide to approach Penang under water, *Trenchant* would have to be pretty close to hear it. Closer to Penang, he could drop to the bottom and listen for his prey.

*Trenchant*’s bow cut the waves and left a mighty wake as she sailed at top speed toward Penang. Once, there was a welcome rain squall to shield them from detection, but in these regions such squalls never lasted longer than a few minutes. Soon they left the rain and the sky was clear again.

By the time *Trenchant* had gained another 50 miles, Hezlet decided that they had reached their ambush point and that it was time to dive and wait.

“Stop—out both clutches,” he called into the voice pipe.

The engines died down, and the boat immediately decelerated, bobbing in the long swells.

He could leave her here. There was little danger from enemy surveillance, even this close to Penang. From up here he had a better view while his Asdic could also listen.

“Group down, both ahead, slow,” he called down. “Steer two-eight-oh!” He had to get closer to the coast line.

It was mid-morning when the coast came into sight. He turned the boat around, with her stern facing toward the mainland, then he bottomed the submarine. The depth here was still 150 feet. Not much to escape in, should an emergency arise. It was to be expected that the target would pass between the coast and Trenchant, who lay there like a mouse trap waiting for the mouse. Being stern-to to the coast would make it easier to escape to deeper water if it turned out that the target was accompanied by an escort.

There was silence in the boat. With all engines stopped, the Asdic was switched to listening. With that silence, they should be able to hear the target even if it travelled submerged.

“H.E. to starboard,” the Asdic operator suddenly broke the silence, after they had lurked for a while.

Hezlet was on his feet.

“Up to periscope depth—group down—slow reverse, together.”

Hezlet went to the Asdic operator and took his headphones. For a few seconds he listened, then he went to the periscope. The enemy was running fast on diesels and would be passing where he was expected.

“Flood tubes seven, eight, nine and ten,” he called, and made a full circle with the periscope. Then he froze as the U-boat came into sight in the far distance to starboard. Damn! That boat was moving fast—must be making more than 20 knots. He sure was in a hurry to get home.

Back in the after torpedo room the compressed air had hissed into the W.R.T, the tubes were flooded, and now the outer doors slowly opened to the sea.

Hezlet was joined by the T.I., who relayed his commands to the leading torpedoman aft, while Number Two was operating the “fruit machine,” the firing angle computer.

“Keep steering two-eight-oh,” Hezlet reminded the helmsman, who had trouble because the boat was slowly moving in reverse, which also confused the planesmen.

The normal strategy for British submarines was to shoot the target from the stern quarter, because the enemy lookouts concentrated their vigil ahead and abeam, often leaving the stern quarters neglected. However, with this fast moving target, Hezlet decided to shoot from abeam, taking the risk that the torpedoes could be detected by an alert lookout, giving the enemy a margin for evasive manoeuvres. The German U-boats had it easier. They had torpedoes that were driven by electric motors, fed from batteries. They left no wake. British torpedoes were driven by steam, and left a wake of bubbles in their trail. An alert lookout could spoil the whole operation and save the target.

Hezlet’s eye never left his victim. With his aides, he got through the ritual of calculating the shooting angle until there was no chance for a mistake.

Patiently he waited, looking at the U-boat, who proceeded as though in peace time, with flapping flags along the periscope, which gave her a festive appearance, her bow cutting the waves under the full power of her diesels.

For a moment he permitted his thoughts to wander. He imagined his target, the cigar-shaped hull crammed with men turning valves and throwing switches, similar to his own surroundings. They all had to be killed.

*Barbaric!* he thought, but quickly wiped that thought from his mind as the enemy’s bow cut the centre line of his optic.

“Fire seven! Fire eight! Fire nine!”

With a hiss and a thump, the torpedoes left the tubes in close succession, running in echelon to intercept the enemy.

“Torpedoes running, sir,” the message came from the Asdic operator.

*Arthur Baudzus*

Hezlet didn't need to hear that report. He could clearly see their wakes, and hoped that the enemy's lookouts couldn't see them, too. He crossed the fingers of both hands for good measure.

## Chapter 14

Adam, being off-watch, had been day-dreaming of home. He had already opened his locker and taken out his tropical khaki dress for his arrival in Penang. Only 40 minutes more and all their worries would be over.

From Penang they could send telegrams home, and receive some signs of life from Germany. Conditions in Germany had likely deteriorated badly and he was most anxious to hear from them.

Over his feet, Adam looked through the open hatch into the electro room. Podlizki was at the switchboard, making some adjustments to the charge, looking at the ammeter. Adam laid his head back on the pillow again and listened to the excited men, who were already trying on their new clothes. They hadn't worn shorts since they had been little kids, and this new uniform was a novelty.

The bunk felt comfortable. The sheets had not been changed in the last six months. The men had grown accustomed to the mixture of their sweat and smell. On a U-boat, one could not be fussy. When you have only four hours to fall asleep, and then must wake up refreshed for another duty cycle, you couldn't worry about trivialities.

Today he did not have to fall asleep and relax. The whole duty-cycle had come to an end. In a moment he would get up, get



dressed and go up on deck to be paraded into Penang. He shut his eyes and tried to picture what it would be like. He had seen pictures of Tahiti—dreamy palm trees, sandy beaches, blue lagoons, hip-rotating girls. He pictured Penang as similar, a dream island in the South Sea.

The thundering noise of the diesels rumbled on. It did not bother him. During the past months his ears had learned to ignore that noise. It was only the heat that made life miserable.

Adam felt that it was high time that they reached their destination. Life on board in these regions had become a nuisance. Insufficiently cooled by the tropical water, the engines radiated their heat into the boat and all the men slept near naked, wearing only underpants. The searing heat was nearly unbearable. More sweat into the bunk—not to worry. In a bit more than half an hour they would be in paradise and then there would be no more sweaty bunks for a long time to come. And no more four-hour duty, either. They would go ashore and would have the whole daytime to relax. Then they would sleep all night until morning. Heaven!

He had not had such luxury for half a year.

\* \* \*

Robert was resting in his bunk in the forward quarters. It was nice and cool in here. The heat of the diesels never reached the front of the boat. Robert felt at ease. Tony was up on the bridge on lookout duty.

Relaxing on his mattress, he watched some of the crew trying on their khaki uniforms. They looked smart, with their brand-new shorts, long socks and polished black shoes.

No signs of military rank were permitted in Japanese occupied territory. They all looked like civilians—more like overgrown school boys in their shorts. However, despite their tender age, all of them were seamen, who had sun-burnt faces, and white patches where beards had been.

Robert's beard was gone, too, but his whole face was pale, like a stoker's face. Unlike them, he had not been exposed to the sun.

He remembered now that he should now rise and go aft. Adam had promised to get him a lunch box from Caruso. So, if he succeeded in escaping, he would have some food on the way.

\* \* \*

Hezlet kept his eyes on the wakes of his three torpedoes. They stuck out from the smooth surface of the water like a sore thumb. They were already quite close to the target and nobody seemed to have seen them yet. He could relax. Too late for evasive action. At 40 knots, eight feet below the surface, they converged on the U-boat.

Two missed, the third hit the boat behind the conning tower.

*Wham!*

*Trenchant* shook as the U-boat was lifted high up out of the water and broke into two halves. With a gigantic splash, both halves dropped back into the water and, a second later, the U-boat had disappeared. Like the hand of God, the next wave wiped over the grave of the U-boat which had caused Admiral McCain such heartache and smoothed out all ripples.

Poor devils, Hezlet thought with regret. Fifty or sixty men had been alive only a moment ago and were now snuffed out in just a second.

\* \* \*

Adam had lifted his pillow and turned it around to find a dry, cooler spot. When it came down on the mattress, there was a thundering explosion. It sounded as though heaven had caved in. Total darkness was instantaneous. Adam was thrown out of his bunk and was lying on the floor.

His instincts took over in an instant. As practised in his mind for years, he jumped to his feet to make it to the conning tower. In spite of the total blackness he reached the hatch and grabbed the two handles above to swing through. He was about to jump, when

a searing blast of air hit his body and made him hesitate. The gust came from the engine room and singed his hair. He could smell it burning. His hands still cramped around the handles. This was the way out to the sun.

The blast lasted only a second, then he was engulfed in a stream of water. A torrential flood shot through the hatch and threatened to tear him from his hold. Within seconds, the aft quarters were filled and everybody swam in darkness. The compartment, which had been their bedroom for six months, was now filled with water and threatened to become their tomb.

Lucky for them, the hatch was low and now the aft quarters had trapped an air bubble above the rim of the hatch. It would be enough to keep them alive for a few more hours.

There was silence now. The men were shocked. Was this the end of it? Was this death? All Adam could think about was that at last that dreadful moment had arrived, which U-boat men only joked about, but did not believe could really happen to them. He was encased in a stricken U-boat, which was sinking. In a flash, he realized that he always had deceived himself. All U-boats sink sooner or later, and now it was his turn.

With a thump, the boat settled down at the bottom of the sea.

The blackness in the aft quarters was total. The emergency lights were either under the water line, or the batteries were flat.

There remained a deadly silence. All the men were stunned, and only slowly emerging from their shock. Gradually, there were some noises of swishing water as the men started to move around to get their bearings.

Adam's body refused to accept that this was the end of his short life. He let go of the handles of the hatch. Stretching his neck he fought to keep his head above water and bumped against the ladder. Instantly he remembered the torpedo hatch above and, like a snake, he worked his body through the rungs. When he was through, he sat down on the match stick and felt for the hand wheel

of the hatch. Up there was the outside world and his mind was racing in an assessment of their situation.

“What was the latest depth sounding?” he screamed into the darkness.

He was the first one to speak. His voice sounded strange, high-pitched in the compressed air at the bottom of the sea. It sounded like the quacking of a duck.

“Fifty metres,” an equally distorted voice came back.

Adam was relieved. His hopes soared. He knew that his body could withstand this pressure. Calmly, he sat on the match stick, with his feet resting on the ladder and his hands on the wheel of the hatch. He tried to turn it and it worked easily.

This was the way up to the sun.

The other men had come alive now, and were busy preparing themselves for their escape from the stricken boat. In the darkness, they were fumbling to find their survival gear. Their bunks were under water and it took time to find their bearings.

Nobody panicked. If you were still alive, your body intended to keep you that way. Everybody was determined to get out of there again.

The men had been an integral part of the boat, and had made it come alive. Now the boat was dead, and the men were going to detach themselves from it like the soul from a dying body.

Suddenly a whining noise from the T-5 resting in its cradle pierced the darkness. It sent goose-pimples down their spines. What had triggered off that torpedo? They all knew that this was a dangerous and unpredictable tool of war, and had to be treated like a raw egg.

The torpedo artificer knew what to do. Working blindly, he disconnected the internal battery and, suddenly, there was silence again. The men breathed easier.

Adam decided not to leave his place by the hatch. A life vest, with breathing apparatus and a one man rubber raft, was in his

bunk under the mattress, but where was his bunk? If he started searching now he might not find what he was looking for and only lose his place of priority at the life-saving hatch.

He realized that when the hatch was opened, the precious air supply in the aft quarters would leave the room in one single bubble, and whoever was behind must struggle for the opening or die. Being at the tail-end of men struggling for their lives, with no breathing aid, would mean certain death. Nobody could hold his breath that long. Badly, he wanted to see the sun again.

Below him he lost his foothold, as some men had the foresight to remove the ladder from the overhead. It would have been a deadly obstruction for the escaping men.

All the men worked with cool deliberation toward their escape. Nobody intended to be buried at the bottom of the sea.

Another man had come up and sat down beside Adam. He had the feeling that it was Joe. Now four hands were clutching the wheel in preparation for the escape.

Voices could be heard now. One got used to the distortion of the vocal chords. It even became possible to recognize who was speaking.

"All clear?" the torpedo artificer called a question into the darkness.

"All clear!" it echoed from all corners.

"Hold on," Somebody protested. "I can't swim. Leave that hatch closed."

"Don't be dense," some other anonymous voice quacked, irritated. "You want us all to rot in hell? What do you have a life jacket for?"

"Give me your hand," the first voice quivered.

"Okay, open that hatch!"

Adam was pleased. His big moment had arrived. The boat was dead, and he was anxious to detach himself from it. Together with the man beside him he turned the wheel and watched the green slit

around the hatch grow wider. Then, with a sudden swish, the hatch flew open.

Adam took a deep breath and then eased out with the air bubble over the sudden inrush of water.

Floating freely upwards, he saw promising daylight in the green distance above. During his training at U-boat school he had learnt all about the dangers of diving. About the bends and burst lungs. He did not know how long he would have to hold his breath, but he did not panic. He was determined to hold on to that air as long as it took.

He did not hurry up to the surface, and let the compressed air flow freely from his mouth. The emerald green of the light above grew brighter by the second, reflecting silver on the bubbles that left his mouth in a steady stream. The amount of air in his lungs seemed to be inexhaustible and the way up endless.

Suddenly he broke the surface.

He had made it! His eyes blinked as he saw the sun, the blue sky and some golden tufts of cloud. And he was still alive!

He turned on his back and swam blissfully, with a smile on his face. He was not considering that he had no life raft, not even a life vest or protection from the sun—that he was floating in shark-infested waters, out of sight of land. He didn't care. Down below he had left the nightmare of the U-boat and Hitler's government. He was a civilian now. He was free! He was alive! He was ecstatic!

\* \* \*

Going forward from the aft quarters, the boat was a tomb. In the electro room, Podlizki had just stopped charging the batteries, and was standing at the small desk, entering the data in the log, when the torpedo struck. The blow threw him off his feet and propelled him against the bulkhead where he smashed his skull. His death was swift and merciful.

His mate, down by the fresh water machine, evaded the initial blow, but the room filled with water in just three seconds. There was hardly an air bubble left here and he struggled up to clear his head where he found a bit of air, but that pocket was full of carbon monoxide from the flames of the torpedo. He lost consciousness quickly, not realizing that he was drowning.

The diesel compartment, as well as the *Zentrale*, suffered the full acoustic blast of the torpedo. Here, too, death was instantaneous and mercifully brief. It quickly uncurled the last clawing hands.

Also all men on the bridge were killed in the blast. They had received an instant death sentence for their lack of vigilance.

The hatch in the bulkhead leading from the *Zentrale* to the fore-ship had been closed to keep out the diesel noise, but the bulkhead had cracked. Immediately, the boat went under. The officers tumbled about as though in a mincer. Henning quickly recovered and, bleeding from a head wound, tried to crawl to safety. The only logical way out was toward the tower and the open hatch.

The hatch in the bulkhead opened toward the *Zentrale*, and by now tons of water pressure kept it firmly shut. It could not be opened any more. Through the crack in the bulkhead, a thick jet of water shot into the officers' quarters and slowly filled the room. Already the captain was standing ankle deep in water. The emergency light was on, and the officers could see what they were doing.

"We will just have to wait until our room is full of water and the pressure equalizes. Then the hatch will open," said the L.I. He did not panic as he assessed the technical implications of that closed bulkhead door.

In a quick flash, Henning recalled his last decisions. He had failed somewhere. He had made a big mistake! Close to his destination, he had become too complacent. He had trusted the Japa-

nese surveillance. That was wrong. He should have been more alert, and approached submerged to the unknown gates of Penang.

The ocean was wide and endless. If anybody searched for him, here was the place to find him. He should have thought of this. He should have realized that the last few minutes were the most dangerous ones of the whole trip. It was true that Penang should have warned him if these waters were not safe but, in the end, the responsibility lay squarely on the his shoulders.

He could have made it if—

If only—

Blood was running from his forehead, down his nose and face. Henning licked his lips. It tasted sweet.

The L.I. was still rattling on the hatch handle. Henning pushed him aside and tried the hatch himself. It still did not budge. The handle was open, but the hatch was pressed shut. They would have to wait a few seconds longer. The water was already up to his chest. The doctor was coughing badly, the L.I., too. Henning felt a choking in his throat. It was too late for all of them. The big batteries underneath their feet were cracked and flooded with sea water and deadly chlorine gas filled the room.

Suddenly, Henning's thoughts flashed back to Barbara and Nicole. She had had a dream—a vision—and he had laughed it off. Now here he was, submerged in water, with only his head sticking out—she had seen that, and possibly could see him now. He took another breath and his throat constricted and refused entry to the deadly chlorine gas, which had seeped up from the battery. Suddenly he realized that an agonizing death was only seconds away. For Christ's sake Barbara—Nikky," he screamed. "I'm not going to make it—"

\* \* \*

Robert's ears were ringing from the shattering explosion. The bunk under him had heaved like a catapult, thrown him against the overhead, and then he had fallen to the deck, momentarily winded.



The light blacked out instantly and then the emergency lights lit up, switched on by relays and connected to their internal batteries.

Groaning, he regained his breath and tried to rise. His body ached, but no bones seemed to be broken. Slowly he rose and pulled himself up to his bunk. His eyes fell on the depth gauge by the torpedo tubes. It indicated 20 metres and was dropping fast.

He thought of Adam's words: *Run to the tower hatch!* Nobody did. They all scrambled to their feet. Unbelievably, they stared at each other in stunned silence. The boat seemed to be on a crazy slant and the men held on to the bunks along the side to steady themselves.

With a soft thump the boat settled down at the bottom of the sea and assumed a level attitude. Robert had a knot in his stomach. His ears were still ringing, and he looked frantically around for some guidance on how to deal with this situation. So far the boat was still dry, and only the main lights were out. They had been out before, but always the damage control crew had restored them within seconds. In the dim light of the emergency lanterns he looked again at the depth gauge. It had settled on 50 metres. Again he thought of Adam's words only a few days ago. Fifty metres was not serious. One could escape from such a depth, he had said. Slowly the knot in Robert's stomach eased.

Now water started pouring through the hatch. Three men crawled out of there, above the stream of water. The first one was Leutnant Klopp. He was staggering to get a grip on one of the bunks. Blood was running from a gash on his head. He was followed by an engine artificer. He was coughing badly. The third one was a seaman. He was also coughing and was vomiting.

Robert looked at the scene of devastation. Damn Uncle Hux and his purple lines, he thought. This wasn't funny anymore. At least he had let them reach some shallow water. That was something to be grateful for.

Robert guessed that some bulkheads must still be intact, for the water was rising only slowly. He was standing in water to his hips, and the round entrance hatch was nearly all submerged.

As their initial shock subsided, the men slowly came to life. They remembered their survival training at U-boat school in Neustadt, where they had practised escape procedures. They went to their bunks and recovered their survival gear from under the mattresses. It was equipment they had thought they would never need.

The top bunks were still above the waterline, and Robert watched the men strapping on their life vests, which also worked as a breathing apparatus. He found one under Tony's bunk and copied them.

Nobody panicked, nobody made any comments. This was no time for joking or flippancy—there was no time for talking. The odds were on to live or die, and nobody was ready to give up living. With single-minded determination they concentrated on the task of seeing the sun again.

Robert took the mouth piece between his teeth and started breathing. It didn't work. Obviously, he had to know more about this equipment and started to investigate. Maybe he should take the other one from under the mattress? Every bunk had two breathing vests.

A seaman from the next bunk, who was already finished, watched him.

"You have to open the valve at the mouth piece," he advised Robert, with a quakey little boy's voice.

Robert did so and started breathing. Now it worked. The yellow canvas bag around his chest worked like an outer lung, reciprocating with his own breathing action.

"There's a little valve at the bottom," the seaman continued his instructions. "It has to be open when you go up to equalize the pressure, otherwise you burst your lungs."

He flipped the valve on Robert's vest open. It was already under water and a stream of tiny bubbles were released from there.

"You also have to open the oxygen bottle when you go up, and keep breathing deeply to arrest the carbon dioxide you exhale in the potash-cartridge. If you are timid and breath shallow you will suffocate."

Robert ducked his head under water and started breathing. It worked. With water streaming from his hair he emerged again and smiled at the man next to him.

"*Vielen Dank*," Robert said gratefully. "You just saved my life. You're a pal."

He winced when his first words came out. His voice had sounded funny, not at all like his own. He hoped that no permanent damage had been done to his vocal chords.

"And when you get up there, you will need a life jacket." The sailor was not finished yet. "Then you close the mouth piece and the bottom valve, as well as the oxygen bottle."

Robert's head was spinning with so much instruction and so many things to think of. Obviously one needed training to use these things.

"Let me see," he wanted to be sure and repeated, "For breathing I open—"

"It is easy," the other one interrupted him. "For breathing, everything is open and, up there, everything is closed."

Robert smiled. That, indeed, *was* easy.

"*Vielen Dank*, Pal," he said again, and turned to look under his mattress, where he found a yellow, one-man rubber raft, which he had seen under the arms of the other men.

Now he was fully equipped, and watched the other men in the semi-darkness of the narrow space. They all had only their heads sticking out, for the water had left only about one metre of air to the overhead. Some men were busy detaching the ladder from underneath the torpedo hatch. It was the same arrangement as Rob-

ert had inspected two days earlier in the aft quarters—match stick and all.

He thought of Adam. Was it the same back there? Adam had expressed no doubt that he could escape from a sunken U-boat if it was not too deep under water.

Now Robert was glad that he had not gone aft earlier, as he originally had planned. Somewhere back there an explosive charge must have hit the boat, and if he had been there, he would be dead by now.

Suddenly Robert thought of his own future if he survived this. He was still not finished. There were the Japs to think of. No need to hide under the deck anymore. When he came up, he should detach himself from the other men and swim ashore. He had to play it all by ear.

Even if they should be picked up by a Japanese coastal patrol, he could pose as one of them and sneak away as soon as they were put ashore, before they sorted out who was who. No good worrying about that now. He was still 50 metres down at the bottom of the sea.

His thoughts were interrupted when the torpedo artificer checked the progress of the crew.

“Anybody got any questions on how to get out?” he asked.

Nobody answered.

“All finished?”

“All ready,” all confirmed. Nobody protested.

“Remember, don’t go up too fast—now, turn on the oxygen bottle and start breathing. Don’t rush for the hatch, you have all the time in the world. The first one at the hatch will not get a prize. Open the hatch!”

Two men, sitting on the match stick turned the wheel, then suddenly, the hatch flung open. The air in the room escaped instantly in a single bubble and a thick jet of water shot into the forward quarters as the remaining lights went out.

The sudden inrush of water took Robert by surprise. It threw him off his feet and flung him against the torpedo tubes. He bashed his head against the steel and stars appeared before his eyes. Quickly his teeth clamped around that life-saving mouth piece and he started breathing.

It was all over in just three seconds. Again there was total silence, interrupted only by his own breathing, which sounded like an air-pump in his ears. Robert could see the emerald green of the round torpedo hatch above, with shadows of the escaping men disappearing through it.

Breathing deeply, as instructed, Robert drifted toward the opening and let himself out. He did not look back to that dreadful tomb below, and had his eyes raised to the green light above. The bottom valve of his breather released a string of tiny bubbles, which glittered silver and drifted up ahead of him in the increasing light of the surrounding water.

At last, he broke the surface. He closed all valves and his vest ballooned out to support him

“Just like a professional,” Robert smiled. It had all worked like a charm. Briefly, he noticed that there was nothing wrong with his vocal chords after all. Must have been the compressed air down there. He forced himself to cough and spit into the water. It was a bit rosy, but no blood. His lungs were as good as new.

Heads were popping out of the water everywhere. There were more survivors. Some blew up their yellow rubber rafts. Robert remembered that he, too, had one and started to blow it up with the mouth piece.

In a flash, he realized that he was swimming again, like before in the Atlantic and the Irish sea. This seemed to be the punctuation mark in a Navy man’s career. Right then he decided that there would be no more swimming. This was the last straw. When he got back home, he would take Uncle Hux up on his offer and join his department.

Luckily, this water was more pleasant than that in the North Atlantic. It was nice and warm, like in a bathtub. He could swim in it forever.

With his rubber raft half inflated he let himself drift on the gentle waves and looked around for a place to swim to. He had intended to swim ashore, but the horizons were empty. There was no sign of land.

Surely, the sinking of a U-boat could not have gone undetected? Soon some coast guard would come and pick them up, and he would have to swim away before then. Better wait with the rubber raft until he was out of sight

Suddenly he saw a stick on the horizon. It was swinging on the waves, like the pendulum of a clock. Was that the mast of a coast guard vessel? Was he too late? With widened eyes he watched a structure emerge from the water, parting the waves like the head of King Neptune. It was shedding tons of water as it rose.

“Another U-boat!” Robert cried.

Again he noticed that his voice was normal. Maybe this boat was getting back to Germany and he was saved from the threat of a Japanese prison camp. But another six months on a U-boat? Robert shuddered.

Quickly, the submarine took shape and rose further out of the water. Like angry ants, ready to fight when their nest is threatened, many sailors thronged out of the tower hatch and jumped on deck. The boat had drifted closer, and the sailors threw lines overboard.

“Swim! Swim!” they encouraged the drifting survivors.

“Christ! They’re English!”

Robert felt a surge of joy. He abandoned his life raft and swam with powerful strokes towards the boat. He got hold of a line that was thrown at him and was pulled aboard.

It was Uncle Hux after all, he thought, as he stood on the deck of the submarine. What makes the Germans think that they can win the war?

*Arthur Baudzus*

A lookout high up on the tower screamed a warning and, on the captain's order, all sailors and survivors disappeared into the tower hatch and the boat went down.

## Chapter 15

Adam's bliss didn't last long. Suddenly it struck him that being alive and seeing the sun was not the end of his misery. He could not swim ashore—he didn't see it anywhere and did not even know where it was.

Next to him, a man popped out of the water. It was Brimstein. He had been a strong man, with a chest like a barrel. He must have filled that mighty chest with air and had come up holding on to that precious commodity. On the way up his lungs had burst and he had drowned in his own blood. He was dead, with blood still streaming from his mouth. His impetus had brought his body up, and now it sank down again.

He was gone. Only a red cloud in the water proved that there had been a Brimstein once. Adam shuddered. He became concerned and looked around for something to attach himself to. He did not want to be alone at the sight of death.

Overhead, a lone sea gull gave a single cry and then flew on. Adam suddenly remembered the time when he was initiated into the brotherhood of U-boat men. When marching, they had sung enthusiastically:

*On a sailor's grave  
there grow no roses.  
On a sailor's grave*



*there grow no flowers at all.  
The only mark  
that is a lone white gull  
and hot tears your girl would shed back home.*

This was it, then. When he was singing this, his death had still been in the remote future. All the men left down there in the stricken boat had sung this song at one time or another, never considering that one day they, themselves, would come to an end in that sailor's grave. Now it was their turn.

There would be plenty of tears back home. Adam did not want to die. In stories, the shipwrecked sailor always found some driftwood to attach himself to, and then floated to a romantic island. Adam was still full of life and had plenty of energy. He looked around.

A few yards down he saw Erwin Neulander, a diesel artificer, drifting in his life jacket. He had a deflated life raft under his arm. He looked sick, his face tinted green, his head hanging low over the water.

Adam swam toward him.

"Don't you blow your raft up, Erwin?" Adam asked hopefully. He was something to hang on to.

"I can't," the man said weakly. "The pressure bottle is empty, and I don't feel good enough to blow it up."

"What's wrong with you? What happened?"

"I was on my way forward when it happened. I must have inhaled some chlorine gas before I could make it to the forward quarters. I feel miserable."

"Here, let me have that thing."

Adam reached for the life raft and tried the pressure bottle. It was empty, all right. He found the mouthpiece and started to blow it up. His lungs felt strong and healthy.

When the life raft was fully inflated, he helped Erwin in, then he followed. The raft was designed to carry only one man, but fac-

ing each other, with their legs contorted to save space, they could both fit into it.

Adam felt safe now. He had really never doubted that it was not yet his turn to die. He had trusted that something would turn up and it did.

Because of the heat in the U-boat, all stokers were dressed only in their underpants, and so they had emerged from below. Now Adam felt the sun burning down on his bare back, but it was still pleasant. It still felt more comfortable than the heat in the boat.

Suddenly, Adam saw a submarine emerging from the water. It was a strange sight to him. It was not the blue-grey colour of a German submarine, but was more a light brown. The raised snout, too, looked alien. It took only a few seconds for Adam to realize that this must be the culprit who had caused the disaster. He saw sailors crowding the deck, picking up survivors. Now hope lifted his spirits. It got better every minute.

He felt no particular animosity toward the enemies. He, too, wanted to be saved by them. He felt like jumping out of the raft and swimming toward the boat, but it was still some distance away and abandoning the life raft meant burning his bridges behind him. If he should miss the boat it would mean that he would be again alone in the ocean without anything to cling to.

Longing to catch the submarine, Adam jumped out of the raft and started to push it, swimming toward the boat. Maybe he could catch it before it dived away again. He saw the men on deck, saw some of his comrades being helped aboard, and he pushed harder.

Suddenly, what Adam feared happened. All the men climbed back into the tower and the boat disappeared. The green water closed above it and they were alone again.

Well, not entirely. When Adam looked around he saw that there were more survivors who had missed the boat. He had an uneasy feeling that some shark might be taking a closer look at his heels and quickly climbed back into the raft.

There were more lonely swimmers, and it was important to establish half ownership of the raft. When it came to surviving, he was number one before everybody else.

They were all drawing closer together now. Nobody wanted to be alone. Four more men came to the raft and held onto the rat-lines. They were Hein Obermaier, Joe Schmidt, Caruso and Müller from the forward quarters. They were now six men and one life raft. The swimmers all had life jackets, but still Adam felt uneasy. Self preservation could turn men into animals, and he hoped there would be no fight for possession of the raft. Nobody was going to take this place away from him. He would kill for it, if necessary.

Adam expected that some coast guard would come soon and pick them up. Surely the sinking of a U-boat this close to Penang could not go unnoticed.

They spotted another raft a few waves further on. Lothar Jesse, who operated the diving panel, sat alone in it. Müller detached himself and swam toward it. He climbed in and the two rafts drifted together.

Suddenly, they saw some other yellow spots in the far distance. How could they have drifted that far apart? With their hands, they paddled toward each other. One single man was sitting in one raft, holding on to an empty one. They recognized Kurt Obst, a seaman from the forward quarters. Both rafts were already fully inflated.

What a stroke of luck! Now nobody had to swim. They were eight men with four rafts. Everybody was high and dry, and there was no fear of having a leg bitten off by a hungry shark.

For company, they tied the four rafts together.

Now they started to look around. Where could they go? Should they just wait until they were picked up? Or should they attempt to row somewhere? From their elevated position, they now could see the coastline of Malaya.

They decided to take the initiative. They untied the rafts and started paddling with their hands toward the coast, taking care to stay close together. The ones wearing lifejackets were better off, but Joe, Adam and Caruso were naked to the hips, and they began to feel the burning sun. Their skin turned red, like a lobster.

For hours they paddled toward the coast while the sun climbed higher. As time went on, the dim line of the coast grew fainter and finally disappeared altogether. Instead, on the other side, a faint mountain appeared, which they suspected to be Sumatra. They realized that paddling the rafts with their hands did not get them anywhere. The currents were too strong and they were at their mercy.

"Looks grim," said Adam. "We're drifting in the current much faster than we can paddle."

They all ceased their efforts. The insides of their arms had become raw from rubbing against the rough fabric of the rafts, so they tied the rafts together again. They did not want to drift apart.

"We'll make it," Erwin said, in answer to Adam's pessimism. "I'm sure that if God has helped us to escape from down there, he will not let us perish here."

"Hmmm."

Adam was an agnostic, but it gave him comfort to share in his mate's belief. He was not really afraid, and felt safe in the raft. He felt free and released from the Navy now. Perhaps they would be picked up by some fisherman. That would be even better than the coast guard. He would like to get ashore, among civilians, and start a new life there, free from the interference of governments. He wasn't in the Navy any more.

In thoughtful silence, they remained tied together. They had drifted for hours now. The sun had peaked, and was sliding down toward the west. The Sumatra mountain had disappeared, and the Malayan coast had come into sight again. It seemed that they were drifting to and fro at the whim of the tides.

A rain squall came and thrashed violently down on their sun-burnt backs. It didn't last long, but it had given them a short period of relief from the burning sun.

Earlier, when still in the boat, Adam had yearned to see the sun again. Now he had what he wanted and the sun was frying him. He hoped that the sun would find a cloud to hide it soon.

In the late afternoon a German Arado floatplane flew low overhead. It was obvious that they were searching for them already. They were all jubilant and waved, screaming in a frenzy, to the aircraft overhead. The Arado flew in wide circles and at last disappeared beyond the horizon.

"He did not give a sign that he had seen us." Adam's spirits fell. "But maybe he'll be back."

Nobody said a word. They all seemed to have similar thoughts. However, having seen the familiar markings on the side of the aircraft gave them the assurance that they were not far from home.

Their confidence did not last long. Darkness descended quickly, and it became obvious that they would not be found before the next day and would have to spend the night on the water. At least the torture of the sun had disappeared.

Nobody wanted to drift alone in the darkness of the night, and they made sure that the rafts were properly tied together by their ratlines.

There was no moon, and the stars shone brightly from a pitch-black sky. Longingly, Adam looked up to where the North Star could be seen low over the horizon. There was home. There was Germany.

The water was eerie. Illuminated by billions of fluorescent life forms, every movement in the water could be seen. A hand dipped into the water shone brightly, and anxious eyes scanned the surface of the water for the fast-moving fins of sharks.

There was nothing. It seemed that the rafts did not transmit the message to the sharks that here was something to eat, but the apprehension remained, nagging in their heads.

The night was long. It stretched on forever. Many times it looked as though they had drifted toward the coast, shadows appearing quite nearby—teasingly close—and then a wind gust blew it all away. For hours, their eyes pierced the darkness for some brightening of the horizon—for some sign of the rising sun. It was daylight that would bring rescue, and they longed for some lighter sheen on the horizon, but the night stretched on.

Finally, it came! First a faint blue streak along the horizon, then a rosy sheen, growing brighter and, at last, there were the rays of the sun again.

It was daylight, and with daylight there was hope again and there was more! During the night they had drifted quite close to the Malayan coast. No longer a distant, hazy line, they could make out trees—waving palms and, better still, some islands nearer by. Surely they could be reached by now. They were at most a thousand yards away.

“I’ll get it,” Joe cried enthusiastically and untied his raft. Then he started paddling toward the nearest island. He had no urge to return to Germany. *There* was his wife—that unfaithful bitch. Who needs a wife? Here were hula-hula girls on this island. Among them he would settle down and live like a king.

Hein agreed with him. He had similar sentiments, and with shaking hands untied his raft. He, too, paddled in a frenzy toward the island. It was so temptingly close.

Caruso untied himself, too. He was in high spirits, and felt like singing “*Aloha Oe*,” but he had no guitar. He never sang without his guitar or his banjo.

Adam started paddling. His mate had recovered during the night and had lost the green tint in his face. Wildly, the two pad-

dled toward the island like a Mississippi river boat. They paid no heed to the wounds on their arms that scraped along the raft.

In spite of all their efforts, they kept on going backwards. The tide was much too strong. Soon the dreamy islands that had beckoned so close faded away into the hazy distance. Adam gave up and stopped paddling. His arms hurt badly, and his back was even worse, with the sun burning down again.

Now the two were alone.

With their eyes focused on the coast, all the rafts had drifted far apart and were out of sight. If they had to spend another night on the water it would be dreadful. Without each other's company, how could they maintain hope?

Then a triumphant scream!

Erwin, who was sitting facing the coast, had seen a boat—a large trawler bobbing up and down as it made its way toward them.

Adam now screamed, too, waving his arms to make sure they saw them, but this time he did not have to worry. The boat came straight toward them and came to a stop. Curious Japanese faces looked down on them, and at last they were picked up.

Speaking with hands and feet, Adam directed them toward the other rafts, and at last they were all united and on their way to Penang.

Adam was in the Navy again.

## Chapter 16

Admiral McCain was in his office early. He was in a rosy mood. Six months had passed since Robert's death, and the initial pain had faded. Three days ago he had received the news that *U-859* had, at last, been sunk, and that this time it had been definite. They nearly got away with it. The enemy was about to slip into his hole, but McGregor had caught him by the tail and finished him. It had been a day to celebrate for both of them.

Now everything was fine. It did not bring Robert back, but there was a sense of satisfaction of a job finished

There were no worries in the Atlantic any more, and the war would be over soon. There was no challenge left. It was a pity that Robert was not there to share in the successes. These days the sinking of a U-boat was as easy as taking candy from a child.

It had not been all that easy with the skipper of *U-Henning*. He was one of the last of a dying breed. There were still some of them left, but you could count them on the fingers of one hand.

He reached down under the desk and produced a whisky bottle. He filled a glass and drank it, then he put the bottle away and lit himself a cigar.

"Ah—" he felt good now.

Lately, he had taken to drinking a glass or two. It had helped him to maintain his image when he found himself fretting about



Robert. He still felt guilty that he had not been more persuasive in holding Robert back.

The door opened, and Eve Fowler, the officer on duty, came in. She had been released from McGregor and was back at her old desk. She was a clever girl, and he considered promoting her.

"Good morning, sir," the third officer stood to attention.

"Good morning, Fowler, and what a good morning it is." The Admiral was in high spirits. He was a dried-out bachelor, but he still appreciated the sight of beauty and youth.

"We have some more news from Ceylon, sir."

"Oh, yes—that U-boat. That was a good one, wasn't it?" he took some more puffs from his cigar.

"Yes, sir, but there's more than that."

"What?" the Admiral searched the face of the girl for an answer. Her eyes were red—she seemed to have been crying. "That U-boat *was* sunk—wasn't it?"

After that endless string of near misses everything was possible. McCain held his breath.

"Yes, sir, it was sunk all right, but there's more to it. There were survivors and Trenchant took them back to Trinkomalee. One of them claims that he is an Englishman and he said—"

"Preposterous!" McCain exploded. An Englishman in a U-boat! Whoever dared to invent such a harebrained story? Probably the latest trick of that blasted captain. "I hope they threw him into the darkest dungeon."

"Unfortunately, they did, sir. The only reason they notified us is because the prisoner referred to you personally as a witness and I think—"

"What! How dare he!"

For a moment the girl ducked her head under the blast of the Admiral's wrath, then she pushed her chin forward, and with tear-stained eyes blazing, said, "I think you should listen, sir. The man says his name is Robert McKay and that you're his uncle."

“What!” The Admiral half rose from his chair and then slumped back again.

Images flashed and chased each other through his mind—Robert, drifting alone on the waves, a U-boat passing by and picking him up as a prisoner of war for interrogation—suddenly it all fell into place like a Jigsaw puzzle. Robert, on deck aboard *Dauntless*, the case of the missing body—he, himself all the time hunting the boat that sheltered Robert.

“Oh, my Gaaad!” The Admiral groaned at the enormity of this revelation.

Until now his world had been black and white. White was his country and black the enemy’s, to be ruthlessly eliminated. Unemotionally, like in a chess game. In a chess game the pawns could be restored after the game, but suddenly it struck him that he had eliminated countless U-boats—all filled with men such as those who had sheltered Robert.

“Rob—” he cried, and his voice broke.

Quickly, he swivelled his chair around and stared at the chart on the wall. His shoulders shook. An admiral does not show emotions—not ever.

Slowly, he swivelled back and looked at Fowler, his face a mask of granite.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” he barked. “Get a V.I.P. plane and then go and get that fellow here! On the double!”

“Aye aye, sir!” the Wren’s face broke into an enthusiastic smile. She turned on her heel and left the room.

Alone, McCain let his head fall on the gold braid on his arms and gave vent to his emotions.

\* \* \*

The night had been black. Only the fluorescent water shone and teemed with microscopic life as *Trenchant* rocked silently on the gentle waves on the lee side of the island. For the second night

in a row they were waiting here at the rendezvous point to pick up the missing commandos.

Due to the operation against that U-boat, they had missed the appointed pick-up date and were now hoping against all odds that all was not lost. Hezlet decided that he would give them one more night, and then he would have to give up the enterprise as lost. If they had not turned up by then, then the Japanese most likely had captured them and he would have to head for home.

\* \* \*

Robert was down in the English boat.

If he had thought that being picked up by an English boat would solve all his problems, he was to be badly disappointed. He was still bundled together with the German prisoners, and they were not permitted to fraternize with the crew. No speaking was permitted.

Robert had succeeded in approaching the captain, where he identified himself and told his story. But the captain had refused to take any action. He had said there was no way that he could tell a collaborator or a spy from a genuine case and that this was a case for the shore authorities.

He was back with the U-boat men.

After a few days of idling, a new group thronged through the tower hatch into the boat. Their faces were blackened and they were English, but they, too, were not permitted to associate with the prisoners.

Robert felt lonely now. He did not feel like speaking German with the other prisoners any more. Being on an English submarine, among his own people, had turned the Germans into enemies again. He had nobody to talk to.

The diesels had sprung into action, and life assumed a familiar atmosphere. The same oily, sweaty stink felt homelike, but with nearly a hundred men on a smaller boat, the ship was a captain's

nightmare. The submarine was badly out of trim and Hezlet hoped that he would not have to dive any more.

Luckily, it took only a few days of surface travel and they were back in Trinkomalee. Robert hoped that now his ordeal would be over, but nothing changed.

Again he was bundled together with the others and thrown into a shore prison camp. Once he had been granted an interview with a lieutenant, who was the security officer. The man had listened sympathetically, and even offered him a cigarette, but made no commitment. This was a case for London to decide, he said, and in the meantime he had to remain under guard until he was cleared.

That was that, and that was the problem, because one of the guards was a hostile Australian. To him, the prisoners were U-boat men, and all U-boat men were murderers. He once had had a brother on a merchant ship, which was sunk by a U-boat. His brother had gone down with the stricken ship. Now that man held a personal grudge against all U-boat men and let them feel it.

The prisoners were glad when, after a few days, they heard a rumour that a ship was in port, which would take them to Egypt to another prison camp.

Robert was worried. He did not want to be transferred to another prison camp. He wanted to go home. Surely, Uncle Hux should have heard about him by now? The only thing that made his life bearable was the thought that all this would soon come to an end. Only six months had passed since he had last seen Eve Fowler, and she was sure to be where he had left her.

He had a thoughtful smile on his face when the door rattled and the Australian guard came in.

"Okay, mate," he addressed Robert. "Come on out. There's somebody waiting to see you. You seem to be a dinkum Pom after all."

Robert was guided across the yard into an administration building, where he was pushed through a door. The guard closed the door behind him and left, while Robert looked around.

The room was empty except for Eve Fowler, who sat casually on a desk.

Robert's face lit up as he felt his burden drop from his shoulders.

"Well, Lieutenant," the Wren started, "don't look so pleased. You should be court martialed."

"Court—I?" Robert's mouth fell open. "What in blazes for?"

"We had a date, remember? You stood me up, and are living it up here in a tropical paradise. I'm suing you for breach of promise. How's that for a valid reason?"

There was that faint smile again, that smile that had haunted him ever since he had lost his ship from under his feet. Fascinated, he looked at that lovely face, which had been in his dreams, and had made life bearable for him during his ordeal.

"I plead guilty and accept your punishment." Robert grinned from ear to ear. "Only tell me, what took you so long?"

"Long?" Eve Fowler rose and came closer now to meet him. "That wasn't long at all. To the Navy bureaucracy you were dead and buried in the Atlantic. I had to exhume you from the files in the archives, dust you off and revive you again before I could come and pick you up."

She stopped in front of him and looked up.

"I suppose this is no time for kidding, Lieutenant. I suppose you have an awful time behind you. I brought you a suitcase full of stuff to turn you into yourself again. I also have a plane waiting to carry you home as soon as you're ready."

"You're an angel, Eve. I've had about all I can take by now."

"You poor thing," Eve Fowler smiled. "At least I can assure you that your swimming days are over. The Admiral put his foot down. He thinks your knowledge about U-boats must not be

wasted. You're a lieutenant commander now, and my boss in the U-boat surveillance department. I brought you a uniform to prove it. How does that sound to you?"

They were standing close together, and Robert had her sweet fragrance in his nostrils. Her smile was not Mona Lisa-like any more. It was wide, and showed a row of beautiful teeth. Robert felt an instant attraction to that woman, who with the flick of her fingers had put his life back on the rails again. Overcome with gratitude, he took her into his arms and kissed her.

It was sweet and delicious.

"Hey!" She freed herself. That behaviour was not listed in Navy regulations. "What was that for? You don't have to be that grateful. I'd gladly do it all for nothing."

"I'm not completely revived yet, I need some more mouth to mouth resuscitation," Robert smiled down on her. "Now I feel really alive. That felt like heaven."

"It did?" Eve's smile deepened. "Then let's do some more reviving," she said, and slung both of her arms around his neck as she kissed him back.

Robert was happy.

He had never kissed an officer before. It really felt like heaven.

## Epilogue

The boat was *U-859* and she was not forgotten. Twenty-five years later, the two halves were located and a million dollars worth of mercury recovered from her keel. In 1994, a salvage consortium located the John Barry at great depth and brought up her cargo of silver.

Arthur Hezlet, the commander of the *Trenchant*, became an Admiral, was knighted, and held a leading position in NATO until he retired.

Now that you know all about U-boats, you might one day find yourself as a tourist in Moltenort, a small village north of Kiel in Germany, where there is a U-boat Memorial. On 89 plates are the names of the 757 U-boats, and the 30,000 men, who went out to sea and did not return. In hindsight, one will realize that from the outset the chances of *U-859* returning safely home had been microscopic.

Starting with *U-841*, of 20 boats, up to *U-860*, every single boat was sunk.

I was on *U-859* and went down with her to the bottom of the sea. I came up again to tell this story, in which I pay tribute to my comrades, who I left below.

Arthur Baudzus

### ***Inscription on Memorial Plaque for U-859***

U859

KOMMANDANT KAPTLT. JOHANN JEBSEN

AM 23.9.1944 IN DER MALAKKA-STRASSE VOR PENANG  
DURCH BRIT. UBOOT VERSENKT.

OBGFR. GERH. ALBERTUS 4.6.1925 - OBGFR. FREIDR. ALBS  
4.11.1923 - OBGFR. WALDEMAR BASTICK 27.7.1922

OBGFR. ADAM BELZER 23.9.1924 - OBMT GUSTAV DAMM  
8.4.1920 - OBMASCH JOS. ENGELMANN 5.6.1919

OBGFR. HERM. FLUCHT 15.10.1924 - MAR.ST.ARZT DR. H. VON  
GEHLEN 31.7.1910 - OBGFR. G. GOPPELT 24.4.1925

MT. ALFONS GUNKEL 13.10.1916 - OBSTRM. LORENZ GUT-  
BROD 23.6.1918 - OBMT. WERNER HÄHNEL 7.10.1920

MT. KURT HELLWIG 24.5.1922 - OBMASCH. HEINRICH HERLING  
2.12.1914 - MT. HANS JÄKEL 19.12.1918

KAPTLT. JOH. JEBSEN 21.4.1916 - KAPTLT.ING. HELMUT KIEHN  
1.6.1917 - OBGFR. ALFRED KLAK 19.12.1924

OBGFR. HEINZ KLUGE 1.4.1924 - OBGFR. HANS KOLENDA  
2.7.1921 - OBMASCH. WILHELM KRUG 21.1.1913

MT. REINHOLD KOSS 25.3.1923 - LT.Z.S. GERHARD LASK  
6.11.1922 - OBGFR. GERHARD LORENZ 21.8.1924

MTR. KURT MASCHKE 19.9.1922 - OBGFR. HELMUT MUNOT  
5.8.1922 - OBGFR. FRIEDRICH NÖHLES 30.8.1924

OBGFR. ALFRED PANTKE 6.8.1926 - GFR. KARL PENKALLA  
6.10.1925 - OBGFR. HELMUT PETZEIT 6.11.1923



OBGFR. HORST PETZOLD 8.2.1922 - OBGFR. ARNOLD QUAST  
10.12.1924 - OBGFR. REINH. REHBERG 13.3.1922  
MTR. ARNOLD REITER 24.2.1925 - OBSTRM. EWALD RODE-  
WALD 9.2.1919 - OBGFR. HEINZ RUPPRECHT 26.6.1925  
OBGFR. ERNST RYDZEWSKI 11.1.1923 - MT. ERW. SCHIDLO  
15.6.1922 - OBLT.Z.S. GERH. SCHNITZLER 18.6.1913  
OBMT. W. SCHREIBER 21.12.1921 - OBGFR. WERNER SELZER  
6.11.1924 - OBFKMSTR. W. SILBERHORN 23.6.1917  
MT. RUDOLF TAIMER 2.7.1922 - MT. RUDOLF UBL 9.6.1924 -  
OBGFR. HANS VITT 6.12.1927  
OBGFR. ERICH WICHMANN 30.8.1922 - GFR. HANS ZIEMER  
9.1.1924