

TIME WAR ONSLAUGHT



NICK S THOMAS

Table of Contents

- [PROLOGUE](#)
- [CHAPTER 1](#)
- [CHAPTER 2](#)
- [CHAPTER 3](#)
- [CHAPTER 4](#)
- [CHAPTER 5](#)
- [CHAPTER 6](#)
- [CHAPTER 7](#)
- [CHAPTER 8](#)
- [CHAPTER 9](#)
- [CHAPTER 10](#)
- [CHAPTER 11](#)
- [CHAPTER 12](#)

OceanofPDF.com

TIME WAR: ONSLAUGHT

By Nick S. Thomas

Copyright © 2015 by Nick S. Thomas

Published by Swordworks Books

OceanofPDF.com

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, media, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of various products referenced in this work of fiction, which have been used without permission. The publication/use of these trademarks is not authorized, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

OceanofPDF.com

PROLOGUE

In the year 2074 a great war raged that decimated the populations of most of the world. New chemical weapon technologies, genetically enhanced soldiers, and mutations changed the face of warfare. An embittered scientist and genius, Maximilian Villiers, leads the NAM forces in an attempt to destroy the Allies of the Free World (AFW). An elite AFW team of Augmented and Psychologically Enhanced Servicemen, A.P.E.S., tracked down this leader of the enemy, and it seemed as though victory was in sight. Led by their fearless leader, Sergeant Corwin Wyatt, the unit known as the Luckers undertook the mission that could end the war in a single day.

But that was not to be. For Villiers had one last hand to play. In secret he had developed what seemed the most unlikely and unbelievable of devices - a time machine. Realising what was at stake, Wyatt and his team fought with everything they had to shut the device down, but they were too late. Having no other choice left for their survival and the freedom of the world, the twelve-strong squad of A.P.E.S followed the villain in to his time machine just moments before it was utterly destroyed, along with all evidence of its operation.

Wyatt and his team are on their own now in an unfamiliar world they had only read about in history books. They are in the middle of a larger war than they could ever have imagined, World War II. Whether it was Villiers' chosen time or not remains to be seen, but this is not the war they knew from the history books of their day. It is 1943, and the Axis forces seem stronger than anyone could have believed. They soon discover that the Soviet Union has already fallen, and hope of success for the Allies in the war seems increasingly in doubt. History has already been changed, and it is soon clear that Villiers arrived well before them, and he has already turned the tide of the war in Hitler's favour.

The Luckers set out to hunt Villiers down and bring an end to the madness he created. He was turning Nazi Germany into the superpower Hitler had always envisaged. But they soon find themselves amongst a

failed Allied invasion of the town of Dieppe. The chance of pursuing Villiers seems impossible as they battle their way through German forces, only to be confronted by Allied troops who suspect them of being the enemy.

Wyatt and his team had no choice but to surrender to the Allied forces, or risk having no friends in a dangerous and war-torn world. Interned in a prisoner of war camp, the Luckers superhuman skills are soon revealed when they utilise them to help defend the prison from a German raiding party, uncovering one of Villiers' super soldiers in the process.

Wyatt formed an uneasy alliance with local Allied officers, but few yet believe in their abilities or motivations, and they became increasingly torn between the search for Villiers and assisting newly found friends.

Military officials in the Allied forces are as distrustful of the Luckers as they are of the Germans. Their knowledge, technology, and abilities led to a deep distrust of them. The fact they do not exist on record anywhere in the world, only further casts doubts over their origins. But there are a few who believe. A select few who Wyatt has shared the truth. Amongst them is Captain Hotwell. A British intelligence officer first sent to interrogate them, and now acting as their liaison officer.

This support was not enough for the Luckers to get the resources they need. But when a German plot to assassinate Winston Churchill is uncovered, Wyatt saw an opportunity to save one of the most important leaders in the free world, and to gain a powerful ally. Despite Villiers' best efforts, Wyatt saw his people to success and saved the life of the British Prime Minister.

When hope seemed within grasp, one of Wyatt's own struck against them - Tano. A highly intelligent and manipulative meddler who would see Churchill dead so that they may seize power themselves. Even while the youngest of them is bleeding out from his wounds, they must confront this new problem. Tano is quickly overcome, but a doubt lingers over the group, and the platoon is divided and broken.

CHAPTER 1

"Think the kid will make it through?" Rane asked.

Vi smiled as she saw the soft side of the hulking soldier sitting opposite her.

"We can only hope," replied Corwin.

He turned back to look out to sea as the small ship bobbed along. It was a bizarre experience. The sea was a variable he had rarely had to consider as they flew about the globe on highly advanced vehicles that could soar through the air with little resistance at all.

It was clearly a small military vessel that had been disguised as a pleasure yacht. It was convincing enough from a distance. All weapons except small arms had been stripped, and the armour didn't look like it would hold up to much. As they rocked from side to side, Nylund finally rushed to the rails edge and threw up over the side of the vessel. Vi laughed aloud, and it even brought a smile to Corwin's face.

"You know this mission is bullshit, right?"

"They are just testing us, Porter," Beyett said calmly.

"Testing us? Haven't we killed enough fucking Nazis for them to take us seriously?"

"Why are you complaining about a chance to kill more?" asked Harland.

"Why!" he yelled.

He leapt up and pointed out at the sea around them, though there was little for them to see, as only the moon lit up the horizon.

"Because it's taking so fucking long! Look at us. We're sitting around on some ancient piece of shit when we should be out there fighting."

Beyett looked across to Corwin to intervene, but he had little motivation or incentive to do so. It weighed on him heavily that they were two men down. They hadn't even come close to tracking Villiers' location, and already they had been reduced to a ten-man squad. He knew they couldn't afford those kinds of losses.

"Do you know why they have sent us on this mission?" Beyett finally asked Harland as he paced back and forth angrily.

"No, go on, educate me."

"Because we are about to conduct a mission in a neutral country. They can't afford to have British or American forces involved in this. But us, we are something entirely unique."

"Neutral country? Who gives two fucks about a neutral country? This is war."

Beyett shook his head.

"This is a different world we now live in. Wild and savage like our own, but in wholly different ways. Our world was like the Wild West compared to this."

Harland grunted with frustration and slammed his fist into the cabin wall beside him, but the rest of them ignored him.

"So this operation, Postmaster, know anything about it?" Corwin asked Beyett.

The intellect among them shook his head, and yet still managed to share more than any of them knew.

"I am not familiar with the details, but I am pretty sure it was supposed to have been last year."

Corwin shook his head.

"Things have changed so much."

"Yes, and I fear the time we came from would be unrecognisable to us now."

"That a good or a bad thing?" asked Vi.

Beyett shrugged. They could hear footsteps, and a tall and square jawed man approached Corwin. He wore nondescript clothing that made him look more like a fisherman than a soldier. But the way he carried himself made it clear he was in charge.

"Captain Corwin?"

"Yeah," he replied casually.

"I am Major Sykes-Gathany of the Small Scale Raiding Force."

"Jesus that's a mouthful."

Corwin shook his head, but the man was not perturbed and stepped forward to offer Corwin his hand.

"You can call me Gus," he added.

The man's confident and friendly manner pleased Corwin, and so he stood up to greet him properly and shake his hand. Though he could hear Harland sighing and muttering in the background.

"Has your man got something to say?"

"No, he's just being a little bitch."

"You must excuse me, your American manners are a little alien to me."

"Likewise," replied Corwin.

"Yes, well, onto business. I can't say I much approve of this last minute addition to this mission. You see it is intended to be carried out in a covert manner, and you do not strike me as the sort of team that would know what that meant, let alone have any intention of carrying one out."

It was hard to tell whether he was trying to insult them or just be honest, so they simply waited for him to go on.

"We are going to the island of Fernando Po, just off the coast of West Africa. Our mission is to capture and recover three fully laden cargo vessels that are in port there. The resources would be of use to the war effort, but more than that, it would be a propaganda victory, and an outright insult to their man Hitler."

"I am guessing those ships aren't lying about with no protection?"

"Ah, Captain Corwin, now that is the crux of the matter. Also in port is a Jerry destroyer, and a flotilla of minesweepers in support. Our boys in the Navy can't attack them in the port. It belongs to the Spanish, and we have enough enemies in this world without bringing them into the fight."

"You want to steal three ships?" Vi joined in, sounding none too pleased.

The Major seemed a little embarrassed by the statement, for he knew it were true.

"You want us to commit an act of piracy?" asked Beyett.

Vi began to laugh. "Well, fuck, I'm in."

"I appreciate your enthusiasm, I really do, but this is a mission that requires a delicate touch. We are going to slip in and out without firing a shot."

"Oh, come on, this isn't what we're here for," Harland complained.

"No, in fact I am not sure what your purpose is. If there comes a time when we need a heavy-handed approach, then well, what can the ten of you do? That destroyer is crewed by over three hundred hands. Half of those

will likely be on board. If we are discovered while the vessel is still operational, then none of us will make it out alive."

"This is bullshit," Harland protested and rushed towards the Major as if to get violent. Corwin put his hand out and stopped him in his tracks.

"Sit down!" Corwin barked.

Harland grunted angrily and walked away.

"All right, so how are you getting anywhere near these ships?"

We have an agent on the island that has convinced the destroyer's captain to host a lavish party on the island. Most officers and many of the crew of all the enemy vessels will be attending. He's seen to it that a surplus of alcohol has been laid on for the crews who remain. They should be weak, drunk, and arrogant."

"They would be that stupid?"

The Major nodded. "The Nazis are winning this war, or most of it at least. They are getting a little ahead of themselves, and taking chances no man in war should."

"Seems like you are making an awful lot of assumptions. All it would take is one sentry to see what's happening, and we'll have all hell raining down on us."

"So better make sure they don't, ey?"

Gus carried about his business, and Corwin could see his team were even less content than they had been previously.

"They are testing us," stated Beyett, "See if we can handle ourselves in an actual operation. That we can follow orders and work alongside other teams."

"We are wasting our time," added Porter.

"Not really," replied Corwin, "They want proof that we can do this, so let's give it to them. But we aren't gonna do that by sitting by idly and watch this mission pass us by."

"You heard him. We are just backup."

"What are you, Vi, scared of letting your little hands get a little dirty?"

"Fuck you, Harland!"

"You'd like to, wouldn't you?"

She shook her head, but he would not let it go.

"What's the matter? Can't handle a man?"

She snapped and lashed out, but Corwin caught her strike before it could reach its target.

"Enough, I'm sick of this shit. She's into women, and you're an asshole. Get over it," Corwin spat.

"So what are we going to do, then?" Beyett asked.

"We're going to come back with a prize of our own."

They watched and waited as they made their way quietly through the night until finally three small vessels came alongside them. Gus appeared on deck once again with four other men all dressed similarly in a casual manner.

"Remember, you are here if things go pear shaped. Don't attract any attention. Don't do anything unless all hell breaks loose," said Gus.

Corwin nodded in agreement and watched as he and the others climbed down onto the small tugboats waiting for them.

"Look at it," said Vi.

They looked out into the distance at the destroyer. The lights of the port where the party was raging outlined its silhouette. They could just make out the shapes of the other vessels in the port.

"They should have sent us in for this. What are the five of them going to do?" Vi asked.

But nobody responded. They watched the tugs sail in for the port at what seemed a snail's pace and without any lights on at all. Corwin stepped to the doorway and called in his orders to the helm.

"Take us in."

He said it in such a calm and confident tone, but that still wasn't enough.

"We have strict orders to stay put unless shots are fired."

"I am in charge here now, and I can judge the situation for what it is as it unfolds. You see that torpedo boat out there."

He pointed to a glimmer of movement just out of the port. It was nothing more than a shadow that neither of them could really make out. The Captain recoiled, for he had not seen it himself. Corwin knew the only reason he had noticed it was because Frasi had pointed it out to him, but he didn't tell the Captain that. The Captain took his word for it but still seemed uneasy.

"Circumstances have changed. That boat could block their way out, if it doesn't discover them before they get that far. Get us moving and intercept that vessel."

"I'm not sure..."

"Just do it!" Corwin yelled.

The Captain caved in and begrudgingly obliged as Corwin went back to his squad. It was clear they had all heard his conversation.

"You know this will be the end of us if we screw up?"

"Yeah, Beyett, and the making of us if we do this right."

"The Major won't be happy either way. This is his mission, his baby. His chance to shine and you are attempting to upstage him."

"Yeah, well this is war, and we have a little more to worry about than hurting a few feelings."

He turned to Frasi.

"Think you can handle that torpedo boat alone?"

He nodded confidently and headed to the aft. He pulled out a small one-man canoe. It was a crude looking craft, but it would be the only silent way of approaching that didn't involve freezing to death.

"You don't seriously mean to take that ship, do you?" Nylund asked.

"Why not?" Corwin answered sternly.

"Yeah, why the hell not?" Vi added.

"You've got to be crazy. You'll get us all killed."

"Not necessarily," Beyett said.

He could see the concentration in Corwin's eyes. This was not the plan of a fool, but of a determined mind.

"Okay, so what's the deal?"

"Look at us. We're just a few lost sailors," he replied with a smile, "Anyone speak German?"

Nobody responded.

"Italian?"

Still nothing.

"What else do they speak around these parts?"

"French, I think," said Beyett.

"I can do that!"

They were all as surprised as Corwin was.

"For real, Lecia?" Vi asked.

"If she says she can speak French, then she can speak French," replied Corwin in support.

Vi shrugged but still didn't believe it.

"All right, everyone else out of sight. Give me your rifle," he said to her.

But she didn't look impressed.

"You want to use those French skills of yours, or what?"

She shrugged and reluctantly let go of the rifle.

"And what do we do when we get aboard? If we get aboard that is," asked Nylund cynically.

"We fuck some shit up," replied Harland.

It was the first happy words to come out of his mouth since they came aboard.

"I figure there can't be much more than a hundred crew left aboard that ship, and only a handful of them will be marines. They'll be spread out, not anticipating having to fight. They won't have many weapons to hand, and half of them will be pissed out of their skulls."

"That's a lot of assumptions to make."

"Yeah, Beyett, I know, but we have to rely on a few strokes of good luck and our own ingenuity. It's the way we work, isn't it?"

None of them could deny that.

"What about the Major and his people? If they are rumbled by our actions, they'll be shot up in seconds."

Corwin grimaced. He didn't want to cause their deaths if he could avoid it.

"Then we don't move on the destroyer until we know they are aboard."

"And you're relying on that freak animal to take down a boat by himself?"

"I trust him with it more than I would you, Porter. Now come on, all of you out of sight," replied Corwin.

He placed Lecia's rifle and his Bren gun inside the bridge, picked a thick long coat from the rack, and threw it over himself. "You all know what you have to do. You don't wait for my order. If you get the chance to board that ship undetected, you take it. Let's do this right. You've seen the guns on that thing, could fuck us up in seconds."

He turned and left to take up position beside Lecia.

"You look convincing," she joked.

"More so than a woman seeming to be in charge?"

"That is the last thing they'll be thinking when we come into sight," she replied as she pulled her coat off to strip down to her tank top. In the dark of the night her striking hair was not noticeable. She almost looked

like the period pinups she was pretending to be, as she pushed out her chest and lowered her chin, looking up at him with big eyes.

"Wow, I didn't know you could act so well."

"When I have a need."

They fell silent for a moment as they watched the tugs ahead of them approach their targets.

"You know if they don't buy this, they'll probably shoot us where we stand?" she finally asked.

"Yep," he said with a sigh.

"And that you have just removed the weapon from my hands that could make all the difference."

"They turn those turrets on us, and that little shooter ain't gonna do nothing to save us. Wait, you're not scared, are you?"

"Facing death without a weapon in hand? Maybe a little."

"You've got a weapon."

She looked at him as if to ask what as she raised an eyebrow.

"Yourself."

She understood what he was saying and appreciated it.

"We pull this off, I expect a few drinks in return."

"I can cope with that."

Corwin raised his binoculars and could see the tugs had reached their targets now. He turned back to the bridge cabin and slammed his fist into it.

"That's it. Take us in."

"You sure about this? You know that is a destroyer before us?"

"Yes."

"And that we are defenceless if they turn on us?"

"I'm ambitious, not an idiot. Now get us moving."

Their pace soon picked up, and as they closed the distance, it became apparent just what a giant the destroyer was compared to their modest vessel.

"Act distressed, like you are lost and in need of help," he said to Lecia.

"Poor helpless little girl who can't handle her boat?"

"Something like that."

As Corwin watched Gus' team go about their work, he remembered Frasi and turned to check on the boat he had gone after. He could just make out someone perched on the roof of the boat. It could only be the feral one

of his own squad, his mission complete and watching and waiting for events to unfold. Corwin sighed with relief.

"He did it, fucking good work."

"You doubted he could pull it off?"

"Frasí isn't really like us. He never recovered from the horrors he was forced to live through. He is a special breed. An enemy you never want to have to meet. I think he could slit any or all of our throats in the night, and escape before anyone was the wiser."

"And you trust him still?"

"Of course. He's never given me reason to believe he would ever do it. You have to trust someone."

She shrugged. He could tell she wanted to agree, but that her stern persona would not allow her to publically. Finally, they were within visual range of the destroyer crew. Even with their lights off, Corwin could see through his binoculars that one of the crew was squinting to make them out.

"Okay, here we go. Time for you to work your magic."

He lowered the binoculars and sat down casually on a nearby container. A sharp and aggressive call was shouted to them in German. It meant nothing at all to Corwin, but it was pretty obvious what he was asking for. Lecia suddenly erupted into speech with a loud and soft toned French accent. It didn't even sound like her.

How on earth does she do it, Corwin thought.

She kept rambling as the sentry continued to yell commands in German at her. But she kept talking over him and throwing her arms about as if in distress and irate over something or other. The German sailor appeared to be beckoning for them to stop their approach, but Lecia threw up her arms as if she didn't understand as they turned to come alongside the moored destroyer.

Corwin could see they still did not perceive much of a threat. The sailor had made no attempt to alert the rest of the crew, and only two others had come to the railings, though they were carrying rifles. Their little vessel turned to starboard and floated in towards the destroyer to come alongside. The German was still shouting at them, but clearly there was nothing to be done to stop the two craft coming together. They had slowed to a fraction of their pace and almost came to a stop before coming to rest beside the ship; with just the lightest of contact to the fenders that would go unnoticed to the two thousand seven hundred-ton armoured behemoth.

The two armed Germans had still not even raised their rifles. The three of them seemed more interested in Lecia, and the skin she was showing, than any potential threat that their vessel and her crew might pose. It was in this moment that the German who had been heckling them lifted up a cup and threw it back merrily. It was clearly alcohol, and he was swaying a little.

Fuck me, he really did make it happen!

Corwin remembered the plan Gus had laid out. It all seemed to be going too well when he noticed a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye. He turned quickly to see Harland rush out onto the deck and take a running leap up to the railings of the destroyer. He cleared the boundary and landed on deck with his Bren in hand and firing on full auto. The first guard was riddled with bullets, but the game was up.

"Ah, fuck!" Corwin muttered.

He didn't even have time to go back for his Bren. He threw off his coat and drew his Colt, quickly putting two shots into the German who had been conferring with Lecia. A bullet ricocheted off the hull beside him. The second guard was cocking his rifle as he went to take a second shot, but it was too late. The others had heard the gunfire and had stepped out on deck to join the affray. Rane opened fired with his Vickers machine gun as he advanced towards the railings. Bullets struck all around the position of the German, and he ducked down for cover.

"I guess the subtle approach is over," said Corwin.

He rushed forward and took a leap towards the vessel. He soared over the railings and smashed into the bulkhead, just beside the body of the man who had been yelling at them. Propped against the wall beside him was his weapon. It was a wooden stock submachine gun, with a horizontally fixed magazine and a bandolier of spare magazines on the deck beside it. It looked horribly antiquated to Corwin, but it was a substantial improvement over the pistol that he was carrying. He holstered his sidearm, took up the weapon, and threw the bandolier over him. Chas leapt in beside him, far more nimbly and with more grace than he had done.

"Don't stop. Keep going until this is done," he said to her.

She smiled like she was a kid in a toyshop. He still never understood her mentality, but while she continued to operate and show no fear in the most extreme of situations, who was he to question her? Harland dropped in a second later and smashed clumsily into the bulkhead.

"It's fucking on!" he yelled excitedly.

"You're a fucking maniac you know that, right?" asked Corwin.

He only smiled in response, much the same way Chas had as they continued onwards. A siren began to ring out. It was ear splittingly loud to the level that everyone on the island would be able to hear it. Corwin could already imagine the cursing words that would be coming from the Major's mouth, but there was no time to worry about it now. He hurried onwards and soon found two Germans rushing out from one of the hatches. He immediately squeezed the trigger. The low calibre weapon barely recoiled at all in his firm grasp, but the two men were riddled with bullets.

He rushed on to the entrance and stopped, peering inside because he could hear several people approaching. He pulled out a grenade, primed it, and launched it inside. Before he could go in, Porter burst in through the entrance firing as he went, so Corwin kept going. He looked to the bow to see three crewmembers run into the massive double barrel gun turrets, seemingly unnoticed by the others. He charged on after them. He hadn't seen those guns fire but could only imagine what devastation they might cause.

Gunfire and grenades resonated all around, and he could hear a Bren still firing on full auto. In between bursts he heard the wicked laughter of its user. He turned back and saw Harland at the entrance to the bridge. Bullets ripped through the glass windows as muzzle flashes lit up the interior. Harland still had his cigar in his mouth and puffed away, as he fired from the hip and cut down the bridge crew with merciless joy. Corwin never understood how he could get so much gratification out of it, but he was a good soldier for it, so he could not complain. He carried on towards his target. Halfway a hail of bullets landed all around him, and he rolled into the cover of a lifeboat.

A heavy machine gun was tracking him, and bullets struck all around his position, pinning him down. The weapon went silent for a moment when it could not find a target. He peered out to get line of sight before once again its muzzle flash lit up the sky. It was a fixed emplacement weapon with no shielding, but he had to duck back for cover before he could even hope to get off a shot. The turret was being brought around now, and he had no doubt it would tear their vessel apart. He hadn't got on well with the crew but didn't want to see them dead, but neither could he think of a way to break from cover. But in that moment he was given an answer.

A single shot rang out from their vessel. He noticed the flash and made out the silhouette of Lecia's hair. He peered around the lifeboat; the gunner was slumped dead over the weapon. He looked back and gave her a little salute before jumping out from cover and making a beeline for the turret. It had just lined up on their craft, and the guns began to lower as he reached it. The entrance had been left open in the panic and rush of the crew, a small mercy. He leapt inside; carefully firing a three-shot burst into each of the crewmembers and took a sigh of relief. His momentary calm was broken when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He spun around with his finger on the trigger. Vi stood before him.

"Nice work," she said, but she pulled him out and pointed to the torpedo boats in the bay, "We have a few more problems to deal with."

"Give me a hand, will you?" he replied and stepped into the gun turret. He took hold of the nearest body and threw it out onto the deck and did the same for the second. Vi took the third. He looked back and studied the controls. All the markings he could see were in German and made little sense to him.

"You can't seriously think you can work this?"

"Can't be that difficult."

The two large brass casing artillery shells were resting on the loading tubes from where he had killed the loaders moments before. He rammed the first home and slammed the breech shut and sealed it. Vi was quick to follow suit on the other.

"All right, let's see what this thing can do," he said, taking a seat on the blood stained gunner's chair.

He pivoted the turret around and raised the gun barrels slightly until he had the first torpedo boat in sight and squeezed the triggers. They felt everything around them shake like an earthquake as the thunderous guns rang out and smoke bellowed out around them. Two huge impacts landed on the surface of the water just in front of the boat and splashed it with water. For a moment they both were frozen with shock at what they were dealing with.

"Not exactly small arms, are they?" Vi asked, and she began to laugh.

"Come on, help me reload," he said as he got to his feet.

He opened the breeches, and the brass casings ejected. Corwin reached for another on the rack, quickly slammed it in, and took his seat once again.

Vi did the same. Taking aim, he could see the torpedo boat just begin to move and the frantic crew running about its deck.

"All right, you fuckers, let's see how you like this," he said, smiling as he took aim and confidently pulled the trigger. The guns thundered once again, and one of the two shells scored a direct hit in the centre of the hull. It penetrated and went right through, splitting the craft in two with its immense power.

"Holy shit, right on!" Vi yelled. They watched the two parts break open and begin to sink. They quickly set about loading more shells and fired at another that succumbed to a similar fate, but as they loaded again, they saw the crewmembers of one of the other vessels jumping overboard. He fired anyway and watched the boat become engulfed in flames. They loaded one last time and pivoted the guns around to the final boat. It was making a break for open water. He fired and watched the shots fall short.

Vi rushed to the gun breeches to reload, but Corwin held up his hand to stop her.

"No, enough. They're finished, but we aren't. Let's get this ship locked down!"

He picked up his submachine gun and rushed out onto the deck, finding three more bodies of crewmembers who had tried to reach them and been killed by Lecia's exceptional sharpshooter skills.

"She sure can handle herself."

"Got that right," replied Vi.

He knew she meant more than just shooting, but he had more to worry about than that and rushed back towards Harland. He found a lowly officer stumbling drunkenly out of one of the hatches with a small pistol in hand. He was firing erratically, but to Corwin's amazement, one of the shots struck the armour on his chest. The little 9mm bullet was no match for his 22nd century technology armour, and the shot ricocheted off, but it shocked him for a moment. He held the trigger down and emptied the magazine of his SMG, carrying on as he drew it out and fed in a fresh one.

"That was sloppy," said Vi.

He'd hoped she hadn't noticed.

"Still here, aren't I?" he snarled.

They reached the entrance to the deck and found it to be a bloody mess. Eight crewmembers lay dead in a pool of blood. Harland stood over

the last survivor, about to plunge his knife into the man's neck from above as he knelt cowering on the deck.

"Stop!" Corwin ordered.

Harland looked up at him with contempt and looked back down as if to continue.

"Don't you fucking dare!"

"Do what you want, but when you're done, he's mine," replied Harland. He pushed the man aside and stood back.

Vi looked impressed for him having saved the wounded man, and it pleased her to see Harland put in his place. Corwin never understood his sadistic nature, but it came invaluable in much of the work they did. The German was slumped on his knees and looked up at Corwin. His face was splattered in blood, both his own and his comrades, and he had a gunshot wound in his shoulder.

"You speak English?" Corwin asked.

The man nodded.

"You got some kind of loudspeaker on this thing?"

He nodded in agreement once again.

"Then put me on, and don't say a fucking word."

He reached forward and hauled the man to his feet. He glared at him until he finally reached forward and pressed a few keys, handing Corwin a wired microphone. He didn't say a word, only nodded to acknowledge that he had done as requested.

"My name is Captain Corwin, and I claim this ship in the name of King George and on behalf of His Majesty's Royal Navy. Lay down your weapons and surrender, and no harm will come to you."

They heard a few more gunshots ring out, and finally all fell silent.

"You did it. You took the fucking ship!" said Vi.

Corwin stepped out of the bridge to the open deck. A tug was heading to go past their bow with one of the transport ships in tow. At the bow he could see Major Sykes-Gathany looking at him through a pair of binoculars. He put the glass down and was shaking his head in disbelief. Finally, he lifted his right hand and gave Corwin the thumbs up. He turned his attention back to the coastline and could just make out the shapes of hundreds of German sailors and marines at the edge. Some hurried to get aboard small boats. Others simply stared in horror at the defeat they had been dealt.

"We open fire on that town, and we could wipe it off the face of the Earth," said Harland.

"We could, but there are civilians out there. Civilians who helped us make this happen. We have won this day. Let's take what we have won and move. Raise anchor and get us the hell out of here."

He turned to Harland who looked disappointment by the lack of blood spilt.

"Man the aft guns. If any of those boats get anywhere close, I know I can rely on you to sort them out."

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 2

Hotwell took a sip from his tea and sat back. He propped his feet up on his desk and picked up the morning newspaper that he had not had a moment to read. He was trying to stay calm while he read the headlines, but it was grim news that only made him more anxious. He took a deep breath and finally leapt from his seat, throwing the paper down. He felt useless.

"Should have gone with them," he muttered.

He paced back and forth around the empty operations room, not knowing what to do with himself.

"No bloody use sitting around here."

He cursed and sighed.

"Why? Why am I even talking to my..."

He stopped, realising how crazy he sounded.

"Oh, sod it," he said, as he picked up his cap and walked out of the room.

"Any news on Hunter?" he asked a passing orderly.

"Nothing yet, Sir. He is stable, at least."

"Right, then, but keep me up to date on his condition."

"Yes, Sir," replied the man as he hurried on past.

Hotwell still couldn't believe the kid had survived, but it was just one more fact about the Luckers that seemed impossible and implausible. He stepped out of the building and looked towards the high security wing to the south where he knew Robak was being detained. He still wanted to get some time in with the enemy soldier that could only be described as a creature.

"Oh, well, they can't say no forever," he said to himself, as he went forward to try once again to get a word in.

He strolled on. The sun was just rising and created a beautiful red skyline behind the secure wing they called 'the shed.' There was not a single sound of gunfire or distant bombing. For a moment he could imagine he was taking a pleasant stroll in the country, and that there was no war at all. But his dream was quickly shattered when he heard the rattle of a Sten gun

in the direction he was heading. He quickly reached for the revolver on his belt and drew it out, and went forward towards the shed.

He looked around for help. A single guard was rushing towards him from the main building. He was holding a Sten at the ready.

"On me," said the Captain, and he carried on.

He remembered the hulking Robak. He was a terrifying sight to behold. Wielding nothing more than his miserly little .38 revolver, he felt nothing short of naked and prayed the sound of gunfire was not related to the creature. But he knew in his heart that it was the most likely explanation.

"You see that thing, you fill it full of lead, you hear?"

The soldier looked confused, and it was becoming clear that he had no concept of what was being held in the shed.

"Just stay close, and try not to shit your pants," he said.

He surprised himself with the words that were coming out of his mouth, and could only think that he was being ever more influenced by Corwin and his rebellious and crude squad. He shook his head at how rude and uncivilised he had been, but at least it calmed his nerves a little. Further gunfire rang out, this time from a bolt-action rifle. Four shots were fired until the gun fell silent. An alarm began to sound, and several other troops were rushing towards them from the main building. Hotwell reached the main doors to find they were open. The guards that were on duty must have rushed in to counter whatever threat existed. He stopped for just a moment to see if there was a weapon inside the entrance that he could use in the guardroom, but he had no such luck.

The Captain waited for four of the other soldiers to reach them. He had no intention of going in without at least a few others in support. More gunshots rang out from inside, and once again went silent. They could hear several screams as a few people ran in fear. He looked at the others. No one wanted to be the first through the door, so he took the leap and led the way.

I definitely should have gone with Corwin!

He felt his heart racing, and the fear and tension increase with every step he took. His body was so stiff he could barely bend his knees and keep putting one foot in front of the other. They were in a short corridor and coming to a T-junction. At the end was a closed door, but as they approached, it began to shake violently, and he almost felt his heart stop. He raised his pistol to take aim and noticed his hand was shaking a little. He

raised his other hand to steady it, but the door finally swung open. A man wearing a lab coat staggered out. Blood was spattered across his chest and face, but it didn't appear to be his own. His eyes were wandering from side to side, and he was clearly in shock.

"It...it...that..." he began to mutter and staggered on past them. Hotwell watched him carry on to the door, but he knew he couldn't spare anyone to lend a hand. He took a deep breath and stepped through the doorway and into a laboratory. There were two doors on each wall that led to what looked like cells. The lights overhead fluttered, and he could already see two bodies on the ground. There was a trail of blood leading to one cell, and the door was slightly ajar.

"Stay together," he whispered.

He knew they should split up, but he was too terrified to do so. He stepped very slowly and very cautiously towards the doorway, noticing his feet slipping a on the blood underfoot. That made him feel sick, but he kept telling himself to go on. He finally reached it and hauled the door open quickly. His other hand held the pistol forward with his finger already squeezing the trigger a little. He almost fired a shot before realising all that was inside was the body of a soldier. He heard a screeching sound from above and turned just in time to see Robak descend from the ceiling. It was a terrifying sight, and he landed on two of the soldiers before anybody could even get their weapons on target.

The two men were crushed by his weight and died instantly. He proceeded to grab another by his head and snap his neck with one quick flick. He spun around with the kind of speed and agility no one would expect from such a brutishly large and muscled man. Just as the last soldier squeezed the trigger on his Sten, Robak grabbed the barrel and pulled so that the full auto fire smashed into the wall. Finally, the barrel came in line with Hotwell. He ducked for cover behind one of the counters.

He counted himself lucky and tried to pull himself back up to take on the enemy, but felt a surge of pain through his arm. He had been hit twice, one in the upper left arm and one in the left collar. Blood was pouring from the wounds, but he knew he had to go on. He pushed up with his legs and one good arm, getting upright just in time to see Robak strike the soldier with a punch to the face that fractured his skull. The poor man collapsed dead. Hotwell lifted his pistol and fired. The first shot just missed Robak; the second hit his chest. He responded by throwing the Sten at Hotwell.

The submachine gun hit him square in the chest with enough force that he was thrown down to the floor. He winced in pain from the impact of the weapon, and the surge of pain his landing caused to soar through his injured body. He shrugged it off and forced himself to get back up. Robak burst through the door they had come through. A few more shots rang out, and then all he heard was the siren around the base.

He was relieved, knowing his fight was over. He slumped back against one of the chairs and dropped his weapon, feeling the energy being drained out from him. He looked back to his injuries. Both bullets had passed right through, and he could see just how much a lucky escape he had gotten. He looked down at the bodies all around him. He didn't know a single one of their names.

"Poor bastards," he said to himself, "They should have let Corwin kill that thing."

He felt embittered as he looked around at all the equipment and realised that it confirmed all of his suspicions. The Allies had been studying the obscene creature in some attempt to replicate its superhuman strength and toughness. Then he thought of how desperate the war had become and understood they had to try everything they could.

A few minutes passed by when finally four soldiers rushed in with a Sergeant Major at their head. They stopped and looked in amazement at the bloodshed, before finally one came to give him medical attention.

"What the fuck happened here?" asked the Sergeant in a thick Scottish accent.

"Didn't you see it, the creature?" Hotwell asked.

"That thing is real? I had heard rumours, what was that monstrosity?"

"No idea, did you catch it?"

He shook his head.

"That's not good."

* * *

Corwin looked out the window of the small box shaped utility vehicle they were driving in. A number of officers and personnel, including MPs, were formed up in front of the house that had become their base and home. He wasn't sure whether they were there to arrest them or celebrate their victory. They rolled to a halt in front of the crowd, and nobody came to

greet them. Corwin stepped out and was soon joined by the others in what seemed to be a standoff. He could not figure out what was happening. Colonel Williams stood at their centre on the steps to the building. He stood motionless and staring at Corwin.

"You get sent to help seize a few transports and come back with a destroyer? A destroyer! What an outrageous act of piracy!"

All fell silent as Corwin waited to hear what repercussions might ensue. Finally, the Colonel lifted up his hands and began to clap slowly.

"I salute you!"

He was soon joined by others as a round of applause and cheering erupting from all those around him. He breathed a sigh of relief, for all he needed was to make enemies of their new friends. He looked back to his squad who looked exhausted by the pretentious welcome back, but also glad of a little appreciation. Nylund was soaking it up the most as he paced back and forth throwing his hands in the air to call for more applause; acting as if he had singlehandedly won the prize they had returned to England with. Williams stepped down to come and greet him and patted him on the shoulder.

"What a fine execution of a mission. Plenty of the brass don't like missions going off task and beyond the remit of what they were intended, but there are few in Whitehall who will have anything much to say about it. Churchill himself called me to extend his appreciation and gratitude to you. It is more than just a success for the SSRF, but proof you are all that we have been saying. It is the sort of big win that keeps spirits up. Well done!"

"Thanks, but where is Captain Hotwell?"

Williams sighed.

"I am sorry to say the Captain is recovering from wounds suffered when that dreadful monstrosity made his escape."

"Robak? Robak escaped?" Corwin asked in a heightened tone.

"Yes, and we lost a few good men in the process. But not to worry, old chap, we will retrieve him in time."

"Fuck me, what the hell were you thinking?"

Williams did not look too happy with his response, and the raised and aggressive tone of Corwin had brought everyone to silence as they watched the two officers square off against one another.

"I don't much like your tone, Captain," Williams stated calmly.

"Neither do I, nor the fucking reason I am brought to it. I told you to kill that thing, and you wanted otherwise. If you needed to poke and prod, and do all whatever it is you people do, you could have at least had the common sense to keep him caged, anchored down, and drugged out of his fucking skull. Do you know what you have done?"

"What I have done? No, Captain, what that creature has done. That creature which you say came here with you. Do not start blaming us for the acts of the enemy. They are the enemy and will do everything they can to defeat us, just as we will do to them."

Corwin realised he wasn't getting anywhere.

"Hotwell, is he okay?"

Williams didn't respond for a moment, trying to judge where the Captain was taking the conversation, but he could see genuine worry in his face so went on.

"His injuries were not life threatening, unlike many others. You should find him in your living quarters getting some rest."

Williams leaned in close to whisper to him.

"Take it easy, Captain. There are a lot more people fighting than just your squad. Many of my boys have been fighting this war a long time before the Yanks even got involved."

Corwin didn't feel any connection to the America of this period, but he let it pass.

"If Robak gets back to his people, then you can bet your ass they will come for this place, hard and fast, and far worse than they did last time. He knows my face and exactly who we are. We are a danger to Vill... the Germans, and that we cannot be left to keep doing what we are doing."

"Then we will be ready for them. In the meantime, I suggest your team gets some rest. You've done great work, and you must be exhausted. Rest and calm yourselves. I will be in touch."

Corwin nodded in agreement and carried on around the building to head for their billets. Many of the British soldiers clapped and patted them on the back as they passed through their ranks. It was nice to be appreciated, but it was also of concern to Corwin that they had no idea how bad things could get. As they approached their accommodation, they could see Hotwell in the doorway. His arm was in a sling, and he wore no cap. He was leaning against the frame with a cigarette in his good hand.

"I hear things went rather well," he said.

"But not here, by the looks. You let Robak get away?"

"I didn't exactly open the door and let him run. More like he ran over me like a steam train."

"And yet he let you live?"

Hotwell scoffed.

"I put up a fight, and he ran."

Corwin laughed.

"What? Not like I shot myself!"

The laughter soon died down.

"The enemy knew you had something special here, with us, but they didn't know what. If Robak makes it back to Villiers, then they will know precisely who we are and where we are, and we'll have a whole ton of shit coming down on our heads."

"Agreed, but I don't know what you expect me to do about it?"

Corwin groaned as he went on.

"Williams already has as many men as he can spare out hunting for him. How hard can it be to find a genetic freak like monster like that? I mean really, how can he hide?"

"You have spies in Germany, don't you?"

"Yes, a great many, I should imagine."

"Then they will have the same here. I bet there's more than a few willing and able to help that bastard slip out of the country."

"There has to be some other way of tracking him."

"One man and with this technology, Nylund," Beyett said, "Not a chance."

"Nothing we can do about him. But we can at least move. I don't want to be within ten miles of this place when Villiers hears of this."

"So we run?" Harland snarled.

"We redeploy, like we always do. We are an elite team that fights on our own terms at the place of our choosing. The moment we become fixed, we lose by sheer weight of numbers and logistics. That fact has always remained the same," snapped Corwin.

"Where do we go?" Vi asked.

"I have an idea," added Hotwell.

"Whatever, I don't care, just make sure the kid is brought along with us."

"I am not sure he..."

"Just do it," Corwin insisted, "I won't leave him behind."

* * *

Less than a few hours later, they passed the sign welcoming them to their new home, an army training camp called Sennybridge. They were travelling in two trucks. Hotwell sat opposite Corwin and four of the others. None of them looked impressed at having to make the trip.

"This base is miles from anywhere. It is the perfect location to continue our work."

"And when we actually need to get anywhere, how will we do that?" Lecia asked.

Corwin could see she longed to have some high-speed transport back like she had become so accustomed.

"Had it been dry we could have flown in by transport, but the ground is a little soft right now. You will have to forgive that. Wales is not known for being dry all that often. But not to worry, a landing strip is days away from completion, and then we'll have no troubles at all."

Porter looked around at the base as they entered. It was a wet and bleak site. Despite the fact it was all quite recently built, there was barely a structure over a single storey, and it was nothing more than a concrete wasteland.

"A few days in this shithole?" he asked.

"It's no great hardship. I am told there are a few good pubs in the area and a pretty decent NAAFI."

"So what do we do now?" asked Lecia.

"We rest, we research, and we wait for orders."

"Why? Why are we still just fucking around over here? We should be the other side of the Channel and taking heads," replied Porter.

"What is it with you? We always followed orders, even when we were out in the sticks for months on end. We weren't a freelance outfit."

"No we weren't, but we are now, aren't we?"

"No," replied Hotwell, "You are soldiers in the British Army."

Porter laughed.

"Don't mind him. He's an asshole. He always was an asshole, and the only thing that's ever likely to change is he'll become an even bigger asshole," replied Corwin.

Lecia smiled, and they all knew it was true.

The trucks drew to a halt, and Porter was the first to leap out. He landed in a puddle of water that had accumulated on the hard standing, and it splashed up around him. He looked about in disgust.

"What a shithole," he said loud enough for everyone to hear.

"We aren't here on vacation. You don't have to like it. You just have to live with it." Corwin jumped down beside him.

A drill instructor was taking a unit of infantry through their paces on the square in the distance. Nobody came to greet them, but they didn't care. Corwin turned his attention to the ambulance where Hunter was being unloaded. He stepped up beside the stretcher and saw the kid groan slightly as he was lowered out of the vehicle. He was only just conscious.

"Still with us?"

"Yeah," he muttered.

"All right, get him inside and make him comfortable," said Corwin.

"I have no idea how he survived those injuries," Hotwell said as he was whisked away.

"That kid has survived more than you can ever imagine. More than any of us can. He has known a total apocalypse and solitary survival that I wouldn't wish on any man."

"This time you come from. It doesn't exactly sound worth fighting for?"

Corwin nodded.

"I can see why you might think that, but in this time, your time. You are embroiled in a world war that will see a huge proportion of the population dead, and technologies that will scare you to death. You are yet to see the worst of it, and Villiers may only add to that devastation, and yet you go on."

"Because I knew something better before all this madness. Did you?"

Corwin shrugged. It was true; they were blunt instruments of war that had never known any different.

"Then perhaps you can educate us and bring some civilisation to our lives so that we might understand what it is we fight for now."

"I thought you fought to get Villiers. To save your future."

The team all looked to him now, waiting to hear what had been on their minds since they arrived. He took a deep breath and tried to find some way to break it to them. As he did, he felt the first specs of rain hit his face,

and within seconds they stood in the pouring rain. But nobody moved as they waited to hear what he had to say.

"We are still in this for Villiers, but not for the reasons we used to know. We went after him to put an end to the war we knew. That war has not happened yet, and will not happen in our lifetime, if it happens at all. There is no going back. We hunt Villiers now because of the damage he can do in this place and time. We do it for the same reason that Captain Hotwell signed up to fight Hitler. Villiers might as well be Hitler, as far as we are concerned. You used to worry about bringing an end to our war, but what if we could ensure the war never even started?"

"But..." began Beyett.

Lecia struck her rifle stock gently into his flank so that he stopped. He looked at her in surprise, but knew why she had done it. He understood better than any of them the uncertainties of their situation, and yet Lecia realised they needed to have something to believe in.

"Honestly tell me that if the war back in our time had suddenly been over, you would have anything to go back to. Any of you?"

Nobody said a word.

"No, this might as well be the same war for us. We have a chance to make a difference, just as we did before. Let's not fail a second time."

"Fail? How the hell were we to know the crazy fool was building a time machine? It's insane," added Nylund.

"We are soldiers. The reasons we succeed don't matter at all, only that we do. However we handled things back in our time it led to a failure. The only saving grace is that we few were saved. We know the truth, and we are the only ones who know it for sure. Not even the Captain here can yet wrap his head around it and say he believes it with a straight face."

"Wait a..." began Hotwell.

"No, no," insisted Corwin, "I know how you think of this, and I respect you for it. You have taken it far better than I ever could have. The truth is that we few, a dozen fighters, we are what can make a difference in this war. It shouldn't have gone that way, but it has. I am here to tell you all, we are now here to ensure the Allies win, as the history books said they would. It's not going to play out the same, but there is nothing we can do about that. We can't concern ourselves with the effects of changing the timeline. That ship has sailed."

"So you are in this till the end? Until we bring an end to Hitler and fascism?" Hotwell asked.

Corwin looked around to his team to see what they thought. Just ten of them remained free and on their feet. It seemed like a monumental task lay before them.

"This world and this life, it's ours now, just as much as anyone else's."

"But can it be done?" Vi asked.

"What?"

"Can this war be won? I get that it was the first time around. But you know how much has changed. Seems like this has already gone too far."

"And that's a reason to give up?" Harland asked scornfully.

"She's a girl..." added Porter.

"And a dyke at that," replied Harland.

"She isn't in this for the real fight, just to play a few games and act all tough so she can impress the light headed ditzy bitches."

"Good luck finding those around here," he replied, looking around the bleak site.

Vi rushed towards Porter in anger, and nobody stood in her way. She leapt onto him so that he was driven to the floor on his back, with her on top. She punched him twice to the face, but he turned her over and returned the favour.

"Are you going to let this continue?" Hotwell demanded, horrified by their behaviour.

"This is how we do things. No room for weakness."

"Is it weakness to stand up for your friends?"

"Friends?" asked Corwin, "They are my family, and I don't take sides, no matter how much an idiot one is being."

"Then you are a fool." He hobbled forward and grabbed Porter's jacket and tried to haul him off. He felt the tugging and lashed out with a backhand strike that knocked Hotwell onto his back as his crutches fell around him. Porter saw the shock in the others' faces. But Vi took it as the opportunity it was. She struck him with a hook to the jaw and threw him off her. As he landed on his back, she smashed her elbow down onto his nose, and it exploded so that blood spewed out across his face.

"You bitch!" he yelled.

He reached to strike her but felt himself locked in place. Rane was holding onto both of them. He hauled them to their feet and held them out

of each other's distance.

"What is wrong with you?" he asked.

Both of them struggled, but they were helpless in his vice like grip. Corwin and Beyett rushed to Hotwell's side and helped him to his feet. He wasn't injured, only a little shocked. All of them looked to the Captain now.

"You are the strongest and most gifted people in the world, and yet you cannot overcome simple quarrels, what hope is there?" he asked them.

He straightened his uniform and took his crutches from them so that he could support his own weight before continuing.

"I took a leap of faith with you all. I chose to believe in you, just as I believe in our success in this war. Don't make me doubt that, for you will tread on my dreams."

He hobbled off on his crutches. The others just stared at each other as the rain continued to beat down on them. Finally, Beyett broke the silence.

"He's right, you know. We can't be divided in this. We face the greatest challenge of all our lives, and so much is dependent on us now."

"Divided? We are already divided. We have one cripple and one locked up for life," replied Vi.

Beyett nodded in agreement. "But here and now, ten of us fit and capable, is that not enough?"

"Until it becomes nine, eight, until we are each killed or locked up?"

"We have to get Tano out," stated Lecia.

"What? How?"

"You said we are stronger together, and we are, so we have to find a way."

"He burnt his bridges. There is nothing more we can do for him," Corwin said firmly.

"So that is it? One of us makes a mistake and they are gone? That's not the way we used to work. Every one of this team used to be more important to us than anyone else on Earth, has that changed?"

Corwin looked to Beyett for help, but he seemed to side with her.

"He tried to kill one of the leaders of the free world, you do get that, right? That's a little more than a mistake. It's fucking crazy. I don't even know what to think of that psycho anymore. He turned a gun on an ally at the most crucial of moments. How can we ever trust him again?"

"Because he did it for the right reasons," Beyett said quietly, "Because he isn't evil, he is just misguided. More than that, though, he is one of the

twelve. We are not able to find any others like us, so we cannot afford to lose a single one. He is also smart, far smarter than most of you realise. No, he doesn't always show it, but his mind is as sharp as mine. We need to understand him, and we need to use him."

"You're right, but I need to think about this. It won't be easy. Enough for now, get some rest, and we'll talk about this again," Corwin said.

The tension seeped away as they split up and went for the barrack room allocated to them. Corwin headed for the officers' quarters and stepped into what was a modest accommodation. It seemed luxurious after the many nights he had slept rough in wartime. He took his gear off and collapsed on the sprung bed with his fatigues still on. Seconds later the door swung open, and Lecia stood in the entrance, waiting for him to say something. He just nodded and that was enough. She threw her gear to the ground and collapsed beside him on the flimsy single bed.

"This is fucked up, you know that, right?"

"Yeah," he replied wearily.

"More than fucked up, it's a complete disaster."

"So what do you want me to do?"

She turned her head sharply and looked at him with wide eyes as if shocked, but it was a little playful. "I don't want you to do anything."

He knew that wasn't the case.

"You think getting Tano back will make all the difference?"

She thought about it and finally nodded.

"Why?"

"Because we were strong together, and we can be strong again. Stronger than we ever were, Wyatt."

"But we aren't some rogue unit operating on our own in the wild anymore. We are part of a chain of command, part of some great machine."

"Then you'll have to find a way to work that machine to our advantage."

That gave him reason to pause and think.

"It'll take some miracle to get Tano free."

"Then work a miracle," she replied. She turned and kissed him, pulling him in close.

CHAPTER 3

The Luckers were sitting in a country pub, both relaxed and bored. They sipped dark beer from jam jars as dozens of soldiers from the training camp made merry around them.

"See the name of this place, The White House?" Rane asked, sniggering to himself.

"I am sure there were white house's called the White House before our one," Vi replied with a groan.

"You're a dense idiot," said Porter with malice.

"Sorry if I want to enjoy this life a little."

He genuinely seemed to mean it and that silenced Porter.

"So, about Tano?"

"What of him, Beyett?" Corwin asked.

"We don't have anywhere to be right now, no information to go on, so we might as well put our efforts into getting him out."

Corwin shrugged, for he had no idea where to start.

"Ah, Captain," said Hotwell, as he entered the pub and took a seat beside them.

"We were just discussing our comrade Tano and how we can get him back."

"Back? No, no, not a chance in hell with that, I am afraid."

"That just isn't good enough."

"Yeah, well, it's out of my hands. There's nothing I can do."

"We need this team to be the strongest it can be. For whatever Tano is or isn't, he is a vital asset to us."

"That very well may be, but he attempted to kill the Prime Minister. Were he a British citizen, he would already have been shot or hanged for treason. He may yet still."

"That can't happen," said Beyett.

"Fucking right," added Vi.

"I am sorry, but it's way beyond my control. We must all accept that there are consequences to our actions."

"We don't need a lesson on right and wrong. We know what he did, and also why he did it. Sometimes good people die to achieve the desired end. The Prime Minister must know that."

"Without a doubt he does. But that does not change the fact that he cannot let a would-be assassin walk free. Why would Tano not try and do the same thing again? And what message does it send out to the world?"

"But the world doesn't even know it happened," Vi pleaded.

"But enough do. Look, if there was anything I could do, I would, you know that."

"Then find someone who can. Appeal to the Prime Minister directly if you have to."

"I will just be wasting my time. We..."

"Just do it."

"I'll...I'll do what I can."

"Good," Corwin replied and sipped on his beer.

He knew the difficult position he was putting the Captain in, but they had to at least try.

"And when I get nowhere, what then?"

"Just keep moving forward. That's all any of us can do. Aside from that, we need our operation set back up here in the morning. We need to find Villiers at all costs."

Hotwell's shoulders sagged, and he sighed deeply.

"What is it?"

"Just this Villiers chap. We have put considerable efforts into discovering who and where he is, and yet we have not even found evidence of his existence yet. All we have to go on is the fact you say he is there working with the Axis powers."

"Just because you haven't found him, doesn't mean he doesn't exist."

"Yes, yes, I am aware of that fact, but many are starting to doubt."

"Many, like who?"

"Like the swathe of commanders who have born witness to your abilities and are eager to put them to use in this war, rather than chasing a ghost. You know you can make such a difference, if you just work with the war effort. I mean, come on, ten of you took an entire destroyer from the Germans without a single loss. Those are the kind of victories we need."

"You want us to stop looking for Villiers?"

"Not stop, just work to help the war while you do it. If he is indeed pulling strings in Germany, then helping out in this war fights him anyway."

Corwin looked out to his team for answers.

"Anything that gets us out of this hole," added Vi.

"Just send me to kill Nazis, or anyone else, anything but boredom," replied Harland.

The group agreed with him in an unusual turn of events.

"Okay, but I will not lose sight of Villiers or Tano. Those issues won't go away."

"Understood. I think my superiors will be much more inclined to help if you are willing to do their bidding."

"To a degree. You tell them we will continue to assist, so long as it does not interfere with our own mission."

"You are asking a lot."

"Yeah, I think we have earned that right. Churchill himself saw what we can do, and we saved his life."

"Is that why you did it? To gain power and independence?"

Corwin shook his head. "Nobody acts selflessly in this world, and nobody risks their lives for a man they have never met and don't know. Why, does that bother you?"

Hotwell shrugged.

"I just figured you had done it for the right reasons, and not your own."

"If only life were that simple," said Beyett.

"I know," Hotwell wearily got back to his feet, "You will have to excuse me, gentlemen. There is more work to be done before I can rest."

He turned and left. He stepped out from the pub and stopped in the entrance, lifting his lighter to a cigarette. As he went to light it, he noticed a glimmer of movement. He saw a man dressed in civilian attire kneeling down in front of a parked jeep and peering in through one of the windows of the pub. He had a camera hanging on his side and a notebook that he was writing in. He was barely visible, as almost all the windows had been covered due to blackout conditions. But a tiny ray of light from a small opening cast a shadow.

"You there! What are you doing?"

Fraasi sharply leapt up from the table, causing several patrons to stumble back in surprise. He was the only one that had heard the Captain's words. The mysterious man began to run, and Hotwell threw down his

cigarette and ran after him. He chased him across the parking lot and finally jumped at his legs, tackling him to the ground. But before he could get up, the man had turned him over and drawn a knife. He thrust it towards his chest. Hotwell pushed out both his hands to defend himself. His left hand caught the blade. It cut deeply into his hand until it stopped at the guard, while his right hand held onto the man's wrist. He tried with all his strength to hold the knife off, but it was being slowly drawn nearer to his chest.

With his other hand, the man punched the Captain to the face to try and weaken him. The first struck his nose, a second strike hammered into his jaw and sent excruciating pain through his face. He weakened slightly, and the tip of the knife reached his jacket pocket before stopping it at the last second. The man lifted his hand for another punch, and the Captain knew he couldn't hold the knife back any longer as he felt his strength fade. The first was heading for his head when a knife appeared at the man's throat and slit open his windpipe.

Blood spewed out over the Captain as the man was drawn back away from him and held firmly, until the life was drained from him in Frasi's arms. Hotwell coughed and spluttered as blood sprayed out over his uniform and mixed with that of his attacker. Corwin and the others came rushing out with sidearms drawn and the rest of the bar patrons in tow.

"What the hell is this?" Corwin shouted.

"An enemy agent...a spy," replied Hotwell, trying to regain his breath.

He looked over at the dead man and shook his head, turning to Frasi who was oblivious and calm to their presence as he cleaned the blood from his knife.

"Why did you do that?"

Fraasi looked up at Hotwell with a blank expression.

"Why did you kill him? Do you know how valuable enemy agents are if caught alive?"

But Fraasi said nothing.

"Do you know?"

"Whoa now, Captain, seems like our man here just saved your life," Corwin said.

"But couldn't you have just knocked him out, taken an arm? Just have dragged him off me? Why go for his throat?"

"Because we aren't the cops, we are killers," replied Harland.

"He's right. We exist to fight and to survive. I'm surprised you managed to go after him at all, but you should count yourself lucky."

Corwin pointed down at Hotwell's chest. There was a hole in his tunic pocket, and a light trickle of blood seeping from it. He hadn't even noticed the blade touch his skin. It was a sobering thought when he realised how close he had come to death. He turned back to Frasi.

"Thank you, I mean it."

Fraasi nodded stoically, sheathed his knife, and sat on a tree stump as if he didn't have a care in the world. Hotwell pulled himself up onto his feet and staggered over to the body and knelt down beside it.

"What do you think he was doing here?" Vi asked.

"With any luck he was just snooping for general information. We are near a military training facility, after all."

"And if that isn't what he was doing?"

"Then let's hope that isn't the case, Captain. He seems to be alone, so it's probably nothing to worry about."

"He turned the body over onto its back and rifled through his pockets. He pulled out a little change and a wallet that had nothing out of the ordinary inside.

"That notebook, where the hell is it?" he asked himself in frustration.

"Captain," said Lecia.

He looked up just in time to see the notebook being thrown at him, and he caught it at the last moment.

"Thank you," he replied and lifted the cover.

"Troop movements, arrivals, and departures. Local exercises."

"But what about us and what he just saw?"

He flicked to the last entry.

"Just a description of a few of you. He doesn't seem to have any clue what or who you are."

"No, but a thorough enough description could identify us if it got to the right hands. How many more agents like this do you think are out there?" Corwin asked.

"Hundreds...thousands. Probably a lot more than you would think."

"This is a different war to anything you ever knew," Beyett said to him, "Even before Villiers arrival, it was based on espionage and subterfuge. However large scale and gruesome the history books tell us, the war fought in the shadows is something we never experienced."

"You're saying we come from a simpler time?" Vi asked, taken aback.

"Yes, precisely," replied Beyett, "You think our time was savage and brutal, but it is nothing compared to the complex nature of this time. We lived in a wasteland where we could roam free as a bird. But here, there are defined fronts, endless networks of spies, sabotage, and espionage. What small amount did exist in those forms in our time, we never had any part of. Look at us, we were little more than an execution squad that roamed wild, picking and choosing fights on our terms, and vanished again without a trace."

"Like the SSRF, the Long Range Desert Group. That is exactly what they are like, and I guess our commanders can imagine the potential for what you could do on a large scale in such a fashion," added Hotwell.

"So we go back to our same old ways?"

"That wouldn't be so bad would it, Beyett?" Harland asked, "Kill Nazis one by one every day till there are none left, definitely not so bad."

"Think you can kill about a thousand a day every day of the week all year round? Because that is what it would take to make a difference."

"I'd give it a shot," replied Harland with a smile.

It was clear that he meant it, too. All he wanted was be up to his waist in bodies. He was a barbarian. A brutal warrior who seemed to exist only to kill and would be happy to do that until the day he died. He didn't even seem to care who he was killing.

"What else are you going to do? Keep moping around trying to find an invisible man hidden inside the greatest fortress in the world that is Nazi Germany. Even if we had air supremacy over the continent, we could at least gather intel at a useful rate, but we don't. We get by on a few scraps, and the best our agents can provide as they risk their lives in the field every day, the same as you do. So yes, if you want to sit by and let this war go on while you pursue one man, then be my guest. I cannot stop you. But the end of the war will catch up with you quicker than you think," said Hotwell.

"What do you mean?"

Hotwell wiped the blood from his face and sat down on the ground, as he felt a little faint and weak.

"Beyett, we aren't winning this war. We are barely even holding our ground. No matter what the propaganda campaign is telling you about us holding back the Nazi tide, we are barely hanging in here. If Britain falls, then we lose Europe, and we will never get it back. Think the Americas will

be safe? Think again. If Hitler can bring us to our knees this easily, then he will soon cross the ocean and continue his reign of terror."

Nobody had anything to say. Corwin understood his perspective, but he knew he could not explain Villiers' significance in any more certain terms.

"So, will you submit to the command of his Majesty's forces? Will you fight for us like you say you want to?"

"There is a lot more going on here than you realise. It's a complex situation," said Beyett.

"No, it isn't. We need the best fighters to fight for us. You are it. And if the best we have aren't fully committed to the battle at hand, we have no hope at all."

Corwin stepped forward, offered out his hand, and hauled Hotwell back onto his feet.

"I hear you, but I need to think carefully about this. It's hard to give up on a mission that is years in the making, and we know is vital, even if you don't."

Hotwell nodded in appreciation.

"In the meantime, please chase up whoever you need to with regards to Tano. I guarantee you that we need him. Whatever has to be done will be done. If I have to break him out of whatever cell he is in with my own hands, I will do so. You say you need good fighters, then don't leave them rotting in a cell."

"I will do the best I can."

* * *

"I got you this meeting, but I don't think you are going to like what the Colonel has to say," Hotwell said to Corwin as they wound their way through country lanes in the back of a box shaped four-door utility wagon. His face had bruised up badly, but he seemed to be mostly recovered. Beyett was up front and Lecia sat in the trunk, firmly gripping her rifle and watching every inch of the scenery like a hawk.

"A Colonel? Is that the best you could manage?" Beyett asked.

"He doesn't mean any offence, but we expect to be taken seriously," Corwin said quickly before he could respond.

The Captain spluttered a little before finally getting a few words out.

"I don't think the Colonel will appreciate being talked about in such a fashion. He is a highly decorated gentleman of the previous war. A fighting man who went through some of the worst of it."

"Well that's something at least."

"But I have no doubt that is why he is being sent. Reliable, stiff upper lipped, approachable, and completely unwavering. He will present himself as your friend, and then convince you to stand down on this course of action. I have no doubt that he was very carefully selected for this task."

"So we are being played?"

"No more than anyone else would be."

They rolled up to a track that led to a small farmhouse. It was in the middle of nowhere and seemed a bizarre location to hold what was not really a secret or particularly significant gathering. It was the middle of the day, and one could see clearly for miles where there was no foliage to block the view.

"Stop here," Corwin ordered.

The driver looked confused and looked around for Hotwell's permission. Corwin was not impressed.

"Stop right here!" he boomed.

The driver slammed on the brakes. The wheels locked up on the loose ground, and they slid to a halt.

"What are you doing?" Hotwell demanded.

"Lecia, move out, and cover us from the tree line."

"No," Hotwell said firmly, though it was clear in his tone that somehow Corwin was ruining a plan.

"What aren't you telling us?"

Hotwell looked flustered but knew he had no choice other than to come out with it.

"They know we are coming, exactly who and how many. If Lecia leaves this vehicle, then it will arouse suspicion."

"Suspicion? You want us to trust this situation when you give us no reason? It is not a location of our choosing, and I want to make fucking sure it's secure."

"Of course it is secure."

"So...it isn't the Germans they fear, but us."

"You have to understand, Beyett. You are beyond what any of us can fully comprehend. You are powerful, but you are also dangerous, as your

colleague Tano has already demonstrated. Don't you think it is reasonable that this officer shows a little caution?"

Corwin sighed.

"All we have done for this war and this country in the little time we have been here, and even now you still doubt us?"

"Wouldn't you?" Beyett murmured.

"Maybe, but we have no reason to trust them any more than they do us. I don't like going in blind."

"Please, Captain. This Colonel is one of the good ones. I would bet my life on it. Trust me in this, and we may yet get somewhere with your man Tano."

Lecia did not look impressed. She shoved the tailgate open and began to climb out when Corwin yelled, "Stop!"

She froze and looked to him for an explanation.

"It's not ideal, but if this is the way it has to be, so be it."

"It's crazy, going in with no eyes, no ears, no support. We would never have done that."

"No, not never, it's precisely what we did when we went after Villiers."

"Yeah, and look how far that got us."

"We have to give these people a chance. Get in," Corwin said forcefully.

Her shoulders hunched down, and she looked far from happy, but the only thing that would cause her greater concern would be to not follow orders. She gave off the impression of a rebel, but she was as loyal as they come.

"We should have brought the team," she muttered.

"We are here to talk, not to fight," said Beyett.

"When have we ever managed one without the other?"

"First time for everything," replied Corwin.

He nodded to the driver, and they rolled on as Lecia slammed the tailgate shut. As they passed the farmhouse, they saw an officer's staff car and two jeeps parked up beside it. Two soldiers stood guard on the front door, and they could see another two in windows on the first floor.

"There'll be more in the tree line," said Lecia.

"Of course."

"Then we should all feel safe," said Hotwell.

Lecia didn't look satisfied, and she looked around in all directions, trying to pinpoint any potential threats. The vehicle drew to a halt beside the others, and they got out. As the engine cut off, they noticed the quietness. It was a bleak and dull day with moderate visibility. Were it not for a light wind, there would be complete silence.

"You see, nobody could get within a mile of this place without being heard," said Hotwell.

"Never make that assumption," replied Corwin, "Do you know how many men have been unstuck because they assumed they were untouchable?"

"Point taken."

"What do you want me to do?" Lecia was eager to find an elevated position, but Corwin shook his head.

"Shoulder that weapon. We come here as guests. You're coming in there with us."

"I'm not one for negotiating."

"Well, join the club."

Hotwell led them through the sentries, and Corwin was glad to see they did not even question the weapons they were carrying. It was a good sign. They came into an old rustic kitchen where a slightly overweight but tough looking elderly Colonel sat at the table in the centre. One of his staff was making a hot drink at the stove. The Colonel leapt to his feet rather spritely for his age and came forward to greet Corwin with a beaming smile.

"So you are the fine chap who's been sticking it to Hitler recently. A pleasure to meet you, I am Colonel Wilkes. Please sit down."

Corwin took a seat with Hotwell. Beyett and Lecia stayed back against the far wall. The Colonel seemed enthralled by Lecia, who he studied from head to toe.

"Fascinating that you yanks are getting women into action alongside the boys. I can't say I am surprised. We need all the fighting bodies we can get. The Soviets knew that early on, not that it saved them. Now, what is it that I can do for you?"

"Colonel, we were hoping..." Hotwell began.

"Everyone knows why we are here, so what is it you have to say?" Corwin interrupted.

"Straight to the point, I can respect that," replied Wilkes, "And I will do you the honour of returning the favour. The answer is no. No matter the reason, and no matter what you say, we cannot let that man go free."

"Then what are we even doing here?"

"You pushed this further to go up the chain of command, despite the fact you know he can never be set free. I am sure Captain Hotwell has already explained how severe this situation is. The Prime Minister may not be your leader, but you are on our soil."

"And if I told you that letting Tano come back to us could make the difference between winning and losing this war?"

The Colonel shook his head. "No one man is that important to the war effort. We are all little pieces of a great machine."

"You are wrong," said Lecia, as she lurked in the corner.

The Colonel was shocked and a little surprised. He didn't know how to respond, and she managed to go on before he could find his words.

"We aren't like you. We aren't human, as you know human to be. We are greater than the sum of our number. I thought you'd got that by now, but clearly you haven't. One of us is more valuable than a hundred of your finest soldiers, maybe more so."

"That's a little presumptuous."

"Maybe so, but it doesn't make it any less true," replied Corwin.

Wilkes looked to Hotwell for some explanation, but he shrugged.

"They really are. Until you have seen this team in action, you wouldn't believe it. They are what this country needs, and if they say Tano is essential to that, then I am inclined to agree."

Wilkes sighed, knowing that they were at loggerheads.

"You really are telling me that he is vital to your team and to the war?"

Corwin nodded.

"And you would give me your word that you will ensure he does not act against us?"

"I do."

He sighed again and rubbed his brow, trying to come to some kind of solution.

"And if we cannot free your man?" he finally asked.

"We are here to support one another, but if we do not get that support, we will have little motivation to go forward in the direction your superiors would desire. We never signed up to this army, and we aren't even of your

nation. We help because we choose to. I think we've done more than enough to ask for a little back."

"Well you pushed for it, and you're going to get it. You know I was sent here to put a stop to this, but now we have met face-to-face, I can see you are more than just a pain in the arse. I'll carry this forward for you. No promises, but you have my word that if there is any way I can help you, I will."

"Thank you, I..."

"But...I expect the continued support of you and your team. We need all the help we can get, do I have your assurance you will do that?"

"Yes," replied Corwin solemnly.

"Then we are done here. I will get on this immediately and be back to your man Hotwell here with any news. But trust me when I say I am far from certain that what you want can be achieved, but winning the war, that can be. I hope you will fight the enemy as hard as I will fight your corner at every level."

"You have my word."

He got up and shook Corwin's hand.

"Then there is no time to lose. It was a pleasure to meet you, Captain, and good luck."

Wilkes stepped out to the door of the farmhouse and past the two soldiers who had been waiting for him. Corwin looked to Hotwell and nodded in appreciation.

"He is your best hope," the Captain reassured him.

The silence was broken by the crack of a gun firing, and they heard a body slump to the ground outside. Corwin rushed to the door.

"Wait!" Beyett yelled.

Corwin reached the door and saw the Colonel lying on the floor. He was still breathing but bleeding heavily from a chest wound. One of the soldiers rushed to his side; the other was looking around, frantically trying to find the shooter. A second shot rang out and hit the man in the chest. He collapsed screaming in agony. Corwin ran out of the cover of the doorway towards the Colonel. A hail of bullets struck all around them, and they heard the almost zip like gunfire of a German light machine gun. He ducked back for cover as shots hit the doorframe, and wood splitters cut into his cheek, narrowly missing his eye.

He looked back from the cover of the hallway. The other soldier was cut down, and the Colonel riddled with bullets. The wounded soldier was desperately making for the door while attempting to put pressure on his own wound. He was hobbling and wincing in pain. Just as he got to the door, he was struck in his back by a burst of shots. He fell forward in the doorway. His Sten gun slid forward along the floor until it stopped near Corwin, who quickly picked it up. He rushed to the body and pulled out eight magazines from the dead man, stuffing them into the pouches on his body armour.

The little submachine gun felt like a toy in his hands, but it was a step up from the pistol that was all he had been carrying. He heard bursts of fire coming from the rooms above where the remaining soldiers were returning fire. The German machine gun still rattled in the distance, and beyond what he knew the Stens were particularly effective.

"Take that gun out!"

But even as the words bellowed from his throat, he heard a large calibre rifle fire a single shot overhead, and the gunner was immediately silenced. He knew it could only have been Lecia. She must have headed to higher ground at the first sign of trouble. But the gun soon opened fire once more as another took over. Corwin went back to the door with his Sten and peered around the corner. He half expected to see a wave of soldiers rushing towards them, but all was silent now. Beyett was hunkered down beside one of the windows and Hotwell doing the same across the room. They each had sidearms only.

"Now do you see why we wanted to bring help?"

"I don't see how the enemy could have known about any of this, let alone how they got here."

"Never underestimate your enemy, and always assume they can reach out to you at all times."

"This little sit down may yet be the end of us," added Beyett.

"Easy now, we haven't even got started yet. How much ammo do you have?"

"Only a few rounds," replied Hotwell.

"Few mags," added Beyett.

"Any more weapons around?"

They shook their heads.

"So only back in the vehicle, and probably more ammo in those jeeps."

"I doubt they'd be carrying much," replied Hotwell. Nobody travelling around these parts would be expecting to fight a battle."

"Nope, and that's just why we're in this shit right now. But it's time to dig ourselves out."

He threw the Sten into Beyett's hands and held out two extra mags for him.

"You are going to cover us from this door."

"Us?"

"That's right, Captain, you're coming with me. It's time to turn the tables on these assholes."

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 4

"How the hell did we end up in this mess?"

Corwin looked at Hotwell scornfully; they both knew the answer. He knelt down by the doorway and peered around for just a second. He noticed the glint of sunlight reflect from a riflescope, and he ducked back just in time as a bullet struck the stonework where his head had just been. A shot from above soon followed it, and Corwin had no doubt that Lecia had dealt with the problem. He gestured for Beyett to step up beside him.

"Ready?"

Hotwell looked the most terrified. He was the only one of them not wearing body armour.

"Time to rise to the occasion, Captain, on three. Three, two, one!"

Corwin ran out from the doorway towards the cover of their vehicle. Hotwell was close behind as machine gun fire struck the ground at their feet, and they leapt into the cover of the vehicle. They each sheltered behind one of the tall wheels as glass shattered and showered them. Their truck was riddled with fire, and a number of shots went right through the wooden coachwork and landed past their feet.

"Keep it together," said Corwin.

A shot rang out from the farmhouse and was followed by Sten bursts. The enemy machine gun stopped firing for just a moment before opening up once more, but this time it was not directed at them. They saw a hail of bullets strike the stonework and tear holes in the exterior, blowing the windows out. They watched Lecia jump for cover. Corwin prayed she had not been hit, but he also knew it was their opportunity. He prised one of the rear doors open and crawled inside, trying to hide his presence.

He reached over the back of the bench seat, grabbed an ammo box, hauled it over, and passed it to Hotwell. He went for another. But just as he got a hold on it, several bullets struck the vehicle. He was not willing to leave it behind, lifting it out as he fell back out of the vehicle amid a hail of gunfire.

"What, are you crazy?"

"We don't get ammo, then we are dead in the water."

He opened the first ammo box and found it full of loaded Sten magazines. Then the next, and it was stacked with cotton bandoliers of stripper clips for the rifles. He opened the front passenger door of the vehicle, and to his shock their driver was cowering in the footwell. Amazingly, he seemed to have not been hit. An Enfield rifle was held in mounts beside the seat, and Corwin sighed in relief as he took it in hand.

"Thankfully someone came prepared. You okay?"

The driver was shaking. Corwin grabbed him, hauling him out of the cab and shut the door. He patted him down, looking for signs of injury, but there was nothing.

"You're okay, but you won't be if you don't get with the programme."

The man looked into his eyes blankly. Corwin simply slapped him in the face, to the horror of Hotwell, and yet it seemed to have the desired effect. He lifted his hand to his aching jaw, but looked at them as if he had just stepped back into reality.

"Are there any more weapons in this truck?"

"A...a...a Sten on the driver's side, that's all."

"Did you pack all this ammo?"

He nodded.

"Good job, you might have just saved us."

A little hope appeared in the man's eyes. Corwin reached into the vehicle again and sprawled across the front seat until he could reach the Sten. With a quick tug, he ripped it from the canvas straps holding it in place and ducked back out. He thrust the weapon into the driver's hands and another three magazines out of the ammo box. He threw two bandoliers over his shoulders and cocked the Enfield. It wasn't his style at all, but he had no choice but to make do.

"What's your name?"

"Corporal Badcock."

"Badcock?" Corwin laughed.

It lightened the situation, and the man relaxed a little.

"Any relation to Sergeant Adcock? Billy?"

He shook his head.

"You sure struck out there," he joked, "Okay, Badcock, here's what is going to happen. We can't run back inside and cower there forever. We have

to close the distance between us and them, and then give them a good kicking, you got me?"

He seemed surprisingly confident now.

"You are going to stay here and lay down covering fire while the three of us move, you got that? Three, two..."

He was interrupted by the coarse screeching sound of jet engines.

"What in the hell?" Hotwell shouted.

A German soldier floated overhead. The heat from two engines strapped to his back almost scorched their eyebrows off. His armour was made up of multiple overlapping plates, and not even his face was visible. An eagle and swastika adorned his chest plate. The ominous soldier swooped in for a rather rough and flaky landing, and just managing to stay on his feet as he touched down. Smoke bellowed out from the pack on his back, and he staggered a little before getting stable. It was clear that his suit was at least powered in some way, as its weight alone was more than any normal man could bear. He held a box-fed machine gun in his hands and lifted it to take aim. Corwin quickly responded by raising his rifle and firing a shot into his centre body mass.

The heavy .303 round caused the German airborne soldier to twitch slightly, but the shot ricocheted from his armour. Beyett and Badcock opened fire on full auto with their Stens. Hotwell quickly joined them with his pistol as Corwin cocked his bolt-action rifle. He took aim at the face and fired, but still to no avail.

The soldier was struck by weight of fire and knocked back two paces. He could not raise his rifle from the sheer number of impacts. But the Stens soon ran out of ammunition, and Corwin could see that not even his rifle could penetrate the armour. He threw down the rifle and jumped into a full sprint towards the soldier. He closed quickly enough that the trooper could not get his weapon up through the confusion and shock of the fire he had been subjected to. Corwin struck him like a freight train, and the two of them burst through the wall of one of the farm's barns.

As they crashed through, they struck one of the main supports, and part of the roof collapsed in on them. Corwin coughed and spluttered as the dust began to settle, and he tried to wipe his eyes clear.

"Are you okay, Captain?" Hotwell hollered.

Corwin coughed again and looked around for the German, but there was no sign of him. He took a few paces back and looked around in every

direction. The pile of rubble began moving in front of him, and an armoured hand appeared. The German soldier lifted himself up out of the rubble as it slid from him. He looked awkward and clumsy, but with a lot of strength provided by the suit. He looked around for his weapon, but it was nowhere to be seen. He didn't appear to be carrying a sidearm. Corwin thought to reach for his pistol, but knew the .45 rounds would do no better than anything else they had thrown at the armoured trooper.

They stared at each other wondering what to do, until finally the German stomped towards him.

"Right, you son of a bitch, let's play," said Corwin.

The German swung a heavy hook. Corwin easily ducked under, and the weight of the throw almost took him off his feet. Corwin drew his knife as he came back up and thrust it into the man's armpit, where the articulated joints looked weakest. The blade penetrated just a little, but his opponent swung back around and smashed him in the face with an elbow.

Corwin was thrown aside and felt his jaw almost crack from the weight of the impact. As he hit the ground, he lost his grip, and the knife slid across the barn floor, well out of reach, but then he saw a pulley and hoist hanging from the ceiling. It looked heavy enough to haul an engine, though it was almost ten metres up and hanging close to the rafters. As he looked up, the German's foot was about to crush him, but he rolled out and leapt to his feet. He grabbed hold of the chain hanging from the hoist and kicked out the German's legs from under him. The strike was just powerful to throw him off balance, and he crashed down to the rubble. He tried to get up but seemed to be stuck like a turtle on its back.

"Not so funny now, is it?"

Corwin casually wiped the blood from his mouth as the gunfire still echoed from outside. He stepped up to the stranded man and placed the chain of the pulley around his legs. He hooked them together, turned to the pulley chain, and began hauling the man up. Corwin kept lifting him high and higher, and he began to squirm. But Corwin showed no remorse. He got him to the highest point so that he was dangling helplessly from his feet.

Corwin stepped up to the release clamp, casually lifting it so that the chain was released, and the man plummeted head first towards the ground. His head snapped flat against his shoulder as he landed. The body remained upright for a few seconds and finally toppled over to one side. Corwin chuckled to himself for a moment. It was a kill Harland would be proud of,

but he soon realised how devastating the armoured soldier could have been, and how much of a lucky escape he'd had.

"What the hell was that?" Hotwell rushed in through the hole in the barn wall.

"Airborne."

"Fallschirmjäger? No, not like I have ever seen before."

"Yeah, well you better get used to seeing new things. Something tells me there will be plenty more of these heading our way before long, and we are gonna need something meaty to deal with them."

"True enough, but let's worry about this problem we have on our hands first, ey?"

Corwin was digging around the rubble and finally drew out the machine gun the German had been carrying. He then pulled the magazine bandolier from the dead body.

"I'm getting tired of these bastards being one step ahead, you with me?"

Corwin nodded and rushed out of the other side of the barn. They made a quick run to the tree line unnoticed as the firefight still raged at their backs. The undergrowth was dense enough that they could make their way around the farmhouse perimeter at speed without being seen. Soon they were coming up on a position where assault rifle fire could be heard. Corwin ran out from a hedgerow and found himself facing three German airborne soldiers, all laying down fire with assault rifles. Another in the distance was preparing a Panzerschreck, a shielded shoulder-mounted anti-tank launcher.

Corwin opened up on full auto, and the barrel of the gun rattled to life, cutting the three down with one long burst before they even knew what had hit them. The one carrying the launcher spun the weapon around towards them, but Hotwell fired two shots with his pistol. The man's legs went out from under him. He fell forward as he pulled the trigger, and the rocket hit the ground in front of him and exploded. Dirt and foliage showered Corwin and Hotwell as they were ducking down for cover. When the dust settled, there was nothing left of the man besides one boot. Hotwell breathed out a sigh of relief.

"Nice work," Corwin said, picking up one of the assault rifles and thrust it into Hotwell's hands. He looked at it in amazement, as it was superior to anything the Allies were using.

"We could do with a few more of these," he said, picking up more mags from the bodies. He hurriedly followed Corwin who was reloading on the move. He burst through another few trees to find three more Germans laying down fire on the farmhouse. He fired as he had done before and riddled them with bullets just as Hotwell caught up, and they immediately carried on. As they came through, another a burst of gunfire from a submachine gun hit Corwin. The first few shots ripped through the receiver of his gun, and the rest hit his body armour. The broken weapon flew from his hands, and he immediately reached for his Colt with a quick draw. He fired two shots at the officer who had been firing at him, and both struck him in the face.

Out of the corner of his eye he noticed a flash of movement; a stick grenade landed in front of him. He leapt with all his strength towards the cover of a fallen tree, just making it as the charge blew. As he got back, Hotwell fired three shots into an advancing German. Then it all went silent. He nodded to the Captain but then heard a single gunshot ring out from the farmhouse, followed by someone slumping down behind him. He turned around quickly. A dead German lay on the ground only two metres behind him. Corwin was just able to make out Lecia at a window on the rooftop. He gave her a casual salute in gratitude before going to the body and picking up the rifle.

Just when they thought they had caught a break, they heard the roar of jet engines once again. Three armoured airborne troopers skirted the canopy overhead.

"Fuck me, how many more of these sons of bitches are there?"

He looked down and noticed the MG42 and several boxes of ammunition lying beside two bodies. He threw the rifle on his back and picked up the gun in one hand, the boxes with the other, and made a dash for the house. Bursts of gunfire hit the ground around them, but it seemed uncontrolled and inaccurate from the descending airborne troops. The first landed ten metres behind Corwin. He turned and fired a burst single-handedly, but he knew they wouldn't be able to make it to the house.

An engine roared to life and wheels spun off to their side. A jeep raced out from behind their wrecked truck and slammed into the German who had been pursuing them. Badcock was at the wheel. The German collapsed over the bonnet, but the jeep did not stop. It went another ten metres and ploughed into the front of a parked tractor, crushing the man beneath the

weight of the two vehicles. The front end of the jeep caved in. Badcock was rocked so violently that his nose hit the wheel and blood burst out over his uniform.

Corwin rushed to his side and hauled him out of the jeep. He was still stunned from the impact but soon got a sense of the danger they were in. Gunfire ripped into the ground beneath them as they sprinted for the door. The scene erupted into chaos from their people returning fire. Corwin shoved the Corporal through the door and leapt after him. A hail of bullets struck the wall behind them, and one ricocheted from his body armour. He crashed in through the entrance, and Beyett slammed the heavy wooden door shut and slid the bolt across.

"That could have gone better," he said.

"Still alive, aren't we?" Corwin asked, looking down at the graze on his armour. If it had been just a little lower, it would have clipped his hip. Badcock was lying back against a kitchen work counter with his Sten across his lap and trying to light a cigarette to calm his nerves.

"Saved our asses back there, you know that right, Corporal?"

"It's Tim, my name."

Glass shattered once again from a burst of gunfire hitting the window, but Badcock continued to light his cigarette. He finally drew back on it, sighing loudly as he blew out the smoke.

"All right, Tim, that was some quick thinking."

"Give me a gun, and I can just about use it, but put me behind the wheel, and I can do anything."

"What did you do before the war, Corporal?" Hotwell asked.

"I raced cars, would have had a great career in it, were it not for bloody Nazis."

Corwin smiled; they had an adrenaline junky on their hands.

"Anything else you are good at?"

"Anything that goes fast. Bikes, cars, planes, that's where I am at home."

"If we make it through this, you want a job?"

"I have a job."

"One that doesn't involve ferrying officers around the countryside. Do what you do best, for us. We go into the most dangerous situations, and we need someone who can get us in and out quickly. I figure you could be just the man."

"Based on what?" Hotwell questioned him.

"The Corporal has got skills, and he's got balls. That's good enough for me. And besides, looks like you're out of a job now."

"You get me out of here in one piece, and make it right with my CO, and I'll drive and fly you to hell and back anytime you want."

"I hate to break this up, but we have more pressing matters at hand," said Beyett.

He pointed out of one of the shattered windows. Corwin rushed to his side. Two of the armoured soldiers were approaching.

"Shit me, they don't give up, do they?"

Dozens of bullets bounced off their armour, but they relentlessly drove forward. One was equipped with an MG42 as Corwin now carried, but with an ammo belt feeding out to a huge pack on his back in what appeared to be an absurd amount of ammunition. But he seemed to struggle to fire it on the move, due to the restrictive nature of the armoured suit. He stopped, took aim, and strafed the building. Everyone inside ducked for cover. The ridiculous rate of fire caused hundreds of rounds to strike over the farmhouse, but the thick walls made of stone held firm.

"This is really getting old," said Corwin.

"What the hell are we going to do when they reach that door?"

Corwin watched the one still on the move. He was close now.

"Captain, did you hear me? When he comes through that door, there'll be no stopping him," Hotwell shouted.

Corwin didn't respond. He simply went to the doorway and peered out through a bullet hole. He could see the armoured trooper stomping towards them. He ducked back and thought for a moment, looking down at the gun in his hands and seeing how useless it would be. He looked around the room at his own gear and finally to his knife. Something came to him. He looked back. The soldier had sped up to a jog now to smash through the door, and he had no doubt the bolt and hinges would not hold. He slid the bolt across slowly and quietly.

"What the hell are you doing?"

But he did not answer Hotwell. Just as the German reached the door, he heaved it open and stepped aside. The soldier almost lost his footing. He had expected to make contact, and he stumbled in, crashing into the wall on the far side of the entrance hall. He landed in a seated position with his back against the wall, a little stunned and disorientated. Corwin slammed the

door shut and quickly slid the bolt across. He then leapt onto the soldier, pinning his rifle against him. The German could not move under the weight and strength of Corwin. The others looked on in horror. They seemed to be at loggerheads, for Corwin could not hurt the German, who in turn could not move.

"Knife!" Corwin screamed and pointed to a long thin blade hanging beside the stove.

Beyett grabbed it and passed it to him. The German was fighting to get his hands free.

"Help me hold him down!"

Beyett grabbed one of the man's arms; Hotwell and Badcock took the other. Corwin was still sitting on his legs. He lifted up the knife to look at its almost stiletto toothpick shape and placed it into one of the narrow eye slits of the soldier's helmet. He drove it home until he felt the tip strike metal at the back of the helmet. A short scream rang out, and blood dripped out from the hole. The man soon stopped fighting as his head slumped, and Corwin slowly slid off him.

A short silence in the room was broken when Badcock threw up beside the corpse.

"You have the stomach to race but not a little blood?" Corwin asked.

But he could see in Hotwell's face that the shock and horror was not unique to the Corporal. It was a particularly gruesome scene, but he had just been desensitised in a way that most hadn't.

"This isn't a nice way to wage a war," he said.

"Kill or be killed, whatever you have to do to win," he replied.

"If you think war was ever pretty, then you read the wrong books," Beyett joined in.

Hotwell just about held off from throwing up himself when gunfire ripped through the building once again. They ducked down to the floor for cover, but a few seconds later the gun stopped firing. As it fell silent, they heard the roar of a gasoline engine, and it was soon joined by bursts from a Bren gun. Corwin got up and rushed to one of the blown out windows. To his amazement and delight, two British reconnaissance cars were tearing down the road towards them. They were SUV shaped armoured vehicles with a small turret on top, and a Bren and large calibre rifle mounted for the front passenger.

The German pulled his machine gun around and opened fire. Bullets ricocheted off of the frontal armour as they drew to a halt. The anti-tank rifle on the first vehicle fired and glanced the armour, but the second fired. It was a deafening sound. The shot went right through his armour and hit some kind of fuel supply on his back as he exploded. A large shard of shrapnel flew through the window, narrowly missing Corwin and embedded in the wall on the far side of the room. Then it all went quiet.

He went to the door, slid the bolt open, and stepped outside with his MG42 held low and looking at the carnage all around them. The two scout cars rolled up before them, and a side door opened. A Sergeant stepped out and saluted on seeing Corwin's rank, but looked utterly astonished and unsure how to take him and his group. Instead, he turned his attention to the body of the German soldier wedged between the jeep and tractor.

"What on God's earth is this? Looks like he should have been riding a horse and carrying a lance onto some medieval field of combat."

Corwin nodded. "You thought body armour was dead? Think again."

".303 round didn't even scratch it."

They heard a whistle from the rooftop and saw Lecia pointing out into the distance from where they were first attacked.

"They're running!" she yelled.

"Sergeant, these forces that attacked us are not done yet. I'll be damned if I will let a single one of them get out of here, are you good for this?"

"Yes, Sir," he replied confidently, without understanding much of the situation at all. Hotwell rushed up beside them.

"Sergeant, the enemy must have flown in. Where is the nearest point they could land? Something big enough for a large transport plane."

"There are no strips around here. There are a few level fields that you could land on just east of here, but we don't have any seats going free."

"The rest of you stay here and secure this position," Corwin ordered and turned back to the Sergeant. "Come on, let's get moving!"

He threw down his machine gun and jumped onto the sloped back rear armour of the reconnaissance car. He had just enough room for his feet and found handles beside the little turret to hold on. A hatch on top of the turret opened, and the Sergeant climbed up into full view.

"We'll have to take it easier with you hanging on, old chap."

"Negative, Sergeant, step on the gas and get us there the quickest way you can."

He hesitated for just a moment until he looked into Corwin's eyes and finally had no doubt.

"Forward!" he yelled to his driver through the open turret.

The large gasoline engine roared, and the vehicle lurched forward with an alarming turn of speed. Corwin had to grip on tightly so as not to be thrown off the back. They reached cruising speed quickly and arrived at a country road walled with high hedges. From his elevated position, Corwin could look out of the top as the Sergeant studied everything around them with his binoculars.

"What are we looking for exactly, Captain!" yelled the Sergeant, for they were not connected through comms like the rest of the crew.

"They can't have gotten this far inland with anything that looked German. We're looking for an aircraft disguised as one of our own. It's the only way they could have done it!"

"There!" the Sergeant shouted and pointed it out to Corwin. They could see a C47 in the distance, and its engines were firing up. It looked larger than the C-47s Corwin had become accustomed to.

"What is she?"

"C-87 Liberator, in RAF colours!"

"Any idea if any of our forces would be around here with a bird like that?"

"No idea, we don't get given that kind of intel. We aren't even operational at the moment. We were on a training exercise and called in rather hastily to give you a hand!"

"Yeah, well, it's appreciated."

"You think that's the craft they came in on?"

"Unless you can think of any other way they can get in and out of here without being noticed, or another place they could land a beast like that?"

"Not nearby. Big old girls they are, you'd have to be crazy to land it there, but downright suicidal anywhere else around here. The ground is too soft!"

"Then it has to be them. Get on them, now!"

He felt the vehicle accelerate further as they tore through the rural roads at horrifying speeds. He took the Sergeant's binoculars from him and zeroed in on the aircraft. He squinted to make anything out, but the bumpy ride was blurring his view, and he couldn't spare a second hand to steady his hold. They finally reached a relative flat and smooth section of road, and his

view levelled off. He could make out a crewman at the door. They wore RAF uniform, and he was relieved and a little disappointed as he lowered the binoculars.

"What is it?"

"It's not them, Sergeant."

Even as he said it, a ray of sunlight bounced off something near the cargo hatch, and he lifted up the glasses one last time for a look. He smiled as he saw two German soldiers helping another wounded one into the aircraft. They were wearing one of the thickly armoured suits.

"It's them!"

He thrust the binoculars back into the Sergeant's chest for him to see for himself.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

He put them down and chambered a round into the Bren.

"You ready for this, Captain?"

"Hell, yes," he replied and pulled the assault rifle at his back, holding it at the ready. The Sergeant leaned inside the hull and yelled something before appearing beside Corwin once again. They took a bend at breakneck speeds, and the back end of the vehicle slid out with understeer as they hit wed mud and loose soil. The engine roared and dragged them forward, causing the tail end to snap back into line as the other armoured car slid into formation beside them.

"Give them everything you've got!" yelled the Sergeant.

The anti-tank rifle in the hull fired first, and the shot tore a fine hole in the fuselage and went right through. The Sergeant opened fired with three-shot bursts from the Bren that peppered the hull. The other car followed suit, but as the shots began to hit the hull, the four engines of the transport plane roared louder, and it lurched forward.

"Fuck!" Corwin shouted.

He raised his rifle and began to fire bursts into the hull. Every single round found its target, but it didn't seem to have much of an effect. He took aim at one of the engines and fired off the last of his magazine, but that too had little effect. The anti-tank rifle kept firing. Every shot was ripping holes in the craft, but it was not enough.

"Get me closer!"

"Closer? Are you crazy?"

"Probably!"

The Sergeant relayed the commands, and they once again picked up pace. The improvised strip was relatively smooth, and they were covering ground at a rapid pace, but as they closed with the craft, it was coming close to matching their pace. Corwin could tell they were so close, and yet in seconds they would be out of his reach. The Sergeant had just slammed in a fresh clip to his Bren when Corwin shouted out.

"Get the engines, or we're done for!"

He ducked below to get out of the wind so that the gunner could hear him. Corwin jumped forward onto the top of the vehicle and cocked the Bren. He fired a burst, and then a second. He could see several of the rounds hitting the structure of one of the engines, and yet still it was not stopping. He took careful aim, squeezed the trigger, and held it down. His firm grasp and fixed mounting kept his aim in check, and almost every single round penetrated the engine housing. As the magazine ran dry, smoke began to rise from the barrel. He thought all hope was lost. The engines still ran, but the anti-tank rifle rang out, and a single shot went right through one of the port side engines. It caught fire.

The rate of acceleration began to drop, and their car was slowly closing the distance, but Corwin felt they were now flat out. The straight six-gasoline engine was screaming and fragments of debris from the engine showering their vehicle, but they were close. Corwin pulled his rifle off his back and threw it away. It was only an encumbrance. He was poised to leap, but just when he thought to take the jump onto the huge tail wing, the cargo door opened and revealed a tripod mounted MG42 with two gunners. He ducked back down when the weapon opened fire and rounds ricocheted off the turret. He heard the Sergeant cry in pain and collapse down in the turret.

The noise of the rounds landing all around Corwin was not just alarming, but deafening. He had to do something or their window of opportunity would be lost. He pulled out his Colt and ducked around the turret to get a shot. He could just see one of the gunners, and squeezed the trigger to fire a shot when several rounds hit the frame of his pistol. It wrenched it out of his hands, almost breaking his trigger finger in the process.

His hand was cut and bleeding, but he could still move and had not lost the ability to grip. He looked across to the other armoured car. It was in their shadow for cover; the German gun was keeping both of their heads

down. He knew he was the only one that could do anything. Every direction he looked he could see nothing but the flat surfaces of the armour of the vehicle, and then he saw it, a thick, brown leather holster hanging from the turret where the Sergeant had fallen. He opened the flap and pulled out the pistol. It had a large bore brass barrel and was single shot. It looked comical, but then it struck him. It was a flare gun, and a single shot one at that. He shook his head as he thought about what he would do.

"Time do to something really stupid," he said to himself.

He looked over to the gunner in the turret of the other vehicle. He was just peering out from the open top to get a view without losing his head. Corwin pointed to the flare gun and then to the craft behind him. They both understood exactly what each other must do, and it was just as dangerous and crazy for both of them. Corwin cocked the hammer on the flare gun and took a deep breath, knowing he only had one chance. He watched the other car brake quickly, and it drew back. The gunner in the turret opened fire with a burst from the Bren that was wild and strafed the door and position around it.

It was a tiny window of opportunity. Corwin rose up from the cover of the turret. The shocked German gunners were just getting back to their weapon. They had turned it on the second vehicle and were about to squeeze the trigger. He took careful aim just as they noticed him.

"Fuck you!" he yelled and squeezed the trigger. The flare launched off and soared through the air, striking the gunner dead in the chest and exploded. Flashes of light erupted in the fuselage as the gunner fell back. Other pieces of shrapnel hit his loader and set his uniform on fire. The man fell from one side to another in panic before finally stumbling out of the door. That was all the opportunity Corwin needed. He stepped clear of the turret and bent at his knees; ready to jump just as the wounded Sergeant appeared beside him.

"Good luck!" he called, holding out a small revolver.

Corwin took it and leapt towards the aircraft.

"My god," said the Sergeant, as he watched the Captain clear a distance that no man could hope to achieve. He cleared the tail wing and landed on top of the fuselage. The wind knocked him down. He stumbled and fell but held onto the tail just in time. The two armoured cars behind were falling back now. The Sergeant and the other gunner were shouting some words of encouragement and yelling with excitement to spur him on.

He slipped the pistol into his webbing belt to free up his other hand, pulled forward, and continued to crawl onward as he fought against the turbulence. Finally, he was over the top of where the cargo door was, and a few flickers of flame burnt into his left hand. He twisted his body and slid down the side, thrusting forward with his legs. Both his feet connected with a German soldier as he swung inside. The man was kicked back against the opposing wall, and Corwin landed on his back. The German drew a pistol and took aim at him, but Corwin grabbed his wrist as he fired.

The shot bounced from his torso armour, and Corwin hauled him forward and over him, throwing him out of the open doorway. He was up on his feet in a second and drew his pistol. One of the men was trying to pat down the other who was on fire. He put two shots into each and then turned quickly, firing two more at an officer behind. His gun was empty, and another three Germans were reaching desperately for weapons. He picked up the MG42 still mounted on its tripod and squeezed the trigger, holding it firm as he fired from the hip.

He emptied almost a hundred rounds until the belt ran empty. Shots ripped through the length of the craft. The pilots' seats were torn to shreds and the glass of the cockpit holed. Everyone was dead, and he soon realised the danger he was still in. He could just see through a gap into the flight cockpit, and a line of tall trees lay ahead. He threw down the gun and rushed to the door, but before he made it something gripped his ankle. He tripped and fell to the floor. The German officer he had shot was still very much alive, and was clearly wearing body armour. He kicked back into his face and got back up, heading to the door. He looked forward for just a second. They were almost on the tree line now. A shot rang out, and a bullet ricocheted off the doorframe beside him, but he ignored it. He looked across, and to his relief he found the armoured cars had caught up. As another shot rang out, he took the leap.

Oh shit, he thought as he flew through the air.

He crashed into the four tonne armoured car and landed chest first on the squared off edges of the armour. The impact was enough to rock the vehicle, forcing it to veer slightly and almost crash into the other. He felt someone take hold of his arm. The Sergeant was hanging out of the turret and holding on firmly to him with his one good arm. There was a bullet hole through the shoulder of his other.

"Hang on!" he yelled.

The brakes of the car were slammed on, and the tyres locked up as they began to slide. It took a hundred feet for them to draw to a halt, and as they did, an explosion erupted from the aircraft hitting the trees and the fuel tanks igniting. Corwin looked back just in time to see the Liberator Express be blown apart ahead of them. He breathed out in relief and slumped down onto the armoured windshield as the Sergeant finally let go.

Nobody said a word for a minute. They all just watched the fire rage, and let the events they had just witnessed sink in.

"You know," began the Sergeant with a sigh and a pause, "This was supposed to be a training exercise. Sure, using live ammo, a nice day out in the countryside to hone our skills under real life conditions. Well, I'll be damned, this is not what I had in mind."

Corwin smiled and then began to laugh. The Sergeant was doing the same, though he paused every few breaths and winced in pain. The vibrations from the laughter caused the pain to surge through his body. Corwin held out his hand and shook with the Sergeant.

"Name is Wyatt," he said rather informally.

"Sergeant Travers," the Brit replied sternly, "but after what you just took us through, you can call me John. You already know who and what I am, but I am guessing you cannot afford us the same courtesy."

"Nope," he replied with a smile.

"Ah, well, as great as this has been, the next time you want to go chasing aircraft down under fire, I'd be very grateful if you found some other chump to do the driving for you...Captain."

He seemed serious, but then once again broke out into laughter and then more coughs and cries of pain.

"You might not see me again, but you can damn well be certain that if the Germans were audacious enough to come this far inland, you can bet your ass you'll see plenty more of them soon."

"Just what I was thinking. You know how much I liked this job before you came along, Captain?"

Corwin was starting to like him already.

"You know you're pretty good in a tight spot. You drive fast, fight hard, and were there when I needed you. You want a job?"

"I already have one."

Corwin laughed.

"That's what everyone says. So how about making it a little more exciting?"

Travers shook his head as he looked down at his wound.

"Does it pay any better?"

"Nope."

He smiled in response and looked back to his crews. They had stepped out for a better look at the burning craft and were holding Thompson submachine guns as if expecting trouble. They had all seen what Corwin had achieved. How he had moved in superhuman ways and gone forward and fought in such a fearless fashion.

"Do you fight to keep this country free?"

Corwin had to think on it for a minute, and all that he had witnessed so far. He thought more about what the late Colonel had said to him, and he realised how large the cause really was.

"Everything I do is to help win this war. The Allies were meant to win, and I'll do everything in my power to make that happen, even if it costs me my life."

Travers nodded in appreciation, knowing he meant it. He looked at the American one last time and couldn't believe what he was seeing or thinking, but he nodded once again. He looked back to his crews and saw they were all of one mind.

"You get us transferred, and we're yours to command."

"Then welcome aboard. Get yourselves patched up, and be ready for a hurricane like you never imagined."

Travers looked back to the burning aircraft and shook his head, wondering what could be any more ridiculous and outrageous than what they had just taken part in, and yet somehow he could see Corwin wasn't exaggerating.

CHAPTER 5

"What on earth were they doing here?" Colonel Williams demanded, "I have a well decorated and respected Colonel dead, along with the men who brought him here. The only one of which who survived has sworn allegiance to you. Now I've got reconnaissance corps staff who have gone the same way. I've got a few dozen dead Germans, a wrecked transport plane of which origin cannot be explained. Nobody knows what the hell is going on, not least myself, and I am in charge of this damn area! So tell me, Captain, what the hell IS going on here?"

Corwin was nothing but calm, only a little agitated if anything.

"Colonel, I might ask you the same question. We are supposed to be operating with the utmost security and privacy. If the Germans can hit us this far into our own lines, what is going on with security round here?"

Williams slumped down in his chair and shook his head in disbelief.

"I won't doubt there are some flaws in our defences, but we are here to defend against armies, not these clandestine little operations. Just the sort of operations you and your people like to conduct."

"And have proven rather successful at," added Corwin.

"Yes, well that remains to be seen, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"One has to wonder if what you achieve is worth the grief you bring with you."

"Don't tell me you want to hold us back because you are worried about repercussions! This is a fucking war!" Corwin snapped.

"Don't tell me what this is and what this is not, Captain!" Williams barked, "What you have to understand is there is more to this war than you and your people, and your own little private war that you seem to be so fond of."

Corwin shook his head. He'd really had enough of this.

"You know every time there is a little success around here you can't get enough of us, and any time there is a little hardship it's all on us. Well, fuck you!" He got up and stormed off.

Hotwell seemed firmly glued in his chair and appalled by what he had heard, but Corwin stopped beside him. "Come on." Hotwell knew he shouldn't leave, but he was glad of the opportunity he had been given. He jumped out of his chair and followed on with Corwin.

"Still need to work on your powers of negotiation," he said as they left the room.

"No, I really don't!"

Corwin stomped on back to their billets to find his people lying about. The two recon cars were parked outside. They walked in to see a few were cleaning weapons and sorting equipment. Harland was sitting back with a cigar in his mouth, and Lecia just stared out of one of the windows at nothing he could see. Opposite them were the two recon crews and Badcock, who looked the most uncomfortable. It was as if neither side wanted to interrupt the other, and so they sat in silence.

At a table in the middle of the room was a pile of intelligence photos and maps that looked as if they had been flung there without any regard whatsoever.

"What is this?" Hotwell asked and raced forward with eagerness to check them.

Nobody answered him. A few of them groaned, but not even Beyett looked interested enough to look over them. Hotwell picked a few up, and even from a distance Corwin could see one of them showed a number of high-ranking German officers engaged in conversation.

"You know the kind of danger our agents go through for this sort of information? How many risk and lose their lives for it?" Hotwell asked in astonishment.

Still no one responded, but Corwin squinted and looked closer at the photo Hotwell was holding up over his head, trying to convince them to take an interest.

"Show me that," said Corwin. He stepped forward and snatched it from Hotwell's hands.

"What is it? What do you see?"

Corwin ran his finger from face to face on the photo.

"You see that, the Fuehrer himself," said Corwin, pointing to Hitler at the centre of the image. Corwin said nothing, but it was obvious. The face of the Fuehrer and his ridiculous moustache were just about the only thing he would recognise in any photo of the Germans in WW2.

"If our people were able to get this close to him, just imagine..."

"The photos could have come from anywhere. They could have been stolen from a lab or passed on to anybody. Getting them in hand doesn't mean you have an operative within spitting distance of that asshole," said Beyett.

"What a shame. Get me line of sight anything up to two clicks, and he'd be finished," said Lecia.

"Nobody can hit a man at that range, no matter how good they are," said one of Travers' crewmembers.

Lecia just smiled in response, for she didn't feel she had anything to prove.

"Hitler can't win this war," added Corwin, "I am looking for someone much more valuable."

The man who had questioned Lecia laughed at him also.

"You're kidding, right? He's taken our trousers down and given us a bloody good thrashing. It will take a miracle for us to turn this around."

Corwin stopped and looked up for a minute, making direct eye contact with the man.

"Who are you?"

"I...uhh...I am Private Wright."

Harland laughed.

"Sure got the right name to go with that big mouth," he said.

Wright looked at him but dared not speak out. He could see the murdering eyes looking him up and down and not showing an ounce of fear. Corwin continued.

"Well, Private Wright, firstly, shut up. Secondly, I will not have a man or woman under my command that does not believe in victory. Don't think it can happen, it won't. If you can't deal with that, get out and go back to your unit."

Travers began to laugh.

"He never could keep his mouth shut, but he's not without his uses."

"Oh, really?" Corwin sneered.

"Who do you think shot out the engine on that aircraft?" Wright asked.

Corwin looked to Travers for confirmation, and he simply nodded to give it.

"I guess you aren't a total asshole, then, but if you are going to stick around, you are going to have to start believing in what we are doing."

"And what exactly is that?" Travers asked.

Corwin looked back to the photo and studied it one last time. He panned across the image and suddenly stopped. He slapped the image down on the table and placed his finger on one of the men with the side of his face to the camera. He appeared to be lurking in the background while two other officers address Hitler. Hotwell looked down to he was pointing to as if expecting to recognise him, but he shook his head.

"I have no idea who that is...but it could be anyone."

Corwin shook his head, and Beyett rushed to his side out of curiosity.

"I don't believe it," he said, and as he reached Corwin, he knelt down in front of the photo to get a good view.

"Could it be?"

"Could it be who? That is not any key member of Hitler's inner circle that we know of."

"Of course it isn't," added Corwin.

"Why?"

"Because, Captain, you are looking at the very reason we came here. That there is Maximilian Villiers, the most dangerous man on Earth."

Hotwell picked up the photo and studied it even more carefully than Beyett had. Finally, he looked up at them confused.

"How? Just how on God's earth can you tell it is him from that photo?"

He held it up, and all you could see was the side of the man's face in the background. He was a little out of focus due to the depth of field.

"Maybe he looks a little like your man, maybe he doesn't, but don't tell me you can know for certain from this. Do you know how many thousands of staff the Fuehrer comes into contact with? And do you know how many of those could look a little like your man Villiers from the side in a blurry photo?"

Corwin shook his head. He wasn't willing to accept the Captain's negativity.

"It's him."

"How? How can you know that for sure? You are about to ask the Allies to commit an awful lot of resources to get that man. I know you are. Guarantee me that it's him, beyond any doubt."

"Come on, Captain, you know that isn't how war works," replied Beyett.

"No, it works on numbers of enemy, weapons, bombs, and the percentage chances of success or failure based on those numbers. Tell me what percentage chance there is of that actually being this Villiers character?"

"All this doubt, and yet many operations in history have gone forward to achieve success with less information," said Corwin.

Hotwell was getting agitated and could see he wasn't getting anywhere.

"You know I am behind you on your efforts here. I am that because I know you are heading in the right direction to help us win this war, but I cannot let you deviate based on what is nothing more than a guess. You hope and pray that it is him, and therefore your mind is willing to accept it is, but that doesn't make it true."

"And you've never done anything based on a little faith?"

Hotwell groaned.

"Yes, but nothing as serious as this. I don't know what kind of crazy mission you are going to want to pull to find that man, but I know it's going to be dangerous, and I know it's going to involve committing an awful lot of resources."

"And you won't back it?"

"I cannot...not in good conscience."

"Then you are no good to me."

Hotwell could not believe what he was hearing, but Beyett was the only one who seemed to feel any sympathy for him. Because Beyett understood how useful he was.

"If you aren't willing to help us with this, then leave," added Corwin.

Hotwell looked back at the photograph one last time before shaking his head and dropping it back onto the table. He stepped to the door and stopped to look back at Corwin one last time, but he wasn't even acknowledged. He put on his cap and left.

It was Beyett who finally broke the silence.

"He is right, you know. There is as much chance that the man you see there is just another random officer, maybe even more chance. You want it to be Villiers, and so do I. We all do, but that doesn't make it the case."

"Don't you doubt me, too!"

"This isn't doubt, this is common sense. We need to see clearly, or as clearly as we can on this."

Corwin turned to the others to get a feel for their opinion. Lecia didn't seem to care.

"You know Villiers better than any of us. If you think it's him, then what are we waiting for?" Nylund asked.

Though his opinion was worth close to nothing to the Captain, he was a useful soldier, but far from intelligent.

"Vi?" Corwin asked.

"It's a lead, and the only one we have seen yet. I say we get over there and start taking heads. We're bound to find him soon enough."

"Fucking right," Harland agreed in an unusual turn of support for her.

"Anything to not have to hear this eternal bitching and whining," Porter said.

Fraasi added nothing as usual, and Rane only shrugged, not seeming to care at all. Finally, he came to the last voice that could add anything, Chas. She came close to plain nuts most of the time, and yet just occasionally she had more to offer than her pretty smile and deadly skills. It seemed as if she had nothing to say, and Corwin opened his mouth to speak when she leapt onto the table at the centre of the room, with a turn of speed that shocked the new comers among them. All remained still and watched her in silence and opened mouthed.

She bent down at the hips without using her knees at all so that her butt was thrust out and her hair fell over her eyes. She certainly had their attention. She picked up the photo and slowly rose up. Vi was licking her lips at the sight, and only Lecia seemed to be free of the trance she held the rest of them in. Her face scrunched up in a cute way as if she was studying the photo, and then she threw it back down to the table.

"None of us can say for sure that the man there is Villiers, but there is one way we can be sure. We are hunters. We always have been. We catch a scent, and we follow it until we take down our prey. This is the first lead we have had, no matter how weak it might be. I say we follow it, and see where it takes us. If that path takes us on a bloody journey through a thousand enemy soldiers, then so be it. Seems to me like every single one we kill helps in this war, so what if we find Villiers or not. Time we stopped lurking around this little island and weighed in on the fight for real."

Travers couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"Didn't you see what happened yesterday? We tore those Germans apart, and your Captain here, it was incredible."

"It's a little taste of what we can do. The war in this country is being fought in the air and on the sea, and we are neither fighter pilots nor sailors. We are fighters, warriors, and gladiators. We use our own hands around the enemies' throats if need be. We can't be this side of the water any longer."

She slumped down into a cross-legged position on the table and waited for some response. Corwin coughed to clear his throat and to try and break out of the trance she had gotten him into.

"Quite right. Captain Hotwell has been valuable to us, but he simply doesn't understand the way we work."

He turned to the new recruits.

"We are hunters, just as she says. We don't fight defence. We don't skulk in bunkers or safe back behind the lines. No, that is not our way. We fight the enemy on their soil, at the time and place of our choosing. When they least expect, where they are most vulnerable, and we do not stop until we have achieved our goal."

"And if that still isn't the man you want?" Travers asked.

Corwin looked at the photo again for a moment and thought it through his head, finally turning back to them. He seemed to have found an even higher sense of purpose and confidence now.

"It doesn't matter."

Nylund scoffed. "Doesn't matter? He is the reason we are here."

"What I mean is it doesn't matter if that is him or not. It's a good enough lead to go on. We cut a path to that man. If it is Villiers then good, and if it isn't, we beat the information out of every son of a bitch we come across until we do find him. This is a strange place to us no doubt, but have we forgotten our ways? We are the terrors that lurk in the shadows, and that strike at any and all targets as and when we please. We strike fear into the enemy because they do not know where we are and when we strike. But look at us now! Sitting around a training camp, taking scraps of missions when our new leaders think we need to be tested."

"It's about time you grew your balls back," said Harland.

Porter laughed, but Corwin only agreed.

"Our balls, our teeth. Time to become the unstoppable bastards we really are."

He looked to the seven new recruits.

"Are you up for this?"

"Whatever you're planning, it sounds like both a barrel of laughs and an absolute nightmare...I'm in," replied Travers, and his people agreed, "This is Corporal Coates, and Privates Daniels, Mershon, Piper, and Carver," he said as he went along his line of crew for the two vehicles.

Corwin nodded in appreciation before turning to Corporal Badcock who sat alone.

"What'll it be?"

"I told you before, Sir. I can't shoot for shit, but put me in the seat of something fast and I'll prove my worth. Fly, drive, ride, anything you like. I'd fly you to Berlin on a bomb with Adolf Hitler's name on it if you asked me to, and I'd be sure to ram it down his throat."

"Then we're agreed, enough dicking around. I tell you this man is more dangerous than Hitler himself, and we have to stop him, are you all with me?"

There was overwhelming agreement as grunts of approval resounded around the room.

"Let's get that son of a bitch!" Corwin shouted at the top of his voice, and they erupted with a roar of excitement.

He had riled them up all right, but it was time to back it up with action. He turned to the door and found Hotwell blocking the way.

"Don't ever stand in my way," he snarled.

"It's not me," replied Hotwell calmly.

"What is it, Captain?"

"The Colonel. He has asked for you to report to him immediately."

"Good, because I have a few things to say to him myself."

Hotwell left as Corwin turned back to his people.

"What are you going to say?"

"Exactly what I just told you, Beyett. It's time for us to do what we do best."

* * *

Corwin strolled across a parade ground alone now, making his way to see the Colonel. But he stopped and hesitated for just a moment as he noticed two staff cars and a number of personnel and MPs ahead. It made him suspicious, and he felt his fists clench. It was the defensive reaction

that made him want to reach for a weapon, but he could not see any threat yet, but something was afoot.

Two MPs were watching him carefully now, and it was clear that he was acting suspiciously. His right hand hovered near a pistol, that by all accounts he shouldn't be carrying, and his hesitation to approach them only made them more suspicious. One of them began to take a few paces towards him to intercept. Most likely the man had never seen anyone look like he did. He still wore the body armour he had brought from the future, but over a British wool uniform. His pistol hung from a drop leg holster; part WW2 origin and part his own gear. His was dirty from the day before, and he had not had time to clean it yet. The cuts on his face had only just started to heal.

"Identification!" the man called to him.

"I am Captain Corwin... 7th Parachute Battalion."

The MP didn't believe him, and that was hardly surprising, for he didn't really believe it himself. The MP reached slowly for his sidearm and stopped just at the flap of the cross draw holster.

"Don't!" Corwin yelled.

Hotwell rushed out from the base HQ ahead and saw what was going on. He rushed forward frantically.

"Halt!"

But the sharp call only caused the MP to respond, sensing the situation was about to escalate. He pulled the flap of his holster and began to draw. Corwin snapped his own pistol out of his holster and fired a single shot. The bullet hit the cylinder of the man's revolver. It snapped out of his grip and fell until it hung only from the lanyard around his collar.

A dozen soldiers ran forward to confront him, but Hotwell was already ahead of them. He rushed in between the MPs and Corwin who had raised his pistol to confront the rest.

"Stop, stop right now. He's one of us!" Hotwell shouted frantically.

Only two of the camp soldiers were amongst those now pointing weapons at the two them. The rest had clearly come with whichever VIPs had recently arrived.

"That's the Captain!" one of them shouted.

"I don't care who he is. Put down your weapon. You are under arrest!"

"What the hell have you got us into?" Hotwell whispered.

"Stop right now!" a voice boomed from behind the men.

Everyone turned as Colonel Williams approached.

"What is the meaning of all this?"

"Sir, this man approached and fired upon one of my provosts."

The Colonel looked to Corwin who had already lowered his pistol upon seeing him, despite the weapons still trained on him and Hotwell.

"Asshole didn't accept who I was when I answered his question and then drew down on me. I wasn't going to trust a man as foolish as that to have a gun in my face."

Williams stepped up to the man who was cradling his hand where it was still in pain from the pistol having been wrenched from his grip.

"Is this true?"

"Sir, he was carrying a weapon, acting in a suspicious manner, and did not appear to be what he claimed."

The Colonel glanced at Corwin for a second as if to reprimand him, but turned back and slapped the provost across the face. His palm hit hard, and with enough surprise, that the man stumbled a pace back before getting his balance. Not a single one of them dared question his actions, even though they knew they could in theory.

"You idiot. This is not a boot camp. It isn't the street where you can muscle in because you don't like the way things look. Of course the Captain doesn't look like your typical soldier, because he isn't. In future, you will address him with respect, and think more before you act, understood?"

The man nodded sheepishly.

"Get back to your stations, all of you!"

The group dispersed, leaving only the three officers. Despite coming to their aid, Williams was shaking his head in dismay.

"How on earth can you get yourselves into so much trouble here, and now?"

"I didn't pick a fight. You told us we'd have a safe means of operation here, was that all bullshit?"

"Captain..." Hotwell protested.

"No, no," replied the Colonel, "If the Captain is so eager to get free of this place, then I have just the thing. You wanted to get your hands a little dirtier. Well, be careful what you wish for. We have a mission we'd like you to take on board that will shock you to your very core."

"I doubt it," said Corwin.

"We'll see. Follow me, gentlemen."

The Colonel led them into the building he had come from and past the redcaps Corwin had so recently annoyed. The one who he had injured was being driven off in a jeep still cradling his injured hand. The man looked at Corwin with daggers, but he only glared back until he looked away.

"Pussy," mocked Corwin as he stepped inside.

"You sure know how to make friends, or is this how all you yanks treat strangers?"

"It's a skill."

"I don't doubt that," Hotwell murmured.

The Colonel stopped them dead as they reached a large armoured door. It looked completely out of place with the rest of the building and two armed guards stood outside.

"What you are about to hear is strictly top secret, and I really mean it, you got that, Captain?"

"Just get on with it, Colonel," Corwin replied wearily.

Williams gestured towards the guards. They opened the locks and drew back the heavy steel door. They stepped in and were soon locked inside and followed the corridor until it opened out into a dome shaped room. Eight high-ranking officers sat around a table in the centre. There was only one other door in the room. It was open, but dark so that they could not make out if anyone was inside.

"Take a seat, gentlemen," said Williams.

What on earth have they got in mind for us now?

Corwin took his chance to interject his own thoughts and plans.

"Before anyone starts, I need to say a few words."

He didn't ask for permission nor wait for any of them to respond.

"I am here to tell you that I have one sole purpose in this war, and that is to capture or kill a man called Maximilian Villiers. You may not know that name, but I do. He is at the very core of the Nazi intelligence, technological advancement, and success you have seen this past year. I am here to finish him, and to that end, my team and I will be departing shortly. We operate behind enemy lines for prolonged periods of time. We always have done, and we're good at it. You may not understand the importance of this man or our mission, but you must know it is in the Allies' best interests that we are supported in this task."

With that, he took a seat and breathed out in relief. It felt good to finally let it out to those at the top. It seemed they had accepted what he had

to say, and it brought a smile to his face, but that was soon wiped clean when the Colonel replied.

"We are aware of the potential existence of a man known as Villiers operating within Hitler's inner circle. However, our intelligence indicates that he has little command or responsibility over the workings of the party or the progress of the war."

Fuck!

He slumped a little as he realised they hadn't understood anything he was saying, and let the Colonel continue.

"I am here to tell you, Captain, that no matter what you might think, we have access to far greater intelligence resources than you do. We have a network of spies, surveillance, and intelligence gathering men and machines that are beyond your comprehension. What we need you to understand is, that we need you to trust in us, like you expect us to trust in you."

He waited for Corwin's response.

"I am going forward. My team is going forward. We are going to strike at the heart of the enemy."

"Then why not strike at the man behind it all?" a voice bellowed from the open doorway and the darkness beyond.

Corwin recognised the voice. It was deep and gravel sounding. It resonated around the room that only gave it further authority. It got Corwin's attention, and he turned to see the shape of a man appear in the doorway. Even with the face in the shadows, he could already tell who it was. Winston Churchill himself. In an instant Corwin's approach to the entire situation changed, he now realised how significant the meeting was. Their last meeting had not been at all planned, and entirely of Corwin's making, but not this time.

"Hello again, Captain."

"Sir," he replied.

Churchill stepped into the light to reveal he was wearing a Naval officer's uniform and carried a large glass of brandy. His cheeks were red, and long shadows under his eyes gave away both his exhaustion and drunkenness, and yet he seemed as composed as many a man could hope to be.

"Do you know why you have been called here? Or even why I have travelled the distance to be here today? God knows it is not a safe land to travel anymore, as you very well know."

Corwin shook his head.

"Because we aren't winning this war, Captain. No matter what our propaganda machine might say otherwise, we are not. Hitler has proven a far more formidable opponent than any man on this earth could have expected he could be. That horrid little Corporal who rants and raves, he stands to be a king of this world. That is unless we stop him, and when I say we, there are less and less of us to stand up to his will and tyranny every day. And so, I am asking you to do something for me, for us all. This is not an order, for whether you would take my orders or not, I could not ask it of you... I want you and your people to undertake the most daring, outrageous, and dangerous of missions anyone could ask."

Corwin could already see where this was going, but he let the Prime Minister go on.

"Hitler holds his people together because of his charisma. I don't see what his people see in it, but they do. They see a god among men, and we must end him. If he were to fall, the Nazis would descend into disarray, and like many great powers before it, they would collapse into bitter infighting. Just as every empire ever has that has revolved around one single man."

"I..." Corwin began, but Churchill interrupted.

"I had to come here today because I wanted you to understand the severity of the situation, and because I knew you wouldn't accept this from anyone but me. Do you know how I know that, Captain?"

Corwin shrugged.

"Because you are a maverick, a wild and unpredictable whirlwind. When you set your mind to something you are unstoppable, but pointing you in right direction is the most difficult of tasks."

"No offence, but if you understand me so well, why all this, you being here and asking me in person, why would you think that would work?"

A few of the men in the room gasped at his insolence, and yet Churchill looked unaffected by it all. He paced up further to the table, and one of the officers leapt up to offer his chair. Churchill sat down with a groan. He leaned back in the chair and took a sip of his brandy. They each stared into one another's eyes for a few moments, weighing one another up.

"Captain, have you heard of the events that we refer to as the Battle of Britain?"

Corwin shook his head. Two of the officers cackled at his ignorance, and yet Churchill held up a hand to call for silence.

“Early in this war when things looked so dire, just like they do now, we faced invasion on a grand scale. But it wasn’t armies of soldiers and thousands of tanks that saved us. It wasn’t old officers sitting around big tables like this. It was a few brave young pilots. A handful of men we all relied on, and they came through for us. Never has so much been owed by so many to so few. That’s what I said after that time, and it was true.”

“Sorry, Sir, but I just don’t know where you are going with this.”

“What I am saying, Captain, is that we need you to be those few. I need you to do what thousands of troops and aircraft and ships and pieces of paper cannot. I need a few crazy heroes to pull off something miraculous, and I believe you are just the man for the job.”

“I’m listening.”

“I want you to kill Adolf Hitler.”

Corwin began to laugh, but no one else seemed to see the joke, apart from Churchill, who soon joined in with him and raised his glass before knocking back the last of the brandy. Finally, he slammed the glass down, and they both drew to a silence, and Corwin went on.

“You want me to find, and kill, the man you think is the ultimate bad guy in this world? And you think the whole goddamn Nazi empire will fall apart as a result?”

“We do.”

Corwin opened his mouth to speak, but then he stopped when it dawned on him that was exactly the mission they had taken in their own timeline, and which had triggered the events he now lived in. It took him right back to Villiers.

“But what if Hitler isn’t the king you think he is? What if other people are behind the scenes and pulling the strings?”

“Yes, yes, I am told you believe there is something going on, but you have no proof. For whatever Hitler is and is not, he is a figurehead, a man millions follow because of his face and his words. The war might not end with his death, but it may buy us valuable time to gain back some strength. At the rate we are going, the war could be over in months. We can’t win it in months, but give us years, and there may be hope yet.”

“And Villiers? You may not believe in his existence, or his importance. But what if he really is the key to all this?”

Churchill sighed.

“You know, Captain, I give every possibility a consideration, all plausible ones. Your theory about this Villiers man seems plausible, but you have no evidence, and without that, I cannot rightfully commit any resources.”

Corwin began to shake his head and went to speak when Churchill once again got in before him.

“However! You believe this man is close to Hitler?”

“Yes.”

“So close that they would have to be together a fair share of the time.”

“I should imagine.”

“And what leads do you have on how to find this Villiers? Where is he? What country?”

Corwin shrugged.

“If you are right, then we have the best leads you have. We have diverted an awful lot of resources to find Hitler, and if Villiers is that close to him, find one and you will have the other. Two birds, one stone, Captain.”

Corwin could not help but agree with that assessment, but he also knew that operations rarely ever ended up going that smoothly.

“I know you don’t believe what I have to say about Villiers, but you will one day, and he has to be a priority for you.”

Churchill nodded just before looking back and pointing to his glass to ask for a refill.

“Do you want one?” he asked.

“What?”

“A brandy?”

Corwin was silent.

“Do you know how much I have gotten from alcohol?”

Corwin shrugged.

“A lot more than it has ever gotten from me!”

Corwin laughed. “All right, go for it.”

“That’s the spirit,” he replied, as a glass was placed before him and filled with a generous measure. Churchill lifted the glass towards him before taking a sip, and he did the same. It tasted sweet and refined compared to anything he was used to, and yet it went down smoothly and quickly calmed his nerves.

“So you will do it?” Churchill asked.

Corwin looked around the room and weighed up his options. He didn't want to accept but knew it was the closest he would ever get to have the support he needed to go after Villiers.

"I will."

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 6

"Let me get this straight," Porter said, "You went out there to tell 'em we are doing whatever the fuck we want, and you've come back having accepted another mission?"

"It's not that simple, and you know it," Beyett replied in support of the Captain.

"Fuck me," Porter shouted, and the room fell silent.

"That's about the sum of it, yep. Don't like it, don't come," replied Corwin.

"Okay, so they want us to find and kill the big man himself?"

"Yep, Vi."

"And do they have any idea on where he is?"

"Not much."

"So they want us to do all the work?" Nylund asked.

"The Allies never were able to find Hitler, never able to get close enough. In this timeline things are worse. We are the only ones that can make a difference this time around. We are the only thing that is different," said Beyett.

"Wait, timeline? What are you talking about?" Travers asked.

Beyett paused, realising their latest recruits knew nothing of their origins. Hotwell stepped forward to try and help.

"You're new to this team, and there will plenty for you to learn as time goes by."

"If they live long enough," Porter muttered quietly in the background, but Hotwell went on anyway.

"What you may hear, or even see with your own eyes, might shock you. It may surprise you, but in time you will believe some things you never thought possible."

Travers pointed to Corwin.

"I saw that man leap from a moving vehicle and cover a distance no human being could hope to achieve, not under the most perfect of scenarios. What I saw you do I would already call impossible."

"And that is only a taste of what is to come," added Hotwell.

"I do hope so. Because however amazing you might be, you think we few in this room can both find and kill Adolf Hitler? Who would be insane enough to issue those orders, let alone accept them?"

Corwin stepped forward, appreciative of Hotwell's aid, and for him to take a seat so he could go on.

"All you need to know right now is that we have a mission to do. It is top secret and will not be discussed with anyone outside of this room unless I say so. Gentlemen, you have just joined a unit the likes of which you could never have envisaged. What will follow will be a whirlwind that you can pray you will survive, but only your skills, your efforts, and your luck will see you through. Do you have any questions?"

"Yes, what do you actually want from us?" asked Travers.

"My team are exceptional fighters, more so than anyone you would ever have met in your lives. But we only have so many hands and can only do so much. What we lack is support. We require drivers, pilots, navigators, and gunners, a whole support team that can back us up in combat. We already have Captain Hotwell here who handles organisation, and a team working around the clock on intelligence gathering and interpreting. The seven of you are precisely what we need for this back up in the field, if you feel up to the task?"

"We already said yes, and we won't go back on that, so long as you fight the good fight...against Hitler."

"Yeah, well he ain't the only problem, but clearly he is now our focus. I don't care what combat experience you do or don't have. Each one of you was there when we needed you and has already proved yourselves in my eyes. So what do you say, will you take us forward on a mission to kill Adolf Hitler?"

He could see they were a little stunned, and when he said it aloud it did sound outrageous.

"When do we leave?"

Corwin smiled at Travers. "That's the spirit."

* * *

Corwin sat in the NAAFI bar with a beer in hand. He appeared utterly calm and without a care in the world, and yet plenty was going through his

mind as he stared into the far wall and sipped his drink without even looking at it.

"So you think it can be done?"

He didn't even seem to notice Vi.

"Corwin?" she added as she nudged him.

He snapped out of it and seemed a little surprised to even see her there with him.

"What?" he asked abruptly.

She shook her head and pointed to the barman. "Beer!" she bellowed.

He did not hesitate to grab a glass and start pouring for her.

"I asked if you think it can be done? This little undertaking of ours."

Corwin opened his mouth to speak but stopped on noticing how many ears were listening, and then he realised Vi was for once being subtle.

"Why the hell not? Not like we ever shied away from a job because it was gonna be a little tough?"

She laughed, but it was half hearted.

"A little tough? That what you think this is? All just a game?"

"He shook his head, finished his drink, and slid the glass over to the barman for a refill.

"Maybe, maybe not. Might as well be a game though, winners and losers, a challenge and all that. Whatever, of course it can be done. Anything can be done with a little thought and application of strength in the appropriate place."

"Well I am glad you are so confident, but you might want to share that confidence with our new buddies. You swept them off their feet today. They don't know how to take any of this."

"You don't think they can handle it?"

Vi shrugged.

"I don't know yet, and neither do they, as they have no idea what they are getting themselves into."

Corwin took his glass and led her to a corner of the bar where they could sit and talk quietly.

"Yeah, well they will know soon enough. These people are tougher than you give them credit. They won this war without us first time around, don't forget that," he whispered.

"I get that, but it was a different war in a different world. That world is gone now."

"But the people remain the same. Just because we have certain enhancements, do not underestimate these warriors. A few of them have already saved our asses."

Beyett noticed the two of them talking quietly and walked over to get involved. Beyond him several of them could be seen playing a game of billiards and chatting in the opposite side of the room. Porter and Harland were at the bar. Close enough to talk, but ignoring one another in favour of hard liquor.

"So are you going to share any of the plan with us or keep it a secret?" Beyett took a seat beside them.

"Where we go isn't up to us, right now. We are just waiting on the intel to come back. All we can do for now is prepare. Get our gear together. Equip appropriately and make sure this team works as smoothly as it can."

"You always said we worked alone, and yet now you bring outsiders in. Not only to help, but to fight alongside us. What has changed?"

Corwin took a deep breath, another sip, and then sat back, propping his feet up on the table. The barkeep looked pained by the sight, but Corwin just smiled back and lifted his beer in salute.

"What has changed? I would have thought that was obvious. We used to operate in wastelands, deserts, and empty jungles. We were like hunters in sparse lands, and look where we are now. The numbers we used to know are pathetic compared to this. We need help, and I am not ashamed to admit it."

"Good, then I am glad."

"Really? Some of the others don't seem to share your positive view," replied Corwin, pointing to Porter and Harland.

"Fuck 'em. Miserable bastards. We need 'em, don't have to like 'em."

Hotwell stepped into the bar and looked around for a moment before finally approaching and sitting with the three of them.

"Everything is prepared," he stated.

Beyett looked confused.

"What have you been up to?"

"Getting the ball rolling. We may not know where to go yet, but we can at least get this unit into fighting shape."

He threw back his beer so that it was almost downed in one and leapt to his feet.

"I suggest you get some sleep, 0700 hours tomorrow on the parade ground. Today we are a group of strangers that came together by chance. But tomorrow we become a team."

Beyett smiled. The answer had been vague, but it interested and entertained him.

"Lecia!" Corwin yelled.

She was already at the door waiting for him.

"Yes, Boss?" she asked, casually leaning against the door as if she had been there all along.

Corwin smiled as he strode out of the bar with her and into the cool dark air outside. They walked for a minute without a word. There was not a vehicle in sight, or any lights. Lights flashed far off into the distance to the south and east where German bombing raids struck the towns and cities around them.

"Train them all you like, but they'll never be the calibre we are," she said.

"You think I am diluting our abilities?"

"I do. They aren't one of us. None of them are or ever will be. Not even Captain Hotwell."

"Yeah, well diluting or not, we can't always get what we want. What I want is a thousand A.P.E.S. to lead into Germany and take Villiers' head, and Hitler's after that. But I can't have that. We make do, we improvise."

She shook her head.

"Why don't we just do what we always do? Slip into enemy territory and start working our magic as we always have done. Why do we have to change?"

"Because the world around us has changed. Remember how we used to operate, even when things were at their worst? Remember Sohag valley?"

She nodded wearily.

"Even when all shit hit the fan. When we had fucked up and left a trail that led an army to our door. Even then we somehow shot our way out, but that was a hundred soldiers we fought through. If the same thing happens out there now, it might be a hundred, or two hundred, or a thousand. Do you really appreciate the kind of numbers we are dealing with? Think we could take on a division? How about an armoured division?"

"Then we avoid them. We infiltrate and lay low. Work our way in slow."

"In a densely populated country, where we don't speak the language, and stand out a mile away?" he asked, shaking his head, "We are going in there, believe me, but we are going to do it right."

"And how long will that take? Seems like things are going downhill rapidly, how much longer can we leave Villiers? How long until it is too long and he is unstoppable? Even if we killed him now, do you think the Allies could win the war?"

Corwin groaned.

"Honestly, I don't know anymore. All I know is no matter what Villiers must be dealt with. The rest of the Axis powers, should we even intervene with that any more than we have?"

"Fuck yes. We brought Villiers here. He is our problem, and if the Nazis are now winning the war because of him, then that is our problem, too."

Corwin was shocked.

"I had no idea you had thought this through so much."

"Never assume because somebody isn't talking that they aren't listening and thinking."

"Fair enough."

"So where to? I thought you wanted some rest before morning."

"I suggested it was a good idea, but when have we ever done what we should do?"

She smiled as she followed.

* * *

Hotwell looked at his watch. It was 0700 hours and the only ones there were the British contingent. Not one of Corwin's Luckers was to be seen.

"What is this?" Travers asked.

"You'll have to forgive the Captain and his people. They aren't the most prompt, but they are worth the wait."

The two recon car crews were slumped over their Humber light recon cars, awaiting the Captain at the side of the parade square. Despite the paint damage from small arms fire, they were spotless. The sound of engines approaching caught their attention, and they got up just in time to see six jeeps roll into view. They each had armoured windshields and tombstone plates, as well as long-range fuel tanks and twin machine guns mounted

front and rear. Corwin drove the lead vehicle, with Lecia sprawled out in the passenger seat, one foot hanging casually out of the side of the vehicle. They rolled onto the parade ground at speed until finally Corwin slammed on the brakes, and they slid to a halt in front of Hotwell and the others.

"You do know this is a parade ground?" Hotwell asked.

Corwin shrugged as he leapt out.

"Morning!" he yelled.

The others rolled to a halt in a messy formation that looked as if the jeeps had simply been abandoned on the ground.

"Everyone gather round!"

The Brits were taken aback by his informal approach, but they obliged. As they did so, two men stepped out from a nearby building with trays full of tin mugs with piping hot tea and handed them out.

"Will that be all, Captain?" asked one of the men as he handed Corwin a mug.

"Yes, thank you," he replied.

Hotwell smiled when he realised it was all Corwin's doing. He was breaking the ice and doing it well.

"First things first. Those beasts have got to go," he said, pointing to the armoured cars behind Travers. The crews looked aghast, but he went on before they had time to protest.

"Don't get me wrong. Your trucks rock, and could we take them where we are going, we would. Fact is we are going in by air, and therefore we are limited by what the aircraft fuselage can fit and what the aircraft can lift. When we operate back here on home soil, you can use 'em, and I have been assured by the base commander that they will be stored and maintained correctly."

"Sir, if I may?"

"You may not, Sergeant. Whatever protest you might have will be wasted, so let's move forward?"

Travers begrudgingly accepted.

"These jeeps were modified for British airborne forces and provide a good base for what we want. Today is Tuesday. We have until Friday to get them to the specification we want, and then we go in."

"We have enough intel to start the operation?" Hotwell asked.

"Nope, but weather conditions are perfect, for what we need at least. Rain, cloud cover, and generally poor visibility are the best conditions we

can hope for."

"Providing those conditions don't kill us on the way in," replied Travers.

"Well I'd rather take our chances with weather than the Luftwaffe," Hotwell added, and Corwin agreed with him.

"Porter, you used to work on this kind of tech and old cars, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"Then this is your chance to make us the machines we need. Those who have the knowhow amongst you can help, and I have been assured we will have ten mechanics and a workshop to work from within the hour, so follow me."

He leapt back into his vehicle and started the engine. The others jumped into the rest to follow. They made their way across the base and further out from the billets until they reached a workshop building. It was empty, and the crews awaiting them. Corwin drove his vehicle in through the front doors and jumped out as it drew to a close. The rest circled in around him.

"Travers, you any good with mechanics?"

"Yes, Sir."

He noticed Badcock looking through shelves of component parts as if enthralled by what he saw. He looked eager to get stuck in. Corwin continued.

"So here it is. You have three days to make these vehicles the best they can be. Stay within the size restrictions we have been given, and all will be good. Weapons and ammo are a priority, power and armour, anything you can get us."

"This is it? Vehicle mods? What about training?"

"We are all warriors, Travers, and I have seen you in combat. You have the skills you need. All that can be learnt now is by working together when the time comes. I'll see you in three days."

Harland, Lecia, Frasi, and Hotwell left with him as they walked out on foot. Corwin turned back for just a moment in surprise to see Chas getting stuck in amongst the tools.

"I'll never understand that one," he said.

"None of us will," replied Lecia.

"So what can we do now?"

"Draw up an itinerary of everything we need and make sure it gets to us. You ever been out in the field for any prolonged length of time?"

Hotwell shook his head.

"We take only what is essential and what will keep us alive short term. After that, we make do with what is to hand. That goes for weapons, vehicles, clothing, ammunition, everything. If you can somehow get us resupplied, then great, but we can't rely on it. Once we are over there, we are on our own."

"When you say we, where do you want me?"

Corwin laughed.

"Don't worry, Captain, we still need eyes and ears back home. You'll stay put and ensure we get all the help we can. Above all, you will keep looking for Villiers. That's the deal."

* * *

Once again Corwin found himself lounging about the same pub that had become like a new home for them. Only Lecia was with him; the others were still busy going about their business or otherwise occupied.

"All that fuss to build those vehicles, you make it sound like they will tip the balance," she said.

"Maybe they will."

"Don't give me that. In a few days we are jumping into the fire amongst the greatest concentration of enemy forces we have ever known. We're taking fresh recruits with us, and we haven't even begun their training."

Corwin nodded his head.

"And what do you think we could achieve in a few days?"

"Something more than they know now."

Corwin shook his head.

"They aren't fresh just because we don't know them. They are each trained and proficient, and lord knows they now have some experience. It's unavoidable when you hang around us."

"So that's it? We just go in as is and hope?"

"Pretty much. What they needed more than anything for now was something to put their minds to rest. Something to work on together, and that is exactly what I have provided."

"And behind enemy lines, any vehicles we take could be lost within a day, or before we even arrive."

"It's entirely possible," he replied casually.

"I don't get you at all."

"You don't have to get me. You just have to follow me."

She sighed, sat back angrily, and sighed again even more loudly just to make a point. He realised he couldn't leave it be.

"Look, they need something to set their minds to. This does the job, and might just be useful to us, okay?"

She finally nodded in acceptance and eased up a little.

"Got to say I never thought I would be the one putting a bullet in Hitler's head."

"So sure it will be you?"

"Of course," she replied with a wicked and confident smile.

"Yeah, well if you ever get that shot, you don't hesitate, you hear?"

"Trust me, I won't."

"What's your history like? You know who and what Hitler really was? Or is now, I guess."

"I've got an idea. He was a monster, and I know any good person would not hesitate to save the world from him. I will show no mercy, don't worry."

They both went silent and took solace in their drinks for a moment.

"You know maybe we shouldn't be out in public like this?"

"Why, worried what they think of you?" asked Corwin, as he pointed to a group of soldiers on the other side of the bar.

"I don't give a damn who thinks what about me. We have already been targeted once. Captain Howell said enemy agents are everywhere, and I am inclined to believe him. Should we really risk being discovered once more?"

Corwin shrugged as he finished his glass and then slammed it down.

"I just don't care anymore. In a few days time it won't matter."

"So we just be careless and hope for the best?"

"Something like that, but for the time being, I'm more concerned with not going crazy."

He slid his glass across the table and lay back with a groan.

"Okay, okay," he said as he got up.

"Don't go on my account. You stick to your guns, why don't you?"

"No, no, you are right. Come on, let's get out of here."

She got up and followed him out. He threw the door open, long enough for her to get through behind him without being seen to be holding it for her.

"You happy now?"

They walked through the dark country lane.

"Yes, I have you to myself."

* * *

The days of preparation passed quickly, and on Friday morning Corwin, Hotwell, and Lecia stood before the workshop building where they had left the others. They had not seen them for the three days. The doors were shut and not a single sound emanated from inside. Footsteps approached from the rear, and they turned with anticipation, but it was only Harland.

"Think they died in there?" he asked them.

He smiled at them as if he wanted it to happen, but as he came to a standstill beside them, the doors began to creak loudly and to open. As they parted the first few feet, one of the jeeps became visible. He could already tell it was barely recognisable from the vehicles they had driven in, but all the work that had been carried out was concealed under a fresh olive drab and black camouflage paint scheme.

The doors kept drawing back, and each vehicle came into view, and identical to the first. The hoods were longer, and armoured grills jutted out over the front bumpers that looked like they had been taken from halftracks. The armoured plates and crescent shaped armoured windscreens that had been there before remained. But new armoured sections rose up the side of the hoods to protect the extra fuel tanks. They had been mounted with a Browning M2 50 calibre machine gun in the back.

Two Vickers guns remained for the passenger, but Boys anti-tank rifles had been mounted on a wing side mount for the driver to use. Two bazookas were mounted down the length of the body on top of the fuel tanks, and crates of ammunition strapped down in such quantity the hoods weren't visible at all. Badcock sat in the centre vehicle and fired up the engine. The vehicle roared to life, and muscular growls echoed around the

workshop before the rear wheels spun, and the jeep powered around and slid to a halt before them. Badcock was smiling like a kid at Christmas.

"That ain't stock," said Corwin.

"Hell, no, Captain, flathead V8s, almost double the power those four pots were kicking out. Enough to carry the extra weight, and make sure we get where we need to in good time."

He seemed so excited by the prospect of taking the vehicle to war that Corwin did not have the heart to break his bubble and explain how bad it was going to get. He walked around the jeep. A large storage rack had been added to the rear armour and housed two spare wheels, as well as several cans of fuel, water, and more space for ammunition.

"You intend to be out there for some time, then?"

"That's what you told us, Captain. As long as is necessary to get the job done."

The doors were fully open now, and the other vehicles were firing up and driving out of the shop. It was then he noticed one of the six was radically different to the others. An extra axle had been installed and an anti-tank gun fitted to the chassis.

"What on earth is that? You want to destroy whole fucking towns?"

The six-wheeler rolled out and revealed Porter sitting on the back beside the gun. It rolled to a halt.

"Can we even fly this thing in?" he asked in amazement.

"Sure can, I checked," replied Porter.

"Really think that will be necessary?" Hotwell asked.

Porter looked at him with scorn. "Never been on the front-line, have you, Captain?" he asked disparagingly.

"Not really."

"When you find yourself looking down the barrel of some ridiculous tank, with a Nazi bastard looking back at you, you'll be glad I brought Shirley here along for the ride."

"Shirley?" Corwin asked.

"Named after the sweet little thing that delivered this baby to us. She sure showed her commitment to the cause," he said with a sleazy grin. He picked up a cigar and lit it while still sitting casually next to the gun. Hotwell didn't say another word. Corwin seemed to have turned his attention to the gun itself.

"So? What can she do?"

Porter left it up to Hotwell to fill in with the details. He looked over the weapon and then the ammunition boxes beside it.

"QF 6-pounder, staple of the Royal Artillery, and with APDS Sabot shells. This Shirley of yours can certainly pack a punch."

"And if we come up against heavy armour?"

"She certainly will pack a punch, but I wouldn't advise going toe to toe with any Tigers."

"Understood."

"Really, Captain, if you have a need of this kind of weapon, you are already in too deep."

"Yeah, well you leave that down to us. I like to know we can handle anything should the need arise. You know how often a mission goes to plan?"

Hotwell shrugged.

"Pretty much never, because for some reason the enemy don't seem keen to go along with your best laid plans."

Corwin looked to the driver's seat and was surprised to find Chas at the wheel. She was covered in dirt, grim, and oil, and yet had a huge smile on her face.

"You like our new baby?"

"This was your doing?"

"Well, hell, yes. What, you think just because I like pretty things I can't appreciate a beast like this?"

"No, but how the hell did you manage to get that miserable bastard to work on it with you?" Corwin was pointing to Porter.

"He ain't so bad. You just have to know how to handle him right."

"Ain't that the truth?" Porter grinned.

Hotwell blushed, clearly uncomfortable with the sexual innuendo.

"So we're all ready?" Corwin asked Beyett as he strolled out from the building.

"As ready as we can be. This is all pretty simple tech, but it will pack a punch, and we can keep it operational in the field with the most basic of tools."

"A couple of days and you already know these vehicles inside out?"

"It's like being a kid again. They are nothing more than big toys to me."

Corwin looked to Hotwell.

"It's on you now. We need intel, a departure time, and a landing zone."

Hotwell stepped up to the bonnet of Shirley and drew out a map, placing it as flat as it would go over the ammo boxes.

"Gather around. I want you all to hear this!" Corwin shouted.

They did so and waited to hear what Hotwell had to say.

"The location of Hitler is one of the most closely guarded secrets of this century. What little information we do get tends to be weeks, if not months after the fact."

"Okay, so what can you give us?" Corwin asked.

"Just one lead."

"One?"

"That's right, but it may be enough. One of Hitler's favourite driver's is a man named Konrad Dohman."

"A driver? That all?"

"Porter, let him finish."

"Dohman is a good friend and aid to the Fuehrer, and at present he is laid up sick in Southern France. We know his location and that he will be there for another few days. We know Hitler himself is in that area as well, but we cannot pin it down beyond a few hundred miles."

Porter laughed.

"But!" Hotwell interrupted, "Hitler will not return to Germany without Dohman unless his condition grows worse, which I am reliably informed he will not."

"What is this guy, his boyfriend?"

"Do you leave your comrades behind?"

Nylund begrudgingly saw his point and agreed with him.

"It could be enough, or it could be useless to us," added Beyett.

"Either way, it's what we have got, and we must go forward with it. I won't sit around here any longer. We go in, get what information we can, and keep moving forward. We remain behind enemy lines until such time as our mission is complete."

"And if it proves impossible?" Lecia asked.

"Several extraction routes will be available to you, but none will be easy," added Hotwell.

"When do we fly?"

"Weather conditions are as anticipated and ideal. You depart at 2000 hours and travel through the night."

A jeep rolled into view, and Hotwell climbed inside.

"I will have all final preparations made ready for you. Just be ready at 1700 hours for the final briefing."

The vehicle sped off across the camp, and Corwin looked back to see that it was setting in now, just how ridiculous and terrifying the mission would be.

"You didn't think it was gonna be easy, did you?" he asked them.

"Not too late to back out of this party, is it?"

Corwin could see Travers was at least still smiling and talking in jest, but there was also fear and dread in his eyes.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 7

The drone of the engines had long become boring. Corwin looked out of one of the windows of their transport plane.

Still nothing, he thought to himself, looking out into the blackness of the night.

Like most populated areas it was under blackout conditions, for both sides relentlessly bombed another and used any lighting possible as a reference.

A light flashed in the distance, and then another. They were out on the horizon and soon became almost a constant firework display, but only just getting far enough to briefly outline their craft. He watched one of the transports flying nearby and Chas' face at the window. He could just see her blow a kiss to him, and he didn't know what to make of it, so he smiled and then turned back to those in the hold with him. They were sitting close to one of the armoured jeeps. Lecia and Badcock were opposite him.

"Still think it was a good idea dividing us up this much?"

"We had to, Lecia. Three per vehicle is about all we can manage with the amount of ammo we are taking in!"

They had to raise their voices to even be heard over the turbo prop engines.

"I don't like it."

"I thought you liked working alone?"

She shrugged.

"Sorta, but I like having a team to back me up, not being in the spotlight with all guns aimed at me!"

Corwin smiled, knowing how she felt. He looked to Badcock who seemed mesmerised by it all. He showed no fear at all.

"What are you so happy about, Corporal?"

"It's like the moment before a race. It's exhilarating!"

Corwin thought to shoot down his hopeless enthusiasm, but knew it was keeping him calm and effective, so he held his tongue.

"What's your name, again? I'm Wyatt."

He looked a little surprised, seeming to pause and wonder if it was some kind of test before finally answering.

“Tim.”

Corwin began to laugh.

“Your parents named you Tim Badcock?” he asked, still laughing.

“My uncle did. He was like a father to me, a racer, a real racer. Hot blooded and fearless. He said my father would never have approved, but that he wanted to give me a name people would remember when they saw me cross the finish line.”

“That’ll do it.”

He seemed utterly calm and relaxed with the two of them, and that pleased Corwin. Since being given his Captaincy, he had been treated very differently by many who did not know him. Badcock turned to Lecia and seemed to study her as if both curious and entranced.

“So what’s your story? Not exactly a homely lass, are you?” he asked.

Corwin shook his head. He knew she wouldn’t take it well, even if he didn’t mean any harm.

“You’re pretty cocky for a man who pissed himself under fire.”

“Come on now, that’s not fair,” said Corwin.

“No, no. I froze. I have seen it before. Some people do it behind the wheel of a car, others at the sight of a wild animal. Me, it’s gunfire. I could do five hundred miles an hour in the open air with a big grin on my face if I could, that’s my thing. That’s what you brought me along for. You two, you are fighters. I drive, I ride, and I fly. You fight. Seems like a reasonable deal?”

“And when the shit hits the fan, and you are all that can help us? Will you freeze then?”

It was clear she was starting to get to him.

“Lecia...leave it.”

The man fell silent for a moment and seemed a little embarrassed and ashamed.

“You remember when you first went into combat, Lecia?”

She shook her head and grimaced.

“Yeah, that’s right. This one flipped a transport, launched her commanding officer out on his ass, and crashed into a cliff side. It wasn’t all that pretty.”

Badcock smiled and then glanced at her as if to ask for permission to laugh. She shrugged and began to smile.

"Okay, I get your point," she said to Corwin.

He was glad to see the tone had lightened and so took his opportunity.

"The time will come where you are gonna have to be at peace with both using a gun and taking fire from one, you get that, right?"

"Yes, I know."

"And that the time might come much sooner than you might like."

"I don't think anyone likes getting shot at."

"No. So when it does happen, and it will, you keep your head in the game. You remember that your actions affect the outcome of all our lives. That is what it is to be a team. We are stronger when we work together. So I don't care how good you drive or fly, you have to work with us, can you do that?"

"I think so."

"You're a maverick, a wild one, I get that. But it's time to channel all that crazy into being the soldier we need you to be."

"I told you what I was when I agreed to join you, Captain."

"Yes you did, and I am here to tell you that you can be more than that."

Corwin pulled a transit chest along the floor and opened it to reveal a silenced Sten submachine gun, with two seven magazine bandoliers beside it. He threw the gun at the Corporal who had no choice but to catch it. He proceeded to kick the box of ammunition so that it slid over in front of Badcock.

"You're our driver right now, and I hope that is all you need to be, but there are no guarantees in war. The next time you need to use your weapon, you will do so, or I'll shoot you myself."

Badcock saw Corwin was serious and found it hard to protest.

"You know I am not up to this?"

"Then it's time to make a change. There is no room for hesitation, and you won't get many second chances. I need to know we can rely on you."

He pulled the Sten sling and two bandoliers over his neck and lay back against the fuselage.

"And don't look so miserable. You are an adrenaline junky, and I am providing you with the most excitement of your life. You're about to make a jump into enemy territory with your own personally built hot rod, what's not to like?"

"Exactly that," he grumbled, "I fly, ride, and drive. I don't jump out of a perfectly good aircraft and let gravity to do the work. That's just not natural."

Corwin laughed.

"You'll laugh about this someday, too."

"Why?" he asked in amazement.

"Because it'll mean you survived, and then it could be nothing but funny. This is a ridiculous situation, and one day we will have the luxury of laughing about it, and if we don't, it's because we are dead and have nothing more to worry about."

"That's helpful," replied Badcock sarcastically.

The co-pilot stepped out from the cockpit and into the hold.

"It's time!"

"Okay, let's do this!"

Corwin got up and latched the carabineer of his release cord onto the rail above them, taking a firm grasp on the handrail to the side as the others did the same. He nodded to the co-pilot who moved to the controls of the bomb bay doors beneath the jeep.

"Really think it'll survive?" asked Lecia.

"These people aren't stupid. They won the war as it should have been without us."

"What do you mean?" Badcock asked.

"Nothing."

They watched the doors slide open beneath them, revealing just how low they were flying. The jeep began to sway, as there was nothing beneath its landing crate. For what Corwin was used to it was nothing, but for a parachute drop it was close to crazy.

"This is gonna be rough," he said quietly to himself.

They all knew what they had to do. He just had to hope for the best and do his own part. The co-pilot looked to him for one last confirmation, and Corwin gave him the thumbs up. The straps released, and the jeep dropped out from the fuselage. They all watched and waited for the pilot to give the go ahead. Finally, he pointed, and Corwin took his leap out of the payload doors.

The cold evening air immediately struck his uncovered face. He only had a few moments to look around at the woodland when he felt and heard his 'chute deploy above him and sharply slow his descent. He was a few

hundred feet off the ground, and the wind was taking him eastward towards a thick line of trees, and he had no control at all.

"Ah, fuck!"

All he could do was hold on, brace, and hope. He looked around for some sign of the others. He could make out a few silhouettes and see some of the 'chutes. The combined 'chutes of the jeep caught his eye just as it vanished behind some trees back to the west. He had to turn his attention to his own descent, and did so just as he reached the nearest trees. He crashed through the branches of two. They slowed his fall greatly, but he soon smashed into more branches before breaking free and falling the last of the way. To his surprise his landing was a lot softer than he expected, but as he collapsed down onto his back, he heard the squelch of water and mud. He had come down in a bog.

Fuck me!

He got back to his feet and unclipped his harness and threw off his jump helmet. It wouldn't be much good in a fight, and the one he had brought from his own time was long gone. He looked around for his Bren that had been in the drop bag beneath him, but it was nowhere to be seen.

"Good start," he muttered to himself.

His hand reached for his Colt, but then he remembered where he was. His hand froze as it reached the grip, remembering how loud the .45 calibre weapon was. He reached across to a shoulder holster and drew out a new weapon that had been added to their arsenal, the High Standard HDM, a 10-shot semi-automatic pistol with integral silencer. The small calibre pistol wasn't his style at all, but he looked around, noting how alone he was, and the quietness. While as he was thinking it, he heard a few coughs and sighs. Badcock stumbled into view through some trees and fell as he became entangled in his parachute harness. The lines were cut and frayed. Corwin rushed to his side and began to untangle him.

"What the hell happened to you?"

"Got snagged by those damned trees. Had to cut my way loose, and landed on my bloody head."

"You got your weapons?"

He held up his Sten.

Corwin looked down at the compass on his wrist.

"Where is Esperon?"

"No idea, but you're one of us now, you call her Lecia. Now let's find that fucking jeep."

He chambered a round into his pistol and went onwards through the trees to track his way back to the vehicle. He could not help but feel weak and vulnerable with such little firepower to hand, and despite what he'd said to Badcock, he didn't have much faith in him in a firefight. He tried to make his way as quietly as possible. The soft ground helped, but there was no choice but to rustle the thick tree branches as they made their way through.

"Think the others made it okay?"

"They'll be fine. We've just been scattered is all. It's to be expected," replied Corwin.

He was half telling the truth. In his own head he was livid with the awful drop that had been made, but there was no choice now but to suck it up and go forward.

"I sure hope my girl made it," said Badcock.

Corwin turned in surprise, not understanding what he meant.

"That beautiful jeep," he clarified.

Corwin smiled. "Don't get too attached. Where we are going, we may not hang onto what we have for long."

"I'll find a way."

As they neared a tree line, Corwin noticed a faint light in the distance. He quickly took a knee, pulling Badcock down so that the foliage concealed them.

"Don't move."

He pointed to the light. It was moving and muted like the blackout light of a military vehicle.

"It's one of ours. They made it," Badcock said hopefully.

He tried to get to his feet to step out into the open and greet them, but Corwin once again hauled him down.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Got to be one of ours, who else would be out here?"

"Don't be an idiot. That could be anyone. Do you take those kinds of risks when you are racing?"

Badcock shrugged. "Sure."

"Well, not here, you don't!"

"Okay...okay, fair enough."

Corwin released his grip now that he was satisfied the Corporal was holding his ground. They heard the rasp of an exhaust. It was nothing like the customised jeeps they had brought with them, but that of a motorcycle.

Fuck, Corwin thought.

"How?" Badcock asked, "How could they have known we were here?"

"They probably didn't. Likely a routine ride or some troop movements we didn't know about."

"What? How did our intelligence not pick this up?"

"Are you serious? You think everything can be tracked with that much certainty?"

"Seems a little too convenient."

"Shhh," snapped Corwin, "You know how much noise we made getting down here? Anyone around could have heard us."

"Then why did we land here?"

"Had to land somewhere...now stay silent."

Corwin lifted his pistol close to his chest ready. They watched and waited, and soon they noticed another light behind the first, and the subtle silhouette of a truck following the bike.

Just our luck!

"What do we do?"

"Shhh."

The bike came clearly into view. It had a sidecar with a machine gun mounted, and a similar weapon on the roof of the truck. It looked like there were twenty soldiers in the back of the open top truck, and behind that a small amphibious jeep like vehicle with four more soldiers. They came to a halt, and the two on the motorcycle got off the bike. Flashlights lit up from them scanning the ground around them, and Corwin and Badcock hunkered down lower.

He knew they were well concealed by the undergrowth, but any serious search would quickly find them.

"We're done for, aren't we?" Badcock whispered.

Corwin looked around for some solution, but there was a fair bit of open ground between him and the truck. He couldn't close the distance without taking a lot of fire, and his silenced pistol felt like a toy compared to the army of weaponry he was looking at.

Where are you, Lecia?

He knew she couldn't tip the balance alone. He watched as the two Germans flashed their lights around and finally stopped and focused on something. He heard a few words called out by them, and he squinted to make out what they were so interested in. His face turned to a scowl as he recognised the corner of their jeep and the drop frame it was mounted in.

Oh, shit, just what we needed!

He lifted his pistol and took aim at the gunner on the machine gun of the truck.

"Get ready," he said to Badcock.

"Ready? Ready for what?"

"When this starts, it's going to be hell. You open up on the back of that truck, and you keep up the fire."

"What are you gonna do?"

"Get in there as quick as I can."

Badcock looked shaky, but he had no choice but to rely on him.

"Ready?"

He nodded, and Corwin went back to his pistol and began to squeeze the trigger when one of the Germans barked out some orders. They were about to unload and start scouring the area. It was his last chance. He squeezed the trigger, and the gun fired with so little resonance that nobody noticed the bullet hit the gunner's throat. He slumped forward over the gun without any noise at all. Corwin sighed, seeing he had gotten away with it, but then one of the Germans in the back of the vehicle leaned forward to check on him. The game was up.

Corwin got up and was just about to leap out from cover and make his run, when he heard a V8 engine roar to life a little way down the road from where the Germans had come from; and then a second soon after. They revved highly, and he could just make out the silhouettes of two vehicles slip out from the cover of the trees and get on track to the road. A hail of cries rang out from the German officer and NCOs below, but they didn't have enough time to do anything at all.

Muzzle flashes and the thunderous drum of .50 calibre machine guns lit up the street. The two of them watched dozens of the rounds riddle the truck. The shots went right through multiple soldiers and into the cab as if meeting no resistance. One of them armed a grenade, but before he could fire it, his arm was blown clean off by one of the massive rounds. The arm still holding the grenade dropped into the back of the vehicle. The few still

alive and able to move leapt out in panic, as the guns continued to rip the vehicle apart. Corwin took his HDM into his left hand, drew out his Colt into his right, and leapt out into the open, and running out from cover.

He fired with both weapons at the two who had been on the motorcycle. As he did so, the amphibious vehicle lurched forward and raced towards him. A hail of light gunfire hit the occupants from their side. Badcock was emptying the magazine of his Sten into them. Corwin joined in and fired both his weapons into the windshield as it rushed towards him. At the last minute he jumped aside and rolled into a ditch at the side of the road.

Corwin was back on his feet in seconds and dropped his HDM. He slammed a new magazine into his Colt and fired into the back of the occupants as it veered off and crashed into a tree. It rolled onto its side and finally collapsed over so that any still alive were crushed under its weight. He heard a vehicle slide to a halt, and he snapped around. Two of their jeeps rocked up beside him. Harland was on the gun of one and Nylund the other.

"Nice timing!" he yelled to them.

"I see your girlfriend didn't save you this time?" Harland asked.

Out of the corner of his eye, Corwin saw a German get up in the cab of the truck and lift a pistol to aim at him, but a gunshot rang out to his other side. Blood splattered over the windshield as a shot went through the man's head. Lecia stepped out from the undergrowth not far from where Badcock was hiding.

"Better late than never," muttered Corwin.

He walked amongst the bodies until finally he found one still breathing. The man had a bullet wound in his flank and leg but was still conscious. He hauled him upright against the deflated wheel at the back of the truck. He looked terrified and unable to move. So terrified in fact that he seemed to ignore his wounds. Beyett stepped up alongside him.

"How is your German coming along?" Corwin asked him.

"Better than Vi's, but nothing compared to what Tano can do."

Corwin shrugged, thinking what an asset their meddling comrade could be.

"Ask him what they were doing here?"

Another of the jeeps raced into the scene, and Rane leapt out and approached. His physical presence horrified the German more than

anything had so far. Before Beyett could even try his language skills, the man spoke out in English with a thick German accent.

"Who are you people?"

Corwin smiled in relief; now knowing he could handle it personally.

"We're the bastards who have come here to end you and those you follow."

The soldier looked none the wiser and still stunned by everything he had seen.

"So tell me, what were you doing out here in the middle of the night?"

The man shrugged. Corwin put his boot on the man's wounded leg and applied pressure until he screamed out in pain.

"Please no!" he called out.

Corwin released the pressure and waited for a response.

"There were reports of suspicious activity in a village ten kilometres north of here."

"What sort of suspicious activity?"

"I don't know, rebels, trouble makers."

"So you were not expecting to find anything on this road?"

He shook his head.

"Good."

Corwin lifted his pistol and fired a single shot into the man's head, killing him instantly.

"Why did you do that?" Travers asked, jumping out from one of the other jeeps.

Corwin frowned as if he was either unsure of the question or displeased with the fact it was being asked.

"I get that we have to kill or be killed, but what danger was that man? We don't kill the wounded."

"Then you'd better start, Sergeant. All this man could do was cause us trouble. Right now we have the element of surprise. Think that will last if we leave a trail of breadcrumbs."

"Breadcrumbs? That's a human being we are talking about. We take prisoners."

Harland laughed wickedly in the background.

"You think it's funny?" Corwin jumped in before he had a chance to go on.

"Maybe that is the way you are used to working, but it won't cut it here. We do not take prisoners. We do not try to save the lives of the enemy. We do not shoot to wound. I am sorry if that is hard for you to stomach, but you will stomach it, or you'll only create problems for us."

"No quarter? Is that how you would want to be treated if you were wounded or captured by the enemy?"

"It's not about what I want. It's about what is necessary. You know how many times I have had to have this conversation?"

"That's because what we are doing here is wrong."

"Yep, and the alternative is even more wrong. You want to win this war, then you better be prepared to get your hands a little dirty."

"This isn't what I signed up for."

"Neither did we," added Lecia.

Though it went over their heads that she was talking about something very different. It weighed on them all that this was never supposed to be their war, all except Harland and Porter, whose sadistic sides would have them enjoy killing, no matter where or when they had to do it.

"Sergeant, I have come too far to deal with this again. If you can't cope with it, then leave now and make your own way home. Otherwise you are coming with me and not questioning my decisions. What will it be?"

Travers looked around at the others as if trying to find someone sympathetic, but even Badcock shook his head and looked away.

"I'll follow you, but God help us when we have to answer for what we have done."

"You can worry about that when the time comes. Now give me a hand."

He rushed over to the vehicle the Germans had first discovered and started to release it from the cage it had been dropped in. The others joined in, and they soon had it free rolling. Badcock jumped into the driver's seat and fired up the engine. He edged it out of the frame, and the front wheels dropped and sunk into the soft ground. The vehicle kept pushing forward until finally the rear dropped into the same soft ground. It stopped dead and all four wheels were turning.

"Get it in low!" Travers yelled.

He looked over at the levers and could see it was already low.

"It's all this weight!" he shouted back.

One of the other jeeps rolled up. It was Shirley, the six-wheeler, with Chas at the wheel and Porter and the others on the back. With six of their people hanging off and Rane on the back, the suspension was bottoming out.

"Where's the other jeep?" Corwin demanded.

"The 'chutes failed, and it landed on its head. It's no good," replied Chas.

He looked to the others for confirmation.

"She's right. It ain't going anywhere," added Rane.

"What do we do about it?"

"Nothing we can do, Chas. We don't want to leave clues for the enemy, but neither can we destroy the site without raising attention. Is it hidden?"

"Certainly is, you'd really have to be digging hard to come up on it."

"Then that will do just fine. Turn that thing around, and give us a hand with this one," he replied, turning to leave.

"Where are you going?"

"To find us some extra wheels."

He left the group to get the vehicle out and went over to the amphibious vehicle. One of the dead soldier's arms was sticking out from the side where he had been crushed. He thought to turn the vehicle over when he noticed the front axle and steering had been totalled by the crash. He turned back to the truck that was running with a river of blood still dropping out over the sides. He went to the front grip to see two large holes. He unclipped the hood catches and lifted it.

Wisps of smoke poured out from two holes where .50 calibre rounds had gone the length of the vehicle and through the entire block, passing through the radiator.

"Totally fucking shot," he said to himself and slammed the hood down.

He turned around. Lecia was eyeing up the motorcycle and sidecar.

"You're not serious?" he asked her.

"If it runs, then it's a fuck load better than walking," she replied and leapt on the saddle.

"Do you even know how to start it?"

"I got some idea, yeah."

She looked around and checked the controls, putting her weight on the kick-start and driving it down. The engine turned over but did not start. He looked over to see their jeep being pulled free. Badcock drove it out onto

the road ahead. Meanwhile, Lecia kicked it over twice more and still nothing.

"Come on, leave it!"

She fiddled a little more and kicked over once again. The bike fired into life. She looked up to him with a defiant and cheeky smile that made him smile and shrug, as if to accept she was right.

"All right, spread the load and follow us!" Corwin ordered.

Rane and one of Travers' men jumped in with Badcock. Corwin slumped down rather unceremoniously into the seat beside Lecia as she spun the rear wheels and sped off ahead of the column. They heard the roar of the V8s at their backs, and finally they were off and on their way.

"Days of prepping some vehicle for war and I get to share a crotch rocket," complained Corwin.

"This thing ain't so bad."

She looked very pleased with herself and proud of her new ride. Corwin observed the machine gun before him. A box magazine was loaded and all but ready to use.

It's something at least, I suppose.

"So where we going, Boss?" she asked.

"That German said they were heading this way to deal with some trouble. Guess where our contact is?"

"So we're heading right where the Germans are looking for trouble, and so will be on the lookout for anything out of the ordinary?"

"That about sums it up, yes. Still like this bike, now you know the full facts?"

"She'll do just fine."

"We've got a fair ride ahead of us, and I want plenty of time before sunrise to see what we are dealing with!"

She put the power down, and they surged forward under little more than the tiny blackout light. They felt the sidecar wheel hit a pothole. The wheel bounced up off the ground. Corwin lifted up off the seat and crashed back down unceremoniously. He knew they were in for a rough ride, but he wasn't going to be the one to slow them down.

CHAPTER 8

Corwin wiped the dripping water from his face, but it barely seemed worth it now. It had been raining nonstop for an hour, and they were soaked to the bone. The baking dusty desert like conditions they had come from didn't seem so bad now as Corwin began to shiver. He looked back and could see that despite the lack of roofs, the windshields were keeping the worst of the weather off the rest of them.

"This is shit! Still think this bike was a good idea?"

"We're going forwards, aren't we?"

He shrugged but then noticed a sign with the village name they had been looking for – Allenc.

"This is it."

"You sure?"

Before he could even think to answer, a hail of gunfire rang out, and bullets hit the ground all around their bike. Lecia responded quickly and wrestled the handlebars to the side. They banked so sharply the sidecar wheel lifted off the ground, and Corwin was hardly able to hold on to save him from being thrown out onto the road. The turn caused them to smash through a pile of undergrowth, and the front wheel of the bike dipped into a rut. The bike jolted to an abrupt halt and stalled.

"Smooth," replied Corwin.

He jumped out and took cover behind one of the trees. Their convoy had halted and held position, but nobody was firing any shots on either side.

"What is this?" Lecia asked.

Corwin just noticed the faintest of movements. Frasi moved to flank their position with such incredible agility, and then he vanished into the night.

"I should imagine turning up to the resistance on a jerry bike doesn't exactly get a warm welcome party."

"Hey, we had to take the bike, so quit your bitching."

Corwin got up and took a few cautious steps forward, stopping to survey the scene once again. He could barely see a thing, and missed his

night vision equipment, and a whole host of other equipment that made them so effective in combat. He clenched his rifle close to his body and looked around to check nobody was close.

He then bellowed, "Nice day for a barbecue!"

He looked back at her with a bizarre smile, but she looked utterly confused as he stood upright in almost plain view and called out again.

"I said, nice day for a barbecue!"

"Have you gone completely mad?" Lecia asked in a hushed voice.

But he only smiled back.

"Only on the far side of the world!" a voice replied in a French accent.

Lecia still couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"You've gone crazy," she muttered.

But Corwin stepped out and advanced casually with his rifle lowered. After thirty paces he heard a rustling beside him, and a woman appeared with a German submachine gun in her hands. Another two armed men were just visible from where she had come.

She stopped and hesitated for a moment, looking at him with suspicion.

"You are?"

"Captain Wyatt Corwin."

"We have been expecting you, Captain, but I did not expect you to be...well...as you are."

"Well, we do things a little differently."

"I am sorry for firing shots your way, but they were not aimed to kill. We have already been visited by another group this night, and they were not friendly."

"Yeah, I heard. You pissed some people off, and we ran in to the next group heading your way to deal with whatever trouble was going on here."

"Then we must not stay. Our base is a short drive from here. Follow us."

She went into the bush and pulled back some foliage. It revealed a little French car that had been completely hidden in the woods.

"We'll wait for you on the road!" she said as she climbed in, and they heard another vehicle fire up nearby.

Corwin went back to the road. His people were in complete silence with their engines cut and weapons at the ready.

"It's okay. This is my contact!"

“Sure gave you a friendly welcome,” replied Harland.

Corwin saw Lecia trying to haul the bike out of the mud at the side of the road.

“You really want to take that heap of junk? It almost got us killed once.”

“And yet we are still here. Maybe she isn’t so unlucky. Come on, give me a hand.”

He grumbled under his breath but went over and wrenched it out of the mud. He waited and watched as if expecting her to fail to start the bike he had already begun to hate, but it soon fired up in defiance.

“I hear the Germans make things well.”

“Mores the pity,” he replied and climbed in.

The two French vehicles rolled out onto the road ahead, and Lecia pulled off to follow. This time they travelled at a slower pace that was safe and would not draw attention. Corwin was relieved, and it made him smile to see how much the slow speed frustrated Lecia.

“Not everything can happen at light speed in this life, you know. It didn’t even in our own time.”

“No, but neither should things stop altogether. Everyday we are not fighting and killing is a day our skills go to waste,” she snapped back.

“And sometimes preparation and organisation are required to pull off something so much larger than what we can achieve on any other day.”

“Mmm, we’ll see.”

They followed them for maybe an hour high up into the mountains, but still under the cover of a thick forest. They eventually drew to a halt at what seemed like nothing more than another random piece of forest. But as they looked closer, dozens of wooden shacks were built amongst the trees, and a few dozen people were going about their work. The woman who Corwin had first encountered got out and approached, but she stopped dead when Rane dismounted from one of the jeeps and loomed over her. She looked from him to the women of the group who looked like nothing they had ever seen.

“You don’t look like soldiers,” she said to Corwin.

“Neither do you.”

She nodded in agreement, looking down at her own dirty civilian clothing.

“Fair enough, I am Celine.”

"How long have you been up here doing this?" Vi asked sympathetically.

"Since I was dropped off course. I was unable to complete my mission and have been left to help out here ever since."

"You aren't a local?"

She shook her head.

"I was trained by your people to work in my home country for the Allies."

"Not ours," muttered Lecia.

But Corwin looked at her and shook his head. He knew they didn't need that complication, but the French woman was keen-eyed and sharp on her hearing, and so she called him up on it.

"What does she mean?"

"Just that... well... we are Americans, aren't we?"

It seemed to pass and allow them to move on.

"Do you know why we have come here?"

"I know you are looking for a man, someone I can show you to."

"Okay...when?"

She sighed as she looked around at the group.

"You see all these people behind me? Two months ago there were twice as many. We fight, we pass information, we sabotage what we can, but it is starting to feel like nobody is coming to help us any more."

"It's a big war, a lot of people fighting and dying."

"Yes, here, too."

"Look, are you going to help us or not?"

One of Celine's people handed her a steaming hot drink, and she took a sip as she thought out her response and left them hanging.

"Come with me," she finally said.

He carried on with Beyett while the others went for the warmth of a nearby fire. They followed her into one of the shacks and took a seat under some dry shelter.

"You know we didn't come here to laze about and talk, right?"

"No, and I didn't come here to keep supporting a country who is not supporting me. This is my country, and it has been cruelly taken away from us. I will not help you out of any obligation or order, for I have no reason to do so. We are all but alone here now. We haven't been supplied or assisted in anyway by the Allies for months, our food, our weapons, and our

ammunition, all taken from the enemy. We are alone up here, and honestly we are in bad shape. The Germans have cracked down more and more in recent weeks. So if I am to help you, it is because you are willing to help us. Nothing in this life is free."

"And if you knew what our mission was, you might understand that it is to help you and everyone else who opposes the Germans."

"I know you think that, and I am sure you believe it, but that is nothing more than empty words to these people. They need help now, or they won't survive long enough to see the results of your mission."

Corwin rubbed his chin as he tried to think over the situation. He had some sympathy for their plight, but he knew their mission was vital, and that time was not a luxury they had. He took a deep breath and knew he had to give up something.

"Why we are here, this is not any other operation. We have been tasked with finding and killing Adolf Hitler."

Beyett coughed and scowled at Corwin.

"What? She has a right to know."

"Right or not, this is a top secret operation and..."

"I don't care!" Celine called out to bring them to a stop, and both turned to wait for her to go on, "Maybe you are going after Hitler, maybe not. I simply don't care. Food, shelter, ammunition, an extra day alive, these are the things that matter to us. Help us, and I will help you."

"What is it that you want?"

"As I already said, the Germans are getting closer all the time. There are still many other groups like us out there, and that has created enough chaos for us to slip through the net for now, but that luck will not last forever. An SS company has set up in a nearby town in support of the Milice and German army forces already stationed there. They are here to stay. To hunt us down until no resistance remain."

"Okay, but what do you expect us to do about that?"

"We can handle the regular forces, but an SS company, they will destroy us. They will torture us. If you do not know how bad things can get, then you can't have seen much of this war."

"I have seen plenty of what men can do in war. But still, what do you want us to do?"

"Kill them, all of them."

"An SS company? Two hundred of the German elite?" Beyett asked.

"They are led by Sturmbannführer Adolf Diekmann. An animal. He butchers not only those who resist but civilians, men, women, and children. You see, you have your Adolf, and we have ours. Help us, and we will help you."

"We cannot. We do not have the time and resources for all out battle," replied Beyett.

But Corwin ignored him and simply replied, "We'll do it."

"What? But our mission?"

"We expect everyone to help us get our mission done, what right do we have to ask for that when we will give nothing back?"

"Yes, but this could destroy our only hope."

"Not if we are quick about it."

He looked over to Celine who seemed to have some hope in her face, enough that a little colour had returned to it.

"How far is this town?"

"About a ninety-minute drive."

He rushed out of the hut with the others in tow until he reached the group huddled at the fire. They all turned and waited for what he had to say.

"We want help from these people, and they are asking for something in return. It requires taking on maybe two hundred of Hitler's finest. Who's with me?"

"Hell, yes," replied Porter quickly.

"Any chance we can get to make them pay?" added Harland.

Beyett was shaking his head, for he knew what it could cost them. Corwin placed a hand on his shoulder and whispered to him, "Don't worry, we can make this work."

He turned back to them and everyone waited for his orders.

"Time is what we do not have, but willpower and firepower we do. We also have the element of surprise. No one yet knows of our presence, but by sunrise they might, and a day will pass before we can do what we came here to do. So we don't wait. We don't plan. We hit them right now with everything we've got."

"What? That's crazy. You don't even know where this town is or what it looks like," replied Nylund.

"Nope, and they don't know who we are and what's about to hit them. If we leave now, we can reach the town before sunrise and hit them hard before they can get on their feet. I wasn't asking for volunteers."

He looked to Celine.

"All I need to know is that you will lead us there, and that when we are through, you will help us find our man."

She could barely believe what she was hearing, and it didn't look like her people seemed at all confident.

"I won't risk any of my people in this."

"And I didn't ask you to. All we need is you, our guide. Lead the way, and we'll ensure that company never comes looking for you."

No one moved for a moment, as nobody believed he actually meant it, but Lecia knew not to doubt him.

"You heard the Captain. Load up!" she balled.

"Fucking 'ey," replied Porter as he enthusiastically leapt aboard the six-wheeler. Celine took a seat behind Lecia on the bike. They sped off into the distance to the amazement of all those they left behind. Corwin just noticed Beyett's face as they took a turn to lead the convoy. He looked more than a little concerned. But Corwin only smiled back and put his thumbs up.

"You really mean to do this?" Celine asked.

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Because hitting a well-armed company without assessing the ground and any kind of plan is crazy," added Lecia.

"And maybe a little crazy is just what we need at the moment. These Nazi bastards have become used to living a life of luxury. The only hardship they see is a little bit of sabotage or guerrilla action here and there. Nobody would dare hit them directly."

"For good reason."

"But it's also the last thing they would ever expect, Celine. We are going to strike those fuckers down before they know what's hit them."

"I hope you're right."

"Trust me, I don't risk my life without reward."

"I thought you were a soldier?"

Corwin laughed.

"Something like that."

They tore on through the night until eventually they could see lights on in a town up ahead.

"Arrogant bastards, not even blacking out."

"They don't need to. There has not been an Allied plane in the sky for a long time," replied Celine.

"Why do you keep fighting? Seems like there isn't much left to fight for."

He watched her pull back the scarf around her neck. It revealed a Star of David.

"Because for some of us we cannot surrender, we cannot give up. The choice is to fight, or to die. Maybe you don't know what this war is all about, after all?"

Corwin smiled, for he knew more than he could hope to explain.

"Bring us to a stop," he said to Lecia.

She did as he asked, and he stepped out to address the teams as the convoy drew to a halt, and the crews jumped out to approach him.

"Ready your weapons. We are going in hot. Full throttle, we do not stop until they're all dead. Shock and awe, you got me? Don't spare any ammo, and don't hold back. You ready?"

Many of them nodded in agreement, but nobody said a word as they psyched themselves up for combat, and Corwin went on.

"I am sorry there isn't much more of a plan, but we don't have any time for it. Lecia, you go for high ground as soon as you can, and cover us from there. Everyone mind your fire. Stay in the vehicles while you can, and watch out for civilians."

"No," Celine added, "There are no civilians here. The Germans chose this town because they are loyal. They turned on their own long ago. Do not spare them."

There was bitter hatred in her voice, and nobody was going to argue. At least it made their work a little easier.

"All right, one last thing, what means of communication does this place have?"

"We will pass the telephone lines on the way into town. After that the only radios with range far enough to reach the next town will be in the town hall, where the Germans have setup their headquarters."

"You know an awful lot about this place," said Beyett. He sounded suspicious of her, but she quickly answered.

"Yes, because I am from there. Until last year it was my home. It was also home to many of those that you saw living up there in the wild. I have kept a watchful eye on this place in hope of one day taking it back. I thought we were coming close to being able to launch an attack ourselves, but with the arrival of Diekmann, there is no hope."

“Frasí, you take out the lines as we enter the town. Chas and Badcock, you are with me hitting the town. Porter, you brought that six-pounder along for a reason. Now’s the time, you got HE rounds?”

“Bet your ass.”

“Then you know what to do. There will be no hesitation, no mercy, and no stopping. We will level this place if we have to. Celine, you stay put and wait this one out. I’ll come back for you when it’s done.”

She shook her head as she lifted a captured German submachine gun off her shoulder.

“No, I want to see this through, and see them pay with my own eyes.”

Corwin wasn’t going to argue. He looked back to the horizon at the first glimmer of light. It would be daylight in fifteen minutes.

“Let’s go, go, go!”

They leapt into the vehicles and raced onwards. The rain began to intensify and lightning flashed in the sky as they came into view of the single guard tower overlooking the main road in.

“What a stroke of luck,” said Corwin.

Thunder soon followed as they made out the profile of a guard in the tower. Corwin cocked the machine gun and rattled off a short burst as the thunder still echoed through the skies. A dozen shots tore through the tower, and the guard stumbled back out over the ladder and fell. If he hadn’t been killed by the gunfire, the fall certainly finished him off.

There were no gates or fences to keep them out. The modest tower and single guard was all that stood in their way. That was an indicator of how bad things were. A token guard was all that was needed. Nobody could threaten the town, until now. A German officer casually stepped out of a house ahead and into the road, with nothing in his hands but a steaming cup of coffee. Not at all bothered by the rain, letting it seep into his woollen greatcoat as he took in the fresh morning air. It was clear that he was living the easy life.

“Time to ruin your day,” said Corwin sadistically.

But before he could pull the trigger, a burst rang out from beside him. Hot bullet casings showered him, and one landed on his neck. He quickly threw it off and looked back. The officer was already dead, and Celine was whispering something in French. He didn’t understand it, but it was scathing in tone to the level he didn’t need to. She pointed to the town hall ahead, but she needed not have, for it was obvious to everyone.

“Take over!” Lecia yelled.

She took her rifle in hand and hurtled off the bike with cat like agility, rolling perfectly to keep the weapon from touching the ground. She rolled right up onto her feet and kept running. Celine looked in horror at the lack of rider as the bike began to veer. Corwin grabbed hold of the handlebars and straightened them.

“Move up!” he shouted at her.

She did as he said. As she took over, two armed Germans came out of a building ahead. He could not get back to the gun in time, but he heard the thunder of one of the Brownings on the vehicles behind them. The two men were cut down where they stood. Lightning cracked again, but before the thunder could follow it, a loud crack rang out. They felt turbulence overhead as a shell flew over them and smashed into the roof of the hall. The high explosive shell ignited on impact and blew an enormous hole in the roof. Much more around it collapsed in on itself. The Browning soon joined in and sent dozens of shots hurtling through the windows.

Corwin fired a burst himself but then stopped and looked at Celine. They weren’t slowing down. He wondered in horror for a moment if she actually knew how to ride, but she looked determined and confident.

“What are you doing?”

But she did not reply.

He looked back to see the front doors being opened and let rip with a burst of fire. It cut one soldier down and forced another to retreat back, but still she did not slow down, and they headed full speed toward the partially open doors.

“Oh, shit!” Corwin yelled.

Another shell from the six-pounder hit the building above them, and just seconds later they struck the doors. The speed of the bike smashed the doors open but snapped the bike sideways. They slid in through the doors and ramped up over the dead body, sliding further on before finally smashing to a halt when they hit a heavy wooden desk. The sidecar wheel lifted up off the ground and smashed back down. They were both a little stunned by the impact, but Corwin saw a line of communications desks and a man sitting there, frantically trying to reach someone.

Corwin lifted the stock of the machine gun in front of him and held the trigger down. Almost a hundred rounds struck the man and all the equipment before finally he was out, and smoke rose from the barrel. He

leapt out and drew his Colt as he ran forward to the doorway and past the destroyed equipment. He took a single step through the door but stopped and jumped back as a burst of gunfire struck where he had been.

He pulled out a grenade and primed it before tossing it in. He waited for the blast and then ran right in. One of the Germans lay dead, but another was rising up and lifting his rifle to take aim, but it was too slow and cumbersome to bring to bear. Corwin fired two shots into the man's chest at point blank range, rushing on past while he was still falling dead.

An office lay ahead, and Corwin ran inside. An officer sat calmly and open handed. His pistol was still holstered, and he sat upright and proud as if expecting to somehow command the situation.

"Adolf Diekmann?"

The German looked arrogant and defiant as he began to reply.

"Sturmbannführer Adolf Di..."

Before he could finish, Corwin raised his pistol and pulled the trigger. A single shot went right between Diekmann's eyes and out the back of his skull. Blood burst out over a portrait of Hitler behind him as he recoiled back and then slumped forward onto the desk. As his head thumped onto the wood, Celine arrived in the doorway. She looked at the body and then to Corwin in amazement as though surprised by what he had done.

She walked up to the desk and lifted Diekmann's head so she could see his face and know for sure that it was indeed him, then let go. It hit the table unceremoniously once again.

"Why did you kill him?"

"Why, does it bother you?"

"It doesn't, but I never expected you to be capable."

They heard the raging gunfire outside, and Corwin rushed back out to the bike. He lifted one of the ammo boxes from the car and loaded it into the machine gun. He ran out into the street but stopped in his tracks at what he saw. All of the jeeps were parked up in a crescent shape around the largest building in the town, across the thoroughfare from the hall. Every single one was firing into the building with everything they had. The six-pounder rang out and blew another hole in the lower floor. Part of the ground above it collapsed, and four Germans were thrown into the street dead. Corwin didn't even go for cover. There was no need, and he simply stood casually and watched the slaughter.

"What is that building?" he asked.

“The barracks.”

The Brownings were finally empty, and the six-pounder fired one last shell that blew another entrance through the side of the building. Porter looked happy with himself and went to load in another shell.

“Stop!” Corwin called out, “Let’s move in, sweep and clear. Leave none alive.”

He went forward, and most of them disembarked, except a few who remained to reload and man the Brownings. More than a dozen bodies lay in front of the structure where they had been shot as they rushed out to engage the vehicles, or were blown out by Porter’s artillery piece.

“You sure did a number on this place,” said Corwin, approaching the gaping hole where the main doors used to be. He stopped when he noticed some movement in the distance. It was Frasi slipping in through an open window, carrying nothing in his hands but a knife. He was going door-to-door and killing without a sound.

“Chas, Vi, Rane, with me, the rest of you spread out. I want every single building in this fucking town gone through!”

They split off as he stepped through into the building. It was littered with dead soldiers. One was still breathing but bleeding profusely through a neck wound. He lifted his pistol and fired a shot to kill the man instantly.

“A clean death is more than these dogs deserve,” said Celine.

But Corwin shook his head.

“You’d have it another way?”

“I would torture them to the very end so that they might know a little of the suffering they cause.”

“No, we are soldiers, not psychopaths. Or do you want to become like them?”

“When you have seen your friends and family raped and tortured, you might understand.”

It was hard not to be sympathetic, but Corwin knew it was best left. He carried on through a hole that had been blasted into the next room. Several body parts were scattered about the place where the HE shells had blown the occupants apart. Everywhere he looked there were dead bodies and holes through multiple walls where the Brownings had torn through with ease.

Corwin finally found the staircase that would lead them up to the next floor, but as he took the bend, a shot from up the stairs skimmed his arm.

He ducked back and looked down to see that it had drawn blood.

“Motherfuckers!”

He pulled the pin on another grenade and launched it up the stairs with tremendous force. A few seconds later the charge blew, and they felt the walls shake as part of walls inside collapsed. It was clear that large parts of the building were weakened.

“Fuck going through his place,” he said and drew out a charge of C4, placing it on one of the supporting walls.

“Get to it. Let’s bring this thing down. Two-minute fuses.”

Vi smiled as she drew out charges from a bag slung over her shoulder, and the others carried on through the ground floor of the structure.

“What are you doing?” Celine asked in horror.

“What needs to be done, I’m not willing to waste time going room to room with these bastards. We could be here for hours.”

“So you’re going to take the whole building down?”

He grabbed her by the arm and led her back out the way they had come. Two soldiers rushed in to block their way, but Corwin sprayed them with the machine gun he still had in hand. Firing from the hip single-handedly, he was able to keep it in check and killed them both with a single burst. He almost had to drag Celine along, but she could do little to resist. He took her back to the convoy to find the gunners still firing bursts into any targets they could see.

As they approached, a bullet struck Travers in the left arm where he was manning one of the guns, and he dropped down into the vehicle wincing in pain. Corwin spun around and fired a burst into the window where he’s seen a glimmer of movement. He rushed over to Travers.

“I’m all right,” he said defiantly.

Corwin lifted his hand away from the wound. It had a clean entry and exit.

“You’ll be just fine. Now take a look at this,” he said and pointed back to the barracks.

Vi and Chas were running back towards them.

“Where is Rane?” Corwin asked.

As he was speaking, a huge section of wall collapsed out into the street, and Rane came barrelling through where he had created a new exit.

“What the hell?” Travers asked, “No man could do that.”

“No, because we are more than that,” replied Corwin.

Rane headed towards them with more speed than anyone would expect from his size, but still not fast enough to reach them before the charges blew.

“Run!”

But time had run out. The first charge blew, and several others followed until the whole lot went up with a massive explosion. Corwin ducked down behind the cover of the jeep. He felt the vehicle rock as Rane was hurtled into the side by the force of the blast. A hail of debris and shrapnel showered down upon them until it began to settle, and Corwin got up to survey the scene. Dust still clouded everything, but as it began to clear, nothing remaining of the three-storey building other than a large mount of rubble.

“Holy shit,” Travers said from the seat of jeep, “You know I thought you were a covert operations team? This isn’t particularly subtle.”

“Well there are times for subtlety, and then there are times when we are needed,” Corwin said, sounding almost flippant.

He went around the vehicle to check on Rane. He found the hulking man slightly embedded in the side of the jeep where he had caused the body to buckle. He put out his hand and helped him up. He wasn’t hurt at all.

Travers looked at the damage, and the unscathed Rane, and shook his head.

“You aren’t like the rest of us, are you... human, that is?”

“We are that and a little more.”

Celine was looking around at the carnage as the odd few gunshots rang out in the distance from their team going house to house.

"Are you happy now? Will you do what you promised?" Corwin asked.

She looked a little stunned.

"We have cleared this place of the enemy. It's yours to take," he added.

She shook her head.

"No, there is no coming back here. Not until this war is over. The Germans will be back, and if they find us here, we will be all killed."

"Whatever, will you lead us to Dohman?"

She seemed to have trouble taking in what he was saying.

"All this death, I never..."

"Never what? Expected us to succeed?"

She knelt down beside the body of one of the town's people who was dead on the road beside her.

"What is that?"

Corwin kicked his foot against an armband on the dead man's clothing. He couldn't have been much more than eighteen years old.

"It is the Milice, an army formed in France who are pro-Nazi and who fight against the resistance."

"They fight their own people?"

"Is it that surprising?" asked Beyett, "We have seen enough of that in our own life times."

"I knew him. His older sister was a good friend of mine."

"Do you regret asking us to do this, Celine?"

She wept a little and then shook her head.

"No, I just wasn't ready for it."

"There will be a hell of a lot more killing before this war is through, on both sides. Want my advice? Get the hell out of here."

"What do you mean?"

"Leave France. If it can ever be set free, it will be years, and while the Germans remain and locals help them, you will not be safe."

"Would you leave your home country so easily, Captain?"

He shrugged.

"Yes."

But he knew it was easier for him. He had never truly called somewhere home like she had known. He looked up. Beyett was pointing to his watch in an attempt to push things forward.

"We have done our part of the bargain, now you must do yours. Will you lead us to Dohman?"

She got up and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"I will show you where he is, but nothing more. I am sorry I doubted you and your people, but you must know that we do not have your strength. We cannot get involved in whatever you are about to do. The repercussions would be more than we can bear."

"Then lead the way."

CHAPTER 9

"Still think this is a good idea?" Travers asked.

They were on a ridge overlooking a town not too dissimilar to the one they had almost raised to the ground that morning. The rain had cleared now and visibility was good. It was far better patrolled than the previous one. Corwin lifted his binoculars to evaluate the scene further.

"Good idea or not, it's got to be done."

He could see a few dozen Germans in the square at the centre of the town. But still only a few odd patrols protected the outlying areas. He stopped as he noticed something stand out in the distance.

"What the hell is that?"

He looked closer and could just see what looked like parts of vehicle tracks sticking out from a line of bushes.

"Armour?"

"Not this far south. We don't see anything tracked around here," Celine said.

"Yeah, well then explain to me what it is I am seeing."

She took the binoculars and studied it for herself.

"I don't know. Maybe some old French vehicle, but it looks abandoned either way."

"Abandoned or camouflaged," Beyett said.

"Forever the optimist," added Corwin.

He turned and looked back to Lecia, as he knew she had a better eye and had been studying it through her rifle scope.

"I don't see why it should affect our mission whatever it is."

"And if it is heavy armour?"

"Well, Travers, then I guess we'll have to deal with that if the time comes."

"Deal with it? I remember dealing with them in 1940, and they've come on some way since then."

"Fair enough, then let's do this quick and quiet."

“Quick and quiet? When have we ever managed that?” Beyett asked seriously.

Porter began to laugh, and Corwin realised how absurd a concept that was as he looked around at the team he commanded.

“What do you think, Lecia?”

Corwin trusted her opinion more than any of them.

“Worth trying to do this without a fight. I say we send in two on the bike, and see if they can get in without a fight. Meanwhile, Frasi and me will work our way into the town, locate the bastard, and haul him out. Job done!”

Corwin sighed.

“Close to a solid plan, but you aren’t going in there without me. Celine, which house is Dohman in?”

She pointed without hesitation, and Corwin lifted the binoculars for a better view. It was a luxury two-storey cottage with very little grounds. An open top Mercedes staff car was parked out front.

“Figures,” said Corwin, “Okay, the bike goes in first, and if it makes it past the first gate, Frasi, Lecia, and I will go in on foot. The rest of you will stay on the outskirts and be ready to create the mother of all diversions if the shit hits the fan. Volunteers for the bike?”

No one said a word.

“Beyett, you are going. You have a better chance of being convincing as a German than any of us here. Who’s going with him?”

“I will,” replied Harland.

“Not a fucking chance,” snapped Corwin, “You’d have us wading through bodies within minutes. No, for this we need someone with at least a little subtlety.”

“Something to create a little distraction, do you think?” Chas said, and she stood up, popped a few buttons open on her shirt, and struck a provocative pose.

Corwin smiled, “Something like that, maybe.”

But his appreciation did not go unnoticed by Lecia.

“Sure this is a good idea?”

“What, you don’t think she is a convincing enough whore?”

Lecia had nothing else to say.

“Nylund, you will go with Beyett. You look like you have enough of a stick up your ass to be one of those Nazi bastards.”

That got a few laughs, but not from Nylund. He could never take a joke that involved him.

“Just remember, the aim is to get past the guards and free of them. We don’t want any hangers on, okay?”

“I got it, Boss,” replied Chas in a sexy voice as if she was already in character.

“Okay, if this thing goes to shit, then we rendezvous back at Celine’s camp, you got that?”

They all nodded in agreement.

“But the rest of us, what do we do?”

“Just make sure you’re ready to cover our asses if things go to shit.”

“That’s it?”

“Yep, that’s exactly it.”

“And you think it will?”

“I don’t presume to know anything, Sergeant, not about a mission with so many variables. All I do know are the basic rules of surviving this kind of cluster fuck. Assume the worst, plan for a complete fuck up, and you might just be okay. Anyone got any more questions?”

There was no response.

‘Then you know what you have to do. If we hit trouble, and you think you can make a difference, you get in there sharpish and give us a hand. But if things are going bad, and you’ll know when they are, you get the hell out. Back to the rendezvous and reassess, you hear?’

“Get real,” replied Harland, “You fail at getting this asshole and it’s all over. So we don’t stop until the mission is complete.”

Corwin reluctantly agreed.

“All right, then let’s make sure we don’t fuck it up. You all know what you have to do, so get to it.”

He followed Nylund and Beyett to the bike and waited while they pulled on the uniforms they had captured.

“Stay calm,” he said, “Remember they don’t expect any trouble. There is no risk of resistance in these parts. If you turn up in the right kit and look like you should be there, you should have no problems at all. And, Beyett, remember who you are playing, a German officer, and one who doesn’t take any crap. So you don’t take it off anyone, anyone at all. You understand that?”

Beyett buttoned up his uniform and put on his cap. Corwin was genuinely impressed. They both looked the part.

"All right, throw me a radio. Nobody moves until you hear my order."

Travers passed him the hulking piece of equipment that was backpack size, and he threw it over his shoulder.

"Chas, you're going with them, too. You never know, that distraction might come in handy after all."

Lecia looked unimpressed as if she expected to be able to do just the same, and he could see it in her eyes.

"I need you and your rifle where you can do what you do best," he said to reassure her, but he was also speaking the truth, "You see that church tower, that is where you and I are going. Frasi, just... oh, hell, do what you want."

He knew there was no point being any more precise. Frasi did pretty much what he wanted, but he at least did it well.

"Nylund, you go on my say so. Rest of you do nothing unless things get really bad. We aren't here for a fight, but if the need arises, you come in like hell fire, you got that?"

"We'll be there," replied Harland.

He took one last deep breath and then went onwards into the valley below on foot. The deep foliage covered their advance all the way to the outskirts. That was just as well, as the sun was shining brightly now, and the visibility was clear for many clicks around. Corwin looked around cautiously as they went forward as if expecting to meet trouble in any moment, and yet Lecia strolled along as if she was taking a casual walk in a park.

"You think anyone is watching?" she asked him.

"Maybe."

"Don't you think we might have known about it by now if there was?"

He shook his head.

"There is no one," stated Frasi with the utmost certainty.

"There you go," replied Lecia.

There was a wall ahead between two buildings. It was as tall as a man and made of stone. Frasi went right up and leapt onto it with the precision of a cat. He perched there for just a second before leaping inside. Corwin and Lecia jumped on after him. They hauled themselves up to look over at where they would be landing just for a moment and found Frasi slowly

lowering the body of a German soldier with his throat slit. They jumped in after him and landed softly.

The German still had his rifle on his shoulder and cigarette lighter in hand. Frasi hauled the body over and through an open door.

"They'll come looking for him soon enough," whispered Corwin.

"Then let's get this done," said Lecia as she went forward towards the church holding just her rifle. Corwin couldn't believe her recklessness. He drew out his HDM and rushed on after her.

They reached the church to find the wooden door ajar. Lecia pushed it and stepped on through where a priest stood before them. He said something in French that meant nothing to Corwin, but the man did look a little startled.

"We aren't Germans," said Corwin quickly before Lecia could get any words out in French.

"No, I wouldn't believe that you are," the priest responded in such perfect English with only the faintest of French accents, "but what on earth are you doing here?"

He was well spoken and clearly highly educated in the way he spoke.

"We have come for a man."

"Just one?"

"That's right."

"I suspected it might be too much to ask that you have come to rid us of these vile wretches."

"Give us time. Right now you can give us a hand and make that time a little sooner."

"What can I do?"

"We are after Konrad Dohman, do you know him?"

"Yes, sadly, I do."

The priest shut the door and showed them a map of the town on the wall behind them.

"He is there," pointed the priest. Just where Celine had said he would be.

"But I hope you brought more soldiers, if you think you can get to him and make it out of here alive."

"You leave that to us."

"What can I do?"

"Keep the door shut and your head down. And tell us how we get up there in the tower."

Corwin then noticed that Frasi had not even stepped in with them. He had vanished like he so frequently did, but Corwin did not worry for his safety. They rushed on up the stairs and spiralled around until they came out in the tower. A huge bell occupied most of the space, but there was room to walk all around it, and a stone balcony concealed their position well with just enough room to shoot from.

"Can't get better than this," said Lecia.

She sat down beside the balcony and raised her rifle up to survey the scene, far enough back that the barrel did not protrude out for anyone below to see. Corwin positioned himself beside her. There were a few military staff cars and small trucks parked in the main square, but no sign of any armour of any kind. A few soldiers sat around smoking casually, and they looked as if any trouble was the last thing they expected to see. He tracked along to the house where Dohman was. There were two guards posted outside.

"Doesn't look all that bad. Looks like the other troops are here quite by chance."

"You really think they would leave him this little protection?"

"Why not? It's safe territory as far as they know, and I wonder if few even know his relation to Hitler."

"That's an awful lot of assumptions."

Corwin picked up the radio handset.

"All looks pretty clear up here. Nylund, get moving."

He turned and watched through his binoculars as the bike sped off and disappeared behind a line of trees.

"Time for things to get a little interesting."

"I don't see why we don't just go through this town like we did the last. Not like there are so many troops to deal with."

"We went through the last town because we had to. We have one simple mission here, so let's not take on more work than we need to."

They could hear the sound of the motorbike now and both turned to watch as it pulled up to the guards on the main road in. Chas was on the seat behind Nylund. She had stripped down to just trousers and her open blouse. She waved at the troops eagerly. They didn't look particularly

bothered at all. They were more interested in Chas than the men and simply waved them through without a word.

“See what a women’s touch can do?” said Corwin.

“That woman’s touch goes anywhere near you, and she’s dead,” replied Lecia coldly.

Corwin looked up and smiled. He’d assumed she was joking, but she looked deadly serious. He let it go and looked back as the bike continued on through the streets.

“You fire that thing and the whole town will know.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t pull the trigger until it doesn’t matter anymore.”

Corwin wasn’t sure he believed her. She had acted more and more recklessly recently, and yet he found it hard to tell her. Instead he kept his attention on Beyett and his team. They rolled up to the house where Dohman was staying and rocked to a halt. They climbed off and stumbled around as if acting merry and drunk all at once. It was clear the guards didn’t know how to take it, but were too scared to call up an officer on anything.

Beyett was stumbling about on his feet as if pretending to be drunk with Chas under his arm and only barely able to support his weight.

“Got to hand it to him, that’s a pretty fine act.”

Lecia grunted. She didn’t seem all that impressed.

The three of them vanished inside the lavish home. Corwin and Lecia could do nothing now but wait and hope.

“You really think we can pull all this off, don’t you?”

“Picking up one staff officer out of a quiet town? Or course I do.”

“No...Hitler. Capturing or killing him.”

Corwin sighed as he wiped his forehead of the sweat caused by the tension and stress of having to wait it out.

“You know I have always said I don’t do anything unless I believe I can succeed.”

“And do you still?”

“Yes,” he finally replied, “This war has changed so much it doesn’t look anything like the history books we knew. That is the effect Villiers has had. We are all that exists to counter him and turn things around.”

“But it isn’t him we are going after.”

“Maybe.”

“Then you are as lost as the rest of us.”

“What do you mean?” he asked her. He was intrigued by her comment.

“None of us really know what it is we fight for anymore. A few, Harland and Porter, they do it because they will fight no matter who the enemy is. Some do it through loyalty to you, like Frasi and Chas. But really none of us know. We are all lost.”

Corwin glanced back at the house, but nothing had changed, so his mind began to wander as he tossed her words around his mind.

“What is it you even used to fight for? Back in our time?”

She had nothing to say to that.

“All this questioning of what we do and why, but that was never asked before. I know why I fought, and I know why I still fight now. Maybe it’s time the rest of you got your heads in the game.”

But before he could press the matter further, there was movement at the house. The two of them watched and waited silently. Chas was first out with Dohman staggering beside her. She seemed to be acting out to make a scene to the soldiers, but Dohman didn’t seem to be playing along to the same tune. Nylund was out next and went to their aid, supporting the German to stop him from falling from Chas’ side.

“Oh, this doesn’t look good, not good at all!” said Corwin.

Lecia was already taking aim, and he knew she would almost certainly have to pull the trigger.

“Don’t fuck this up, Nylund,” he said.

“I think this operation has got bigger problems than him,” replied Lecia.

They watched Chas trying to shepherd the German officer towards a staff car parked nearby, but he already seemed a little resistant and appeared to be waking from whatever state he was in. They staggered on a few more paces when finally one of the Germans lifted their rifle to halt them.

“Here we go,” Corwin whispered.

Lecia didn’t even need to ask for permission to take the shot. They both knew where the situation was going. She squeezed the trigger, and the shot hit the man in the back of the head. It killed him instantly. She had the next round in the chamber before the other man even realised what was going on. The rifle rang out once more, and the second man dropped to the ground.

Corwin lifted the handset of the radio and yelled down it, “Get in here now!”

He watched Chas bundle Dohman into the back of the lavish Mercedes staff car that had been parked outside of his home.

"It'll be a miracle if we can get him out alive."

"Let me worry about that, Lecia. You just keep shooting them down."

The car fired up, and they heard the rear wheels squeal as it sped off from the house. Nylund was at the wheel. He tracked along the road that they were taking just in time to see a door fling open and dozens of soldiers pour out onto the road.

"Ah, hell, no! That's not what we need."

He leapt over the balcony and jumped without hesitation. He landed on the roof of the church, rolled, and then jumped again. He hit the ground running and drew his Colt as he did so.

I really need to find a bigger gun!

He dashed through a side alley, hoping to come out at the backs of those heading to block Nylund's way. He came out onto the main road at a sprinting pace and firing on the move. Three soldiers died from his first magazine with shots to their backs. Without even slowing down, he dropped the magazine and threw in another. He got one shot off into the face of the fourth soldier as he reached him and held him up as a human shield to continue firing. He got off another two shots to kill a fifth, when another opened up on full auto with a machine pistol.

Corwin felt the body of the soldier in his arms jolt back and forth. It was riddled with bullets until one skimmed the knuckles of his gun hand, and he lost the grip of the Colt. He launched the body with all his force so that it slammed into the one who had shot him. He was crushed to the floor by the weight of the impact, and the other soldiers were too stunned by the raw power that he had displayed to fire back.

He rushed forward and snapped one of their necks, catching his submachine gun as he fell. He immediately brought it to bear and opened up on full auto. Two leapt back into the cover of the building. The rest were cut down where they stood. Corwin could hear the Mercedes roar into view now, and it slid to a halt next to him.

"Get in!" Nylund shouted.

But before Corwin could take another step there was an explosion. The shock of the blast smashed him into the side of the car, and he collapsed down against the wing. He looked back along the road and out of the town.

It was an eight-wheel armoured car was before them, and it had a small turret with cannon.

"Back!" Corwin yelled.

Nylund didn't hesitate. He slammed it into reverse, and the tyres screeched as they raced back. Corwin got to his feet and rushed for the cover of the alleyway he had come from. A burst of machine gun fire tracked him all the way. It almost reached him before he darted into cover. He stopped for just a moment to catch a breath. He was empty handed. He had dropped the German's weapon as he fell from the blast, and he didn't have a spare second to recover that or his pistol. The only firearm he had was the HDM. He shook his head, knowing it wasn't even worth drawing. It was the wrong weapon for this fight. He heard the armoured car race down the road after Nylund. He shrugged off the fatigue and looked up. Lecia was on her feet in the balcony for all to see and firing as fast as she could chamber the rounds. She lowered the rifle to put in a new clip of rounds when she hesitated. He could see the fear in her face.

What now?

She leaned over the edge to him.

"We've got a problem. A big fucking problem!" she screamed.

Corwin took a running jump and leapt up onto the roof, scrambling up until he was at the apex just below her. He looked out to where she had been pointing. It was the dust cloud outside of the town that first caught his attention, and then he looked down to the source of it. His eyes widened in shock at what was heading their way. Three Tiger tanks.

"Fuck me," he said to himself.

As the words came out of his mouth, one of the tanks rocked to a halt. Its turret began to turn and the gun elevate to the clock tower.

"Lecia, get out!" he hollered. She jumped from the balcony as they heard the crack of the 88mm gun fire. The tower erupted with a massive blast, and both of them rolled off onto the ground below. Chunks of slate shattered over Corwin's back, and he felt a particularly large part smash him down into the ground. As the dust began to settle, he coughed out some dirt and struggled to stand up. Lecia was already reloading her cherished rifle that she had held on to at all costs.

"What the hell do you think you are going to do with that?"

She said nothing and chambered the first round ready.

"Heavy armour? What the fuck is that doing here?" Corwin asked.

But she didn't have any more answers than he did.

“Doesn't matter now, what are we going to do about it?”

The armoured cars cannon sound out again. Soon after wheels screeched, and they heard a car veer sharply and then crash into something substantial.

“Come on!” he yelled.

He rushed on to the source of the sound, although he was still empty handed. He looked around in some hope of finding a discarded weapon, but he had no such luck. He took a bend and found the Mercedes half embedded in the side of a house. Nylund was staggering out and bleeding profusely from a head wound. Beyett was unconscious in the back, and out in the middle of the road was Chas, facing off against the armoured car. She held Dohman in front of her with a knife to his throat.

“What are you doing?” he demanded.

She looked back at him in surprise. She had both hope and fear in her eyes, and also a crazy look as if she really was as insane as people had always joked.

“We can't lose him, you know that? Right now he's more valuable than any of us.”

Corwin looked beyond as the turret hatch opened on the armoured car. The gun was still trained on Chas. A German soldier rose up from the hatch and looked at them intently for a moment as he studied them. Presumably, he couldn't work out quite what or who they were, but then he spoke out in English.

“Lay down your arms and you will not be harmed!” he said confidently.

Corwin smiled, for he knew that was a million miles from reality.

“What are we doing here, Chas?” he asked quietly.

They could hear the roar of the Tiger engines and tracks. Their time was running out.

“Put down your weapons!” the German ordered firmly.

Chas looked back to Corwin for one last time. She had the sort of crazy look in her eye that would have her slit his throat and continue on without any worries at all. He shook his head to tell her no, but before they could do anything, a burst of heavy machine gun fire rang out. The rounds blew off the German's head, and the turret ripped open like a tin can.

Another burst went through the radiators and engine block, and a fire ignited at the rear of the vehicle. Corwin couldn't believe their luck.

Two of the jeeps raced into view, Badcock driving the lead.

"Better late than never!" Corwin shouted.

"We've got trouble of our own. We have a recon platoon hot on our tail, and a few trucks not far behind!"

"Got any good news?"

He shook his head. Corwin grabbed the radio handset in the vehicle.

"Split up! Find any way out you can. You know where to rendezvous, Corwin out."

Meanwhile, Lecia was fighting to get Beyett free. He was still trapped in the vehicle following the crash. He looked back to the other jeep parked beside them. Travers, Vi, and another of Travers' crew were inside. Corwin couldn't even remember his name.

"Give Lecia a hand, and then get the hell out of here!"

Another jeep raced into view with Harland at the wheel. Corwin grabbed Dohman and threw him in the back of the vehicle, ushering the wounded Nylund in after him.

"You get the hell out of here, and fast!"

Harland nodded.

"I am not fucking around here. If you don't get that asshole out of here in one piece, then it was all for nothing, so don't mess up!"

Harland gritted his teeth, wanting to get stuck into the action, but he nodded and floored it. The jeep sped off, crashed through a small brick wall, and tore off into the distance. Corwin was relieved. For all the bad things Harland was, he was a good fighter and a capable man to have around.

Several of his people were still trying to retrieve Beyett. Corwin pointed for the jeep carrying Rane and several of Travers' men. He knew they didn't have long now.

"We aren't leaving anyone behind, but we need to buy some time."

"How?" the Corporal at the wheel asked, "Those are Tigers out there...Tigers. We can't do much at all but draw their fire."

"If that's all we can do, then that's what we'll do."

He climbed aboard the jeep with Badcock at the wheel, and the two vehicles raced on through the narrower streets of the town where they knew the heavy tanks could not fit.

“Reckon there is any way we can take one of those beasts down?” Corwin asked.

Badcock shook his head.

“Bunkers on tracks those things.”

Corwin pointed to the anti-tank rifle fitted on the driver’s side.

“Not even with that?”

Badcock laughed.

“Against a Tiger? You’re dreaming.”

“Not anywhere, no vulnerable spots?”

“I guess if you got at its arse, where it is weakest. But nobody would be crazy enough to try that.”

“Congratulations, you have a new job.”

“We will die if we go up against those things, you do understand that?”

Corwin shook his head.

“They are big, heavy, and slow. Slow turret speed, long unwieldy gun, and poorly suited to these streets, you can out manoeuvre them, and once more they are arrogant assholes. They think they can roll us over.”

“Probably because they can.”

“Bullshit, they can’t be all that.”

Corwin got up onto the Browning and chambered a round. They took a bend that had them break out into one of the main streets in full view of the first Tiger. He opened fire and strafed the side of the tank with two-dozen shots. The .50 calibre rounds bounced right off, and the turret began to turn towards them. Badcock raced on to the cover of the next street. The gun rang out, and a whole wall of the building between them collapsed as they raced past.

“Fuck me, they really are beasts!”

“Let’s get the hell out of here. Captain. There is nothing more we can do!”

“No! Lecia needs time!”

“Any longer and we’ll all be lost!”

“Stop!”

Badcock slammed the brakes on, and they screeched to a halt. Corwin picked up all the C4 and jumped out.

“Go,” he said calmly.

“What?”

“You are probably right, so go, save yourself and anyone else you can.”

“Where are you going?”

“To try and buy you some time.”

“Bu...”

“Fuck you, don’t give me that crap. You get the hell out of here, and that is an order! Don’t fight me on this.”

Badcock could see he was serious and watched Corwin rush to the building beside them that had been destroyed. Badcock huffed and finally pulled off to get on his way.

“Crazy bastard,” he muttered.

Corwin reached the first storey of the building and was well hidden from view. He armed one charge on a short fuse, at the same time watching the Tiger roll on in front of him. He held out the charge and let it drop onto the rear of the body. It blew soon after as he ducked back for cover. He looked out in dismay at how little it had achieved and fully realised how much trouble they were in.

“All right, if we can’t destroy you, then we’ll damn sure disable you!”

He rushed to the stairs and went for the ground floor. The building was shaking from the roar of the engine and heavy tracks. He jumped out through the front window to find himself at the rear quarter and far from the machine guns of the beast. It had stopped as if to wait and watch for any more sign of him. He armed another charge and slipped it in between the overlapping wheels just under the right track. He quickly leapt back in through the window.

The charge blew, and he looked back with glee to see the track had blown and unravelled. Unfortunately, before he could enjoy his moment, the turret began to turn far quicker than he had expected. He could easily have gotten out of the way, but for some reason he was frozen. He had never come up against such a powerful weapon of war that could not be defeated by his own hands. The turret tracked until it was in line with him, and the gun began to lower.

“What are we even doing here?” he asked himself quietly.

For a moment he did doubt it all. For all their individual ability, they seemed small compared to the vast scale of the war and the Nazi war machine. He couldn’t move a muscle, but just as the gun lowered, he saw Rane descend onto the turret. He landed with such force that the heavy tank

seemed to rock slightly. Rane put his hands on the commander's turret and ripped it off its hinges as if it were made of tin. He threw it aside, and it smashed in through a window to disappear into a nearby house. He looked back at Corwin with a smile as he held out an armed grenade and dropped it in through the open hatch.

"Go, I'll handle this!"

Corwin did not hesitate now, for he knew how important it all was. He watched Rane jump off the vehicle and heard heavy impacts and cries of pain as he engaged troops nearby with little but his bare hands. But then he was gone from view. Corwin rushed on out of the back of the building. Six Germans were encircling the entrance, all with their weapons aimed at him. He was fast, but not fast enough to close the distance. A gunshot rang out that went through two of them, and then another less than a second later through two more. The two survivors turned to face their attacker, but at that moment a jeep tore into view and ran them down before sliding to a halt. It was Badcock.

"Why did you come back?" Corwin asked.

"I am not a coward. I wanted you to know that."

Corwin smiled as he took his seat, and they tore off into the distance. He watched Lecia climb down from the elevated position she had saved him from, and carry Beyett on towards Travers' jeep that was awaiting her. One last shot from the Tigers rang out and trees burst a few metres from Corwin. He felt a sharp pain; a thick piece of tree bark was embedded in his right arm.

"Motherfuckers," he snarled and ripped it out of his body. The blood began to flow. He looked back to where Lecia had been only to find the view obscured. He assumed she had gotten out, but she had not.

Lecia opened her eyes. She was on her back and in agony. Something had hit them hard. She turned her whole body to look around, but before she could see anything at all, a jackboot smashed into her face and knocked her out.

"Guess that didn't exactly go to plan?" Badcock asked.

Corwin spat out over the jeep as he took back some water and they bumped over the rough terrain.

"We'll be back, and they'll pay."

"I thought you were some kind of super soldiers? We got our arses handed to us down there."

Corwin could not disagree with that.

“What has it come to?”

Badcock looked back to him for answers to his own question.

“We have Dohman. That is what we came for.”

“All that to get one driver, that may or may not know, or be willing to help us find Hitler? Too many maybes.”

“Oh, he will talk, believe me. Everyone talks.”

They continued to soar into the distance at such speeds that no one could hope to follow, and were soon covering their tracks. Corwin knew they'd fucked up, but he couldn't admit it. He had underestimated the Germans, and he swore to not do so again.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 10

"We have to stop and patch that up."

"Just keep going," Corwin insisted.

But Badcock brought them to a standstill amongst some dense trees, now that he was happy they had covered enough distance. He pulled out his shell dressing and began to unpack it, as Corwin wiped blood from the wound. It was still seeping badly.

"You're lucky," said Badcock.

Corwin laughed.

"How?"

"Well, it could have been your head."

Badcock wrapped the wound quickly and with precision.

"You've done this before?"

"Motor racing can be as dangerous as battle," he laughed, as he finished up and jumped back into the driver's seat and got them back on track. They had made it less than half the distance to Celine's camp, and it was a long and arduous trek back. It was late into the afternoon when finally they pulled into the camp. One of the jeeps had a hole right through an armoured screen, and the Browning had been knocked off from the impact.

"Everyone okay?" he asked, noticing most of his team were huddled around a fire. He looked back; one jeep was missing.

"Where is Lecia?" he asked.

"Not back yet," said Chas.

He felt his heart sink at the prospect. Rane came to meet him and thrust a hot cup of tea into his hands. He took it and slumped back over Badcock's jeep, watched the trail. He waited there, and almost an hour had passed when he heard Frasi whistle to attract their attention. He couldn't even see their elusive friend, and yet he was out there somewhere, keeping watch. Corwin leapt off the vehicle in anticipation, but as the vehicle came into his hearing distance, he could tell something wasn't right. The engine

was knocking and spluttering, and something was dragging or catching on the vehicle, too.

It slowly rolled into view, and it was in a bad way. There were bullet holes all along the body. The offside wing had been torn off, and a log was now tied to the hub where the wheel had been attached. The spare wheel was missing, and there was only Travers at the wheel. There was no one else.

"Where are the rest of them?"

But Corwin was too impatient to wait for an answer, as the vehicle rolled to a halt and the engine cut out. Travers looked exhausted, and his uniform was soaking with blood.

"Where the fuck are they?"

Travers shook his head as Corwin rushed in to confront him. He looked shell shocked, and as Corwin approached, he noticed a body in the back. It was Dohman, tied up and still breathing.

"You said you wanted him. I got him," said Travers.

The Sergeant tried to get out from the vehicle but dropped slightly as his legs gave way. Corwin caught him and held him up. He was weak and still bleeding.

"Get us a hand over here!"

Chas and Celine rushed to his side with two others and a German stretcher in hand.

"Let me take him. We can help," said Celine.

Corwin stepped back and let them get to work.

"Where is Lecia? Beyett, Vi?"

Travers shook his head.

"Dead?"

He shook his head once again and coughed up blood. He was visibly in a real bad way, but Corwin had to know.

"Not last time I saw them, but they were taken."

Corwin felt both anger and despair building inside him.

"We need to get him inside now!" Celine said.

Corwin let up, but Travers stopped those carrying him to say one last thing.

"I am sorry."

"For what?"

"For not bringing everyone back."

"You did great, but get some rest. We aren't done with you yet."

They carted him off, and Corwin looked back to the others. Nylund seemed the most scared of them all.

"Had to be something or someone pretty tough to take them alive," he said.

Corwin could see the team was at the weakest they had ever been, not just in personnel, but morale.

"So what now?"

"We carry on the mission, Porter."

"And leave our own behind?" Nylund asked.

He hated himself for having to do it, but he nodded in agreement.

"We have come too far to fail now. Trust me, I want to head on out there and find them myself, but we have a job to do."

"I don't fucking believe it!"

Corwin couldn't see where Nylund was going with this, but let him continue.

"You are forgetting why we even came here. It wasn't to find Hitler. It was to get Villiers, and now we have half the team we arrived in this fucking time with, and still we aren't any closer. Do you even know what you are fighting for anymore?"

He had to think hard for a minute, as he was distraught and feeling the pressure. But that soon turned to anger when he caught sight of Dohman. He rushed over to the jeep and hauled him out, throwing him down into the mud.

"We paid a dear price for this asshole, and I for one want my money's worth."

Dohman was helpless and terrified, but none of them had any sympathy for him. Corwin booted him in the stomach and then retreated back, pacing back and forth as he tried to think a way through their mess. Harland approached and kicked Dohman in the head and opened up a wound close to his eye. He went to stamp down again, but Corwin stopped him.

"Enough!" he cried.

Nobody said a word, and so they waited for his next move.

"We didn't start this war or want it. We didn't even sign up for it. But we're in it now, whether we like it or not. We still need to find Villiers, but

we have to accept he isn't the only problem. Our ancestors fought this war because it was worth fighting for the freedom of the civilised world."

A number of them watching had no idea what he was talking about, but they didn't question it.

"We know Hitler is a monster, and we know he must be stopped. However powerful he used to be, Villiers has projected him to new heights. Right now we have a lead on how to find him, so let's stop wasting time worrying about what has been, and focus on what is in front of us."

"So we just leave our own?"

"Forty-eight hours, Nylund, that is the time frame we have to find Hitler before he vanishes from our reach. Find him or not, once that time is gone, we will turn our attention to finding our people."

"And if they can't last that long?"

"They can handle themselves. They'll have to," he added and then turned his attention to Dohman.

"You know where Hitler is, so tell us now!"

Dohman was wincing in pain, but he looked up into Corwin's eyes, and his fear seemed to melt away as he began to laugh.

"What is so goddamn funny?"

He kept laughing in an uncanny way, but then he spoke, "You? You band of rejects think you can take down the Fuehrer?" he asked and laughed again, only this time even louder.

Corwin drew out his DTM and went to fire a shot into his leg when he stopped and thought for a moment if he could be more valuable. Dohman saw this hesitation, and a sneer appeared on his face.

"No, you need me, don't you?"

Corwin was sick of his arrogant tone and squeezed the trigger. The shot went into the German's kneecap, and he screamed out in agony.

"What are you doing? We could have used him to get close to Hitler," asked Nylund.

Corwin shook his head. "He must know by now that his friend has been taken, and any return would be treated with suspicion. Maybe if we'd snatched him like we had planned, then that could have worked."

"I am sorry we failed," Chas said quietly.

He could see she really meant it.

"No, it was not your fault. We tried to do what we weren't made for. We tried to be spies and play it quiet. That's just not us. It's time we stopped

playing by other people's rules. Hunter, Tano, Beyett, Vi...Lecia, down to almost half strength, and we haven't achieved a fraction of what we should have. Let's stop fucking around and go straight for their jugular. It's time to do what we were born to do."

Dohman was still wincing with pain, and Corwin kicked him over onto his back.

"You are going to tell us where we can find Hitler, and how we can get to him."

"Why would I?"

Corwin rested his foot on the man's wounded knee and pressed down. He began to squirm.

"Because if you don't, then you are no good to us, and you see that woman?" he asked. He was pointing to Celine. She had stepped out from a shelter and was covered in Travers' blood.

"You and your friends raped and killed everyone she ever cared for. I will leave you here at her mercy."

From the look on Dohman's face he knew Celine from reputation, and he now looked more terrified than ever.

"Tell us what we want to know, and I'll ditch you a few miles from a town with your own kind. Don't, and you will experience the level of pain and suffering that you have caused on others."

Dohman seemed almost convinced, but still held his tongue as if he was on the fence. Corwin lifted his pistol and fired another shot into his other kneecap. He screamed out in pain once again, but he looked up to see Corwin was quite ready to shoot him once again. He began to cry through both pain and fear.

"Okay...okay. I will tell you. But if you go, you will all die."

"You leave that up to us."

Dohman shook his head in disbelief.

"Last chance," added Corwin.

"Give me a map," he snapped.

Nylund pulled one out and dropped it before him. Celine joined them.

"I know who this is, and you are going to let him go? He deserves nothing more than to feel a fraction of the pain and suffering him and his master have caused upon us."

"Your choice," added Corwin.

Dohman studied the map and then placed a bloody finger down on one point. Corwin leaned in. He was pointing to a tall mountainside to the south. There was nothing marked there at all.

"What is that?"

"You wanted to know where the Fuehrer is. That is it."

Porter stepped forward and snatched up the map, looking at it with suspicion.

"Bullshit, there's nothing there."

"Not on any map that you will ever see," he replied arrogantly.

"What is it?"

"A bunker facility, the likes of which you cannot imagine. You'll never get in there alive, except in shackles."

"And you are positive he is there?"

"For the next couple of days...yes, he will be."

Corwin lifted his pistol to Dohman's head and pulled the trigger. The shot went straight into his brain but did not exit. He dropped down limply to his back and was dead.

"Why did you do that?" Nylund asked in amazement, "You said he could live."

"No, I told him what he needed to hear. You think I care if he lives or dies?"

"The age of honourable warfare has gone."

None of them doubted Celine's words.

"But he could have at least been useful," stated Nylund.

Corwin shook his head.

"He had nothing more to give, and he was a liability we can do without."

"Really think he was telling the truth about this mountain fortress?" Porter asked, "Sounds like my kind of place."

"I don't see why he had any reason to lie to us."

"I have heard rumours of somewhere like this," said Celine.

"What do you know?"

"Nothing more than hearsay, but it sounds like just the same place."

Corwin thought about it for a minute. He wanted nothing more than to go back to the town where they had last seen Lecia, and follow whatever trail they could find, but he knew they had to go on. He took in a deep

breath and slowly looked around at all their faces. Most wanted the same thing, but not for the same reasons.

“We have a pretty good idea where Hitler is. Who knows, maybe Villiers is even with him? We’ve been strangled and held back since we got here. Fighting regular Joes everywhere we go. We were born and bred for greater things. It’s time to stop playing by other people’s games and sing our own tune. I mean to go after Hitler and tear his head off his neck, who is with me?”

All but Nylund roared with excitement at the prospect; who seemed to eventually clap merely to go along with the rest of them.

“About time we stopped fucking around,” said Porter when all the noise had died down.

“Damn right,” replied Corwin, “Time we stop pissing around in the dirt and start making some real difference in this war. Celine, how long will it take us to get there?”

“It’s a long trip, and slow if you want to avoid trouble. You won’t make it by morning, and we cannot risk travelling in those parts in the daytime. The planes in the sky would spot us long before we get anywhere near it.”

“Then we rest tonight and set off tomorrow. Take this night as the rest and peace we all need. Clean your weapons, and ready yourself for the battle we were made for.”

The group split apart as the sun went down. The only fires burning were those concealed within shelters as to not be seen from the air, but Corwin sat out on the bonnet of the jeep Badcock had driven him out on. It was cold, but he didn’t even notice. He couldn’t even bring his mind to the mission ahead. All he could think about was Lecia.

“You okay, Captain?”

He hadn’t noticed Badcock beside him. He was so preoccupied he had not even heard him approach.

“You want to go after the girl, don’t you?”

Corwin looked at him in surprise, as if he had seen right through him. He didn’t see any point in denying it, so he simply nodded in agreement.

“Yeah, I remember that feeling. It’s worth fighting for.”

“I’ve come a long way to get this far, and I am not willing to let her go.”

“How did you ever end up with women fighting alongside you? I mean, sure we have women serving, but not like her.”

“Lecia.”

“Yes, Lecia. That would never be allowed in the British Army.”

“No, but we aren’t in the British Army, nor the American, or any other that you know.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Okay...I want you, no, expect you, to go into combat with us and trust us. I am going to tell you a secret only a handful know, and even less believe.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Because secrets can destroy any of us. We need to trust in those around us, at least as much as any of us can.”

“But you don’t even know me?”

Corwin smiled.

“No, and yet here we are, having already put our lives in each other’s hands.”

“Okay, and what is this great secret? I don’t see it.”

“Look at us, don’t things seem off to you?”

“Well, yes, women on the front-line, advanced armour, and the way you speak, but I just figured you were foreign and so different.”

“All that racing, and you didn’t get out of your country?”

He shook his head. “I have seen some of the things you can do. Whatever you are, it’s beyond normal human ability. I get that. I just didn’t want to ask.”

Corwin chuckled.

“If I told you we had come from the future, and this war wasn’t ours at all, would you believe me?”

Badcock shrugged. “I suppose so.”

Corwin didn’t believe him.

“Why?” he asked as he laughed.

“Because why would you lie to me? I can’t prove you wrong or report you to anyone.”

“People have all kinds of reasons to lie.”

“Yes, but not like this. What you are telling me seems impossible, and yet I have dedicated my life to achieving the impossible. I once broke limits

on a bike that everyone said couldn't be done. Just a shame I couldn't prove it."

Corwin felt that to some degree he understood their trouble in this world. He had always come across as a man who didn't fit in, and in some ways he seemed more at home with Corwin's team than with his own people.

"Time travellers? Can you let me in on the secret?"

"You don't really believe it, do you?" Corwin asked.

"No, I believe it's possible, and it is the most reasonable explanation I have heard yet for what a bunch of crazy people you really are."

"You know when we got here we all agreed to not meddle, and to not let anyone in on the real story, and yet here we are. So, yeah, shoot."

"Who wins this war?"

Corwin took in a deep breath, working out what to say.

"My history isn't as good as Beyett's, but then he's not here to tell you."

"But who won, and how?"

"The Allies did. By this time, the Russians should have turned the Germans back, and a massive invasion force being prepared for an advance across into France. That story I do know. It is remembered as one of the greatest offensives in our history."

"Attack into France? How, we are barely holding onto what we have, despite what the papers would have us believe. It's why we are here, isn't it? Because things are that desperate."

Corwin nodded.

"It wasn't supposed to go down this way."

"What changed?"

"We aren't the only ones who came back in time."

"So whoever came back and helped the Nazis has almost won the war for them, can you not do the same for the Allies?"

"I am trying," he replied wearily.

"If you really can get to Hitler and kill him, do you think the war will end?" Badcock asked hopefully.

But Corwin shook his head.

"No, but it could shake things up enough to make a difference."

"I am sorry I froze up that time when we first met. I am not cut out for war. I shouldn't even be here."

"Neither should we."

He rested a hand on Badcock's shoulder.

"When the time came, you did just fine."

"I hope you find that Nazi asshole, and I hope you blow his head off."

* * *

Corwin snapped awake. It was still dark, and he'd had barely had two hours of sleep. He was wide-awake now and picturing the last time he saw Lecia with his own eyes. He couldn't sleep any longer, so he got up and stepped out of the shelter. He could hear some loud snoring. Rane was out for count on the ground outside another shelter.

"Makes you wish we could all sleep so easy, doesn't it?"

Nylund was standing a few metres off to his one side. He carried on and sat down on the hood of one of the jeeps, but Nylund followed on after him.

"I know you don't like what I am doing here, but I am in command, and that calls for tough decisions to be made. Believe me when I say I don't like it any more than you do."

"Look at us, weaker than ever. We are strong together."

"I agree, and we will get the team back together, you have my word, but not until this job is through. It's too important."

"And if they can't last that long? What if they get taken back to Germany far from where we can reach them?"

"I would reach them if it meant fighting to the far side of the world. Nowhere is beyond our reach."

"Back in our old lives that was true. But look at this. We scramble about in the dirt, barely able to travel a few clicks and having to move in fear all the time. This isn't us. We weren't made for footslogging."

"Something has to change, I get that. And we will make it happen."

"Good, because if it doesn't, you won't be in command for much longer."

He turned and left before Corwin could get a look at his face and understand quite how he meant it. It sounded like both a threat and statement of fact all at once. Corwin thought to call him out on it, but he knew it was true. He was losing control of the situation. The time couldn't

pass quick enough. They needed to have something to occupy their bodies, or their minds would continue to run wild with crazy thoughts.

He slid off the vehicle and yelled out, "Everyone up! Get up now!"

He slammed his fist down on the hood of the jeep several times as if he were beating a drum to call them to service. Porter and Harland rushed out with weapons in hand, as if expecting to have to defend themselves, but the rest slowly ambled out. Finally, they circled him. None of Celine's people had even bothered to get up.

"Enough is enough! We aren't waiting any longer. We're not playing their games or beating to the sound of their drum. It's time to do what we do best. Travers stumbled out, with Celine trying to help him and usher him back to bed, but he pushed her away.

"I'm ready," he stated.

He certainly wasn't to be argued with, and Corwin was glad to have as much support as they could get.

"Load up. We go in five!"

He looked around to see Badcock was already at the wheel. They hit the road even quicker than he had asked, for they had nothing to load except themselves. Rane pushed Travers' wrecked vehicle out of the road before leaping in on the six-wheeler. Celine appeared at Corwin's side as the engine fired up.

"Will we ever see you again?" she asked.

"Why? Because you want us to do more of your dirty work?"

"You have to understand. We are desperate. We risk everything every day. I am sorry about your people, but it was the enemy that did that, not us."

It was hard to be angry with her, for she looked so desperate.

"So, will we see you again?" she asked as she laid a hand over his.

It was an overly friendly gesture, and he knew Lecia would have had her hand off for even thinking about it, but still it felt good. At a time when he seemed to be losing everything, the warmth of her hand was enough to settle his thoughts.

"This isn't a one-way mission, and I have never not come back from a mission yet. You keep you and your people alive, and you'll see me again."

She reached into the jeep and kissed him on the cheek.

"Thank you, Corwin, for everything."

He didn't say another word and just pointed to Badcock to take them forward. The engine rumbled, and they lurched ahead. He didn't look back. He was already starting to feel a bond with her and sympathy for her people, and yet he didn't believe they would see one another again.

"Do you think they can really make it out here all alone?" Badcock asked.

"No," Corwin answered sternly.

"They made it this far, it's a bloody miracle. I'd have left the country by now if I were them."

"And go where? Sometimes what you have is worth fighting for, no matter the price, because it is yours."

He then noticed that Nylund was in the back.

"We're going to have to hit this place hard and fast," he stated.

Corwin saw he was trying to take Beyett's place, but it wasn't convincing.

"I wasn't planning to knock on the door and say hi," replied Corwin sarcastically.

"So once again we are going into an operation without intelligence, plans, nothing."

"Yep, that's about it."

"Has the whole world gone to shit? We just stagger from one disaster to another."

Corwin finally turned around and looked at him eye to eye.

"You got some better plan? Some amazing plan of how we can turn the tide?"

He shrugged.

"No, you haven't, so shut the fuck up!"

Nylund looked away in shame and remained silent. They carried on through the night at not much more than a walking pace, as they traversed dirt tracks, farms, and woods, anything to stay out of sight. Finally, as the sun began to rise, a fog filled the valley. Corwin couldn't believe their luck.

"Get us out on the roads. It's time we cover some distance."

They tore up a farm track and raced out onto a country lane. The engine roared when Badcock opened up at speeds no one would consider sensible, and yet nobody questioned it. They rode on through much of the day. In the middle of the afternoon they came over a hill to find the fog dispersing. Badcock brought them to a halt in order to see the view ahead.

"What the hell is that?" Nylund asked.

The fog was separating around an object on a mountaintop in the distance. As it began to clear, they heard the sound of a rotary engine in the sky above them. They looked up at a rough outline of a helicopter flying overhead. It was coming from the same direction that they had.

The view cleared ahead. A lavish castle like structure was built into the mountainside close to the summit. The helicopter soared ahead and then lifted its nose and went in for an almost vertical landing.

"What on earth is that?" Badcock asked in amazement.

"The future," replied Corwin.

"Haven't you seen a chopper before?" Nylund asked him.

"No, why haven't we got one? Is that what you used in the future?"

Corwin laughed.

"Something like that," he replied and looked down at his map. It still had Celine's bloody fingerprint on the target. Right where the fortress was."

"Yep, she was right."

"That is where we are going? You can't be serious," Badcock said.

It was still snow-capped, and much of it looked like vertical rock and sheer drops.

"We can't get up there."

"Not on wheels, no."

"Well, what else are we going to do?"

Corwin looked down at the map. He could see it wasn't quite as steep the other side, but not by much.

"Can you get us around here?" he asked, pointing to the other side of the mountain.

"Well, yeah, I should think so, but it won't help. We can't get these vehicles up on that thing."

"You just get us around, and let us worry about that."

"I sure hope you know what you are doing," Nylund said.

It was several hours more driving to circle wide around the mountains, and light fog continued through the day that sheltered them well. They arrived at a canyon that had thirty-metre walls either side, and soon came to a halt as they reached a dead end.

"I told you, this won't help," said Badcock.

But Corwin ignored him as the other vehicles pulled up around them. He climbed onto the bonnet so he could be seen and heard by all as they

shut their engines off.

"Hitler, the big bad guy, he's up there!" he said, pointing up the cliff face, "We have no way to fly, and no vehicle that will take us up there. All we have is us, our bodies. I am going up there because I want that bastard to know he is not unreachable, not at any height. Who's with me?"

Chas jumped out of a jeep and rushed to his side. Porter looked up at the face and sighed like an old man.

"Come on, you are going to miss a fight because you are too lazy to put a little effort in. Are you the badass you always said you were or an old woman?" Corwin asked.

It was enough to bait him in.

"Whatever, I'll go," he grunted.

"Where the enemy is, I go," added Harland.

Rane jumped out and looked up at the peak with a smile as if he welcomed the challenge.

"When do we start?"

"Hey, I am not going up there. Are you crazy?"

"No, and I don't expect you to, Badcock. You, Travers, and his people will stay with the vehicles. You are how we are going to get out of here."

Travers looked just as relieved as Badcock was. Corwin looked back at his map and pointed to an opening in a nearby forest.

"You head here after we have gone, and stay there."

"For how long?" Badcock asked.

"You give us until morning."

The light was already fading, and Badcock looked doubtful it could be done, and yet he nodded in agreement as Corwin went on.

"If we aren't back, you go, and if you encounter any kind of trouble, you get the hell out. We can handle ourselves. You all know how to get out of this country. Remember, if you get captured, you may well be shot on sight, so don't get captured."

Travers got out and staggered over to him. He drew out the pistol on his belt and handed it to Corwin with two magazines.

"You'll need this more than I do."

Corwin took it and said his thanks. It was the same issue Colt he had lost. He dropped it into his holster and turned back to the others before taking one last look at the task before them.

"Going to be a long climb so drop anything you can."

He pulled off his body armour and webbing carrying the pouches of Bren ammunition for the gun that was long gone, and took off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. They had all stripped down to nothing but sidearms, all but Rane. He had slung his Vickers' machine gun onto his back and still carried his Bergen full of ammo.

"You're not serious."

"Where I go, she goes."

It was clear he was attached to the gun, and Corwin wasn't going to argue.

"All right, whatever else we need we will find as we go. Any C4 you have, pack it, and let's move!"

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 11

Corwin let out a breath into the cold air. He could feel the sweat freezing on his forehead, and his muscles begin to cramp. He pushed up to the next point and barely made what he expected to, and held on with one hand. He looked down to the vast drop below. They were almost there now, but climbing without any equipment and in increasing colder temperatures. Nobody said a word as they focused on not falling to their deaths. Frasi was the only one ahead of them. He climbed as if it was as natural as walking.

The sound of rocks coming loose caused Corwin to look down and see Nylund lose his grip and fall. He reached for him, but he was not quick enough. He fell a few metres until Rane caught him firmly. He swung out like a pendulum that pulled Rane out from the side of the mountain. He strained with everything he had to hold on. Somehow he managed it, and as Nylund swung back, he launched him upwards with a mighty throw. Nylund flew above Corwin and over the ledge, crashing down on the top. Corwin rushed up the last metre to find Nylund lying flat in shock.

“You’re a lucky son of a bitch,” he said.

But Nylund was still too terrified to answer. He looked truly humbled as the last of them got up over the crest. Frasi was sitting on the edge on the far side. Corwin strode over and hesitated for a moment when he noticed what a sheer drop it was. A little to the left was the balconies of the fortress and the helicopter.

“Doesn’t look like much,” said Rane.

“If Celine was right, then it is not what’s on the outside that matters.”

“But why build it here?” Nylund asked.

“Impassable terrain that is unreachable by anything but a few specialist aircraft. Untouchable by air because it is built into solid rock?”

“Maybe they just liked the view,” Chas added.

The first morning light was already rising in the sky, and the fog had mostly cleared.

She’s right. It is beautiful.

But the rise of the sun and a new day caused Corwin to look down at his watch.

“We don’t have long. He isn’t going to be here much longer, according to what we know.”

“And our sources are always so fucking accurate.”

Corwin ignored Harland and walked on along the peak until they were in line with the top of the landing pad.

“Ropes would sure be nice right now,” said Nylund.

It was a thirty-metre drop, a little more than even their superhuman bodies could endure, but Corwin jumped off the side and bounced from rock face to rock face. He slid down loose shale until finally he rolled onto the landing pad and looked back at them to do the same.

“Smooth,” replied Chas. She and Frasi did the same but with rather more finesse and agility.

Corwin looked around for some sign of life, but there was nothing, not even a pilot for the bizarre looking transport craft.

“This must be the big boss’ ride.”

“I guess so, Nylund,” replied Corwin.

There seemed to be only one way into the building through a huge blast door. It appeared to have no visible locks, entry points, or anything at all for that matter. But as they approached, the bulky door began to open. Corwin leapt to one side out of line of sight, and the others quickly followed. They could hear two men talking in German, and as the door opened fully, they stepped out onto the landing pad. Both wore Luftwaffe uniforms and appeared to carry no weapons.

Corwin pointed for Frasi and Chas to go forward, and they did so silently. Corwin drew out his DTM and shuffled along a little further to the door so that he was ready to take the leap. Just as the other two were about to reach their targets, he heard a panicked cry come from inside the doors to warn the two men. Chas and Frasi were close enough that they took the leap. Frasi leapt onto one of their backs and slit his throat, while Chas summersaulted forward and landed with her legs locked around the other’s neck, snapping it with ease. Corwin jumped into the opening. Another Luftwaffe uniformed man was scrambling to get his leather holster open but stumbled on the catch. He did not hesitate to fire two shots into him.

To his right side there was a small control room with banks of monitors, and an empty seat for whoever should have been watching.

Corwin looked up to see there was a camera hidden in the rock above the door. He was relieved as he realised they would have been spotted with ease had the guard not left his post.

“Stop!” a voice yelled.

A man rushed up the ramp ahead in horror. Corwin smiled; for it was obvious he had let them in. Corwin lifted his pistol and fired. The shot embedded in the woodwork of the man’s bulky looking side loaded submachine gun.

“Fuck!” Corwin shouted.

He threw the HDM at the man as a distraction. It hit his chest and gave Corwin just enough time to get through the door of the guard’s station. Automatic gunfire echoed through the hall from dozens of bullets striking the room. Many hit the thick desk in front of Corwin, but even more smashed through the glass above, sending shards all over him. He heard the bursts of gunfire getting closer as the man advanced. There was a small reprieve when the magazine was dropped, but before another could be put in, three shots rang out from a .45 as Porter rushed in through the doorway.

The massive door began to close again. Corwin got up, and the others rushed to get inside. Rane wedged himself in the doorway and pushed with all his strength to stop it. He was able to slow it to half of its closing speed. The last of them made it inside, and he had to concede defeat and leap in after them.

“Sorry, but I could not hold that,” he said in apology.

Corwin smiled and looked at the monitors. Half of them had been destroyed by the gunfire, but many others still worked. He went from one screen to another, and stopped suddenly, feeling his breathing stop.

Lecia, he thought.

“They are here?” Nylund asked, looking over Corwin’s shoulder.

Lecia was secured onto a metal frame. It locked her arms and legs as if she were on a cross but lying flat. He looked across to the other monitors. Beyett and Vi were in the same situation but in other rooms.

“We have to get them out.”

“No, Nylund, we have to get this mission done,” replied Porter.

Corwin found himself more conflicted than ever before, but he knew he had to stand by his convictions and his word.

“What’s it going to be, Boss?” Chas asked.

“We do both. You and Frasi will go to free our comrades. The rest of us will continue on mission.”

“And yet there is no sign of Hitler at all,” said Nylund.

“You think he would have cameras spying on him? No chance. Now, come on. Let’s move!”

They rushed out and headed on down the ramp. Just as they left, one of the dead screens suddenly flickered to life. It was a display showing the very room itself, but no one was there to notice.

“Think they know we are here?”

“I don’t know, Nylund, but they sure will do soon enough,” Corwin said. He stopped at the body and picked up the submachine gun and two magazines.

“Can you believe our luck? Hitler and our own people all in one place, here for the taking,” said Nylund as they got up and carried on.

“Luck?” Corwin asked, “You’ve got a pretty fucked up idea of what that is, if you think this is it.”

Fraasi and Chas soon vanished when they took a fork in the corridor. Corwin wanted to follow them. Getting Lecia back meant more than everything to him, even more than taking Hitler down, and yet he knew he had to rely on his friends to do it. Three Germans rushed out in front of them. They were wearing advanced body armour on their torsos and helmets with shielded faceplates. Corwin aimed low without breaking stride. He fired a burst across their legs and dropped all of them. One managed to get a few shots off with his assault rifle as he fell, but the shots struck the ceiling above as Corwin reached them. He took hold of the rifle and stamped down on the man’s head, breaking his neck.

Porter drove a knife deep so that he severed one of the other’s hamstrings, and Porter wrenched open the last one’s helmet and smashed his skull with a brutal punch straight to the middle of his face. The two of them and Nylund took up the rifles and all the ammunition they could salvage.

“You see? We didn’t need to climb with any extra weight,” Corwin said, looking down proudly at all the weapons they had acquired, but Rane didn’t look impressed and held on dearly to his Vickers.

It can’t be this easy, Corwin thought as they carried on.

They passed out of the clinical corridor into lavish splendour. It seemed completely at odds with where they had come from. It was a vast

lobby with decorated marble columns. Statues and portraits of Hitler lined the walls, as well as medieval and ancient artefacts. It looked more like a manor house than a fortress.

“Nice pad,” said Nylund.

Porter pulled a big heavy flanged mace from the wall and looked very pleased with himself. Nylund told him to put it back.

“Why?” Porter shot back a look at him that looked deadly. Nylund did not say a word as he stuffed it through his webbing belt and they went on.

“Why haven’t there been any alarms?” Nylund asked, “They must have heard us by now.”

It made Corwin uneasy, too.

“You think we are walking into a trap?”

“Trap or not, Rane, the only way is forward. We can handle whatever is thrown at us. Don’t forget who we are. We are better than them. Better than a thousand of their soldiers, so we’ll let them know it.”

Corwin then rushed on through the lobby. Suddenly, the sound of their footsteps was drowned out by dozens of studded and metal-capped boots hitting the floor as a horde rushed toward them.

“Clear the way!” Rane shouted and lifted his Vickers. The rest spread out to the cover of the columns.

The first few soldiers ran in through the broad open archway ahead, and Rane pulled the trigger the second they could be seen. The Vickers machine gun burst into life with its methodical slow paced thump. It sent a tonne of lead at the enemy. The first few were knocked down by the sheer weight of fire. Their armour stopped much of it, but not all, and Rane did not let up.

“Come on!”

He kept his finger on the trigger as the others advanced down the flanks under the cover of the columns. As Corwin reached the far end of the room, the Vickers’ belt finally ran empty. Twelve soldiers lay dead at the entrance, and three more wounded were trying to scramble back for cover. He opened up, mercilessly shooting at their legs. He had no problem shooting them in the back, for they were nothing to him.

* * *

Chas could hear music up ahead. It sounded like it was in French and being played on a record player. She glanced back at Frasi who looked entirely confused. He had never heard anything like it in his life. They approached slowly and cautiously until she was able to peer through the open door at the source of the music. There were two German officers sitting with their feet up, knocking back spirits and making merry. The music was so loud they could barely hear each other and were apparently oblivious to the danger they were in. Frasi looked at her and to his knife, but she shook her head. Both of the Germans' handguns were lying on the table beside their drinks and within easy reach.

Chas slowly and quietly passed her pistol to Frasi. She unbuttoned her shirt and fluffed her hair up a little before stepping casually into the room. She stopped to strike a provocative pose, one hand on her hip and the other with a finger in her mouth. Her attire was a little rough and ready, but it would have to do. The two officers were both shocked and startled and just didn't know how to react. One of them opened his mouth to speak but could not find any words. They were both cherry cheeked from the amount of alcohol they had consumed and didn't look worried at all by her presence.

"A present from the Fuehrer," she said in a French accent.

"Please, come in!" one of them shouted excitedly.

She leapt forward as if she was floating on thin air and jumped onto him so that she was straddling him. He couldn't believe his luck and was lost in a trance. All he could do was look down through her open shirt, and not where her right hand was going. She quickly snapped up the pistol, put it to the second man's head, and pulled the trigger. Blood sprayed out over the record player, but the other man was too shocked to react. She turned the pistol back to his temple and fired so that once again blood sprayed out over their office.

Still sitting on the dead officer's lap, she picked up the glass he had been drinking from and knocked it back triumphantly. She climbed off and smiled at Frasi while a trickle of the man's blood still dripped down her face. He didn't seem to understand her at all, but she didn't care. She was in her own little world and entertaining herself.

"Shall we find them now?" he asked directly.

She calmly nodded as they went on.

Two more soldiers appeared before them, but Frasi had his silenced Sten at the ready. He fired off two short bursts. To their horror all were bounced. He quickly took aim and shot out their legs. Chas descended upon the wounded men with her knife and killed both of them on the floor. As she finished, she looked up. She was right next to a heavy door with a sign above it. A small thickly reinforced porthole window at the centre allowed them to look in. Chas did so first. There were several cells inside, but she could only see into the one furthest down the corridor. It was Lecia, her hair being so unmistakable.

"It's them," she said gleefully.

Before Frasi could take a look through they heard a thunderous echo of footsteps approaching. It was a single person, but far too heavy footed to be any normal human. They turned in dread when a massive shadowy figure stomped into the room and stepped into the light.

Robak! Chas thought, as she finally felt fear course through her body.

"Who want's to die first?" asked the hulking soldier.

* * *

Corwin stepped past the bodies. There was an opening into a huge domed room. It looked more like a small arena than anything else.

"Sergeant Corwin?" a voice rang out.

It seemed to be blasted out from speakers all around the room so that they could not pinpoint a location, but Corwin would recognise that voice anytime.

"Villiers, you bastard!" Why don't you come on down here and fight!"

"Sergeant Corwin, I am glad that you could join me on this new adventure. I must thank you," he went on.

"Is it pre-recorded?" Nylund asked.

Nobody was sure.

"I have to admit, this time period was never one that I had considered for a moment, and yet here we are after you delivered me here, and what a time it is; a great time of superpowers, technological development, and marvel. I could not think of a better place to fuel my greatest desires."

"And let you carry on fucking the world over with your sick fantasies!" Corwin shouted, "You're nothing but a bitter shell of a man with nothing to live for but your hate!"

Villiers seemed to ignore his question entirely and continued to speak.

“Sergeant, I want to introduce you to one my latest toys. Something a little special I put together just for you. Good bye, Sergeant Corwin, and thank you so much for all that you have done for me.”

Corwin was shaking with anger, and yet there seemed there was nothing he could do, but his attention soon turned to a huge part of the wall that drew back and slid open.

“This doesn’t look good,” said Nylund.

“Did you think this was going to be easy?” Porter grumbled.

Rane put a new belt into the Vickers. He slammed the top receiver shut and lifted it back ready to take on whatever came at them. They were expecting a horde of soldiers to come out of the breach, but the shadow of two huge mechanical legs flowed out into the room as whatever it was approached.

“This is gonna be a party,” Harland said, smiling.

A huge four-legged mechanical walker stomped out from the opening. It stood three metres tall and ten metres wide. The turret of what looked like a Panzer IV appeared to be mounted on the top of the body, carrying a 75mm gun and a coaxial machine gun. Smoke bellowed from exhaust vents at the rear as it stomped into view, and they backed off until it took position at the centre of the room and stopped.

“That is not what I was expecting,” Corwin said nervously, “Take it down!”

Rane opened fire on full auto and raked the walker with .303 rounds, but it sprang to life, its turret turning to take a shot at Corwin. The gun fired, but he just managed to jump to the side of the room. A hole was blown in the ground where he had been standing. In the confines of the room it was almost deafening, and machine gun fire tracked him as he rolled and kept running to outdo the turret speed. Rane remained on the trigger as dozens of shots ricocheted off, and he kept it up on with some hope of getting through or at least suppressing it. The others had joined in with their captured weapons until there was just a continuous drone of gunfire.

The walker stopped and suddenly turned its attention to Rane as the one making the most noise.

“Oh, shit!” he said as he dropped the Vickers and jumped for cover. A shell ignited where he stood, and he was launched through the air until he

crashed into the side wall and collapsed down into a heap. The gun took aim at where he had landed, and he was too stunned to get back up. They could hear the next shell be slammed into the breech and prepared to fire. Corwin charged towards it and struck its lead leg with all the weight and power he could. It was enough to knock the leg up. The creature tilted back and the shot went high. Rubble from the roof collapsed in and covered Rane completely.

The walker spun around and smashed Corwin with its leg. He felt his body buckle and a spike pierce his flank. He was thrown through the air and crashed to the ground like a ragdoll. Harland gave out a loud scream and rushed at the thing empty handed while the others kept up their fire to seemingly little effect. He took a running jump and landed on the top of the turret and held on for his life. The entire creature shook frantically and turned to try and shake him off.

“There’s no hatch!” he cried, and desperately looked around for some way to prise the thing open.

The walker angled forward and ran at one of the walls, attempting to crush him between its turret and the thick structure.

“Fuck me!” he screamed as he spun over onto the other side, and they crashed into the wall. The creature then rushed aside and took aim at Nylund.

“Run!” Corwin hollered as he got back to his feet.

Harland took hold of the turret and wrenched around so that the creature staggered a little as it fired. The shot narrowly missed Nylund, but shrapnel from the floor cut in to the side of his face. He reeled in agonising pain.

“Right, I’ve had enough of this,” Corwin said angrily.

He drew out a grenade and rushed forwards as Harland still wrestled with the powerful walker. He ducked under one of its legs, and as it took aim on Porter, he jumped, primed the grenade, and tossed it down the barrel. He rolled out of the way.

“Oh, shit!” Harland shouted as he let go and was thrown aside. The walker’s turret turned and took aim on Corwin.

“Fuck you,” he said defiantly and stood his ground.

The grenade ignited at the same moment the shell fired, and the barrel blew open at its breech. The walker staggered back, as if whoever was

inside controlling it had been hurt or stunned at the very least. It stopped for a moment, and Harland dragged himself up.

“Is it dead?” he asked.

But it suddenly lurched forward with massive speed and smashed into him like a raging bull. He was thrown up and over, and a blade on the creature’s leg slashed into his own as he was tossed aside.

“Guess not,” said Porter.

It was readying for its next run as they tried to think of some other way to fight it. Corwin heard rubble being shifted aside and watched Rane rise from it. He looked furious.

“Enough is enough! This is going to stop!” he barked.

The massive Rane thundered forwards. As he closed the distance, the walker lifted up one of its front legs. It revealed a thick spear like tip in readiness to thrust down into him, but Rane did not slow down. He went right for the leg, and as it thrust down on him, he caught it and stopped it dead.

“That’s right!”

He took hold of the leg and hauled it aside. The walker tipped onto its side, and he began to swing it around the room with a huge smile on his face. Finally, he let go, and the creature flashed past Corwin and smashed into the wall. The impact caused it to go right through the base of the dome, but Rane wasn’t satisfied yet. He rushed through the breach, and the others quickly followed.

They watched Rane in awe. He picked up the walker by its body and smashed it down on the top of its turret until the turret ring cracked. He forced a hand into the hole and ripped the turret off of the vehicle. Inside was a battered and bloodied German soldier. He was breathing very slowly and badly hurt.

Corwin pulled out his pistol and put a single shot in his head. He then patted Rane on the back.

“You’re one strong son of a bitch,” he said, looking up at his hulking friend who stood almost twice his stature.

He looked around the room, and it appeared to be nothing more than a store, so he stepped back out to the arena where they had fought. Nylund was still nursing his wounds, but thankfully they were only superficial. Corwin looked down at his own flank. He was still bleeding, but it wasn’t enough to stop him.

He walked to the centre of the room and looked around in every direction before shouting out, "Is that all you've got, Villiers? Is that all that you can muster? I am coming for you!"

No response came.

"He isn't there. He never was. He's a coward, but not a stupid one," said Porter.

"So where now?" Nylund asked as they salvaged what weapons they could.

Corwin pointed to the opening where the walker had come from.

"Looks like that's the only way to go."

"Exactly where they want us to? That's just dandy!"

"You're a whiny little bitch, Nylund, has anyone ever told you that?" Porter asked.

Corwin laughed, knowing it was true.

"You can bet Villiers, or whoever is running things around here, has got more in store for us. So let's play his game, and beat him at it."

CHAPTER 12

“Run!” Chas screamed.

She wiped the blood from her nose and rushed on after Frasi. She was cradling her left arm where a knife had been thrust into her shoulder. She was breathing heavily now and running for her life. They could hear Robak storming after them. Frasi was limping from the beating he had taken as well, and neither had any weapons left of any kind. They ran on and on, in the desperate hope of finding a place to hide or some help, but none came. Finally, they ran into one room to find it was a dead end. Chas looked around desperately for solution to their problem, but as she looked back, they saw Robak fill the doorway.

“There is nowhere left to run,” he snarled.

He ran towards them as if he meant to pulverise them into the wall. At the very last moment, Frasi pushed Chas out of the way and took the full impact. But the force of the charge failed to crush him. The wall collapsed and then burst out the other side, dropping two metres into a pile of the rubble that had blown out from the wall as they made impact.

Fraasi coughed out dirt and dust from his lungs. When he managed to finally open his eyes, he saw Robak getting to his feet. But he could barely move, let alone get stand up.

“You are finished,” said Robak.

“No, you are,” said a stern voice.

Robak stopped in his tracks. Corwin was standing behind him with an MG42 held at the waist. His face broke out into a beaming smile, and he pulled the trigger. Robak was hit by dozens of rounds. His body armour stopped the worst, but his legs were ripped apart, and he collapsed down with many more wounds. Corwin finally lifted his finger off the trigger when he was satisfied he was no longer a threat. Robak was a bloody mess. Chas jumped down to check on him, but Corwin strode up and held the gun barrel close to his head.

“You have still lost,” Robak struggled to speak.

“Oh, yeah? And you’re still going to die!”

He began to squeeze the trigger when a loud voice echoed out around the room, as it had when Villiers addressed them, but this time it was not him. Corwin spun around in shock. One again they could not see the source of the sound. They had found themselves in a vast hangar of experimental and advanced aircraft, with a landing strip that led to a concealed entrance on the mountainside.

“Sergeant Wyatt Corwin!” said the voice.

There was no hope of telling where it was coming from, but it was a strong German accent that Corwin somehow recognised but could not pinpoint exactly how.

“What is this shit?” Porter asked.

He stepped out further in to the hangar and looked around for any sign of where it was coming from, but yet again there was nothing.

“You know, this is starting to get real fucking boring!”

“I have looked forward to this meeting for some time!”

“Who the hell are you, you Nazi freak?”

Two doors on an elevated position began to open on one of the far walls. They were five metres high and slowly prised apart to reveal a viewing balcony made of glass.

“No, it can’t be,” said Corwin.

They all looked with marvel at the man in the centre of the glass pane.

“Is it really him?” Nylund whispered, “The Fuehrer, the man himself?”

Without any more hesitation, Corwin lifted his gun and fired a burst at Hitler. The shots bounced off the thickened glass. As the ricochets died down, all they could hear was a sinister laugh.

“Why don’t you come down here and settle this like a man?”

“Oh, no, I don’t think so. I have so much more fun for you yet, Sergeant.”

“It’s Captain!” Corwin snapped back.

“Well, then, Captain, soon you and all your friends will be dead, and nothing will stand in our way!”

“What is this guy, a comic book villain?”

“You read comic books, Nylund?” Porter asked and began to laugh.

“It’s really him, isn’t it?” Rane asked, not quite believing it.

“So why don’t you come down here and finish this, you and I, right here and now?” Corwin called out.

Hitler ignored him and seemed to reach down to a control panel by his side and press a few keys.

“Well, this can’t be good.”

Two doors opened ahead of them, and a dozen heavily armoured soldiers marched out from each of them. They were wearing some form of powered suits, and body armour covered most of their bodies. They stood half a metre taller than the average man as a result.

The Dictator spoke again, “Captain, you and your people are the supermen which we are creating in this new empire. Men like you could live like kings in the new world. Join us, and your lives will not just be spared, but you will live with power and luxury the likes of which none of you could ever have imagined. You can be kings, or you can be dead.”

“Here we go,” Nylund said quietly, knowing which way it was going to go.

“I’ve got a message from Churchill for you!”

Corwin held up his two fingers, and then raised his weapon. He opened fire and ran forward for the cover of a pile of containers in front of them. His team scattered in every direction. Automatic gunfire erupted through the hangar as the skirmish began. Corwin smiled as he looked out at the combat.

“What’s so funny?” Nylund rolled into the cover beside him.

“This is what we were born for.”

Corwin got up and ran towards one of the aircraft, firing on the move. The shots knocked back one of the enemy soldiers but didn’t do any damage. He ducked down into cover as the return fire came in.

“All right, you sons of bitches!”

He pulled out a grenade, his last one. He primed it and launched it over the aircraft. It cleared the fuselage easily and landed amongst a few of the armoured soldiers who were arrogantly standing without any cover or care in the world. The grenade blew and much of the gunfire died down with it. Two of the soldiers lay dead, and another was rendered incapable as he flailed on the floor where his suit had lost power.

“They’re invulnerable to our guns, so we’ll have to take these bastards down by hand!”

He noticed a glimmer of movement as the twin cannons mounted in the nose of one of the parked craft turned towards him. They tracked right

past and took aim at the Germans. He caught a glance of Nylund at the controls.

“Hit those fuckers!” Corwin ordered.

They opened fired. It was far more substantial than from the Brownings mounted on their jeeps. Corwin got up and looked with glee as holes were blown right through two of the Germans, and the rest of them were running for cover. The guns soon ran empty, but it was the opening Corwin needed. He climbed over the fuselage and ran at the nearest soldier. He turned to face him, but Corwin caught the barrel of his gun and stopped him dead. He reached forward and snapped his neck with a single strike. As he dropped, Corwin noticed a massive industrial grade wrench. He picked it up and swung at the next, hitting his flank. The man’s body buckled, and his spine snapped.

He leapt forward and smashed the wrench down on the head of another so that it buckled his helmet from the weight of the impact. Several more then turned to engage him, so he quickly unscrewed the primers on two stick grenades on the man’s body and shoved him forward so that he slid up to them. They tried to run for cover, but it was too late. Corwin stood his ground and smiled as the charge blew. Two more of them were ripped apart by the shrapnel.

“Let’s finish this!” Corwin shouted.

Rane ripped one of the aircraft doors off. He advanced using it as a shield as several of the remaining Germans opened fired on him. Corwin jumped on one of them. He clumsily swung around to try and shrug him off, but he wasn’t strong enough. He drove his knife down deep into the man’s neck, taking his gun as it dropped down. A box fed light machine gun. With the next enemy’s back to him, Corwin opened up on full auto at the running gear and power supply until finally it was destroyed, and the man collapsed to the deck.

Ricochets flashed all around Rane as he advanced with the huge lump of aircraft held out before him. He finally closed the distance but did not stop. He smashed into the first man and flattened him, then threw the door at one that crushed him to the floor.

He ran up to the next and picked him up, throwing him towards the glass where Hitler was still observing the action. He smashed into it at massive speed, and yet was stopped and dropped dead to the ground. The

glass had suffered just a modest crack, and Hitler seemed to smile at them as if he were enjoying the show.

What the fuck is going on in that lunatic's mind?

As he was thinking, Corwin saw Porter fly through the air. He had in his hand the mace that he had taken from the previous rooms. He smashed it down on a man's head, and the force cracked the helmet opened. The mace embedded in his skull, and he collapsed under the weight of Porter who landed on top of him.

Not one of the Germans was now still standing. Harland had taken a bullet to the arm and was tying a piece of material around the wound, seemingly not at all bothered or in any pain. Corwin took a few paces back still holding the wrench, and then waved it at Hitler.

"All these advancements that you have been given. All this knowledge and power, and what have you achieved with it?"

Hitler began to laugh. He was calm and calculated, and Corwin could not help but wonder if he knew something they did not.

"I didn't come here to reason with you. I will show no mercy and offer no terms! I have come for your head!"

"And what would you do with it? Show it to the world so that you can triumphantly take over my power and position?"

Corwin shook his head.

"Don't tell me you don't want it. Do you know what can be achieved with the power we know today? The world is ours for the taking. It could be yours, if you could defeat me. Or it could be ours, to share."

"He's got a point. You've got to wonder if we're playing for the right team," said Porter.

"You're joking?" Nylund asked, but he said nothing.

Corwin laughed.

"You would never share power with us."

"No, not entirely. But I could give you such power you never dreamed of. What is it you all want in your lives? Think of it, and together we could make it happen."

"Something is wrong," said Nylund, "This isn't the man Beyett told us about."

"What do you mean?" Corwin asked.

"Hitler wouldn't reason with us, not even to lure us in to a trap."

But Hitler carried on before they could say anything else.

“Bow to me now, or meet your deaths.”

That alone got Porter’s back up even though he was tempted by the prospect a moment before.

“Let’s end this asshole!”

Corwin quickly looked around at his people, and they all were all of one mind. He even looked all the way back to Chas where they had first come into the hangar. She was holding Frasi, and it seemed like he wasn’t moving. She nodded in agreement, but was unable to get up and help.

“You have your answer you, Nazi scum!”

“So be it, Captain Corwin.”

They watched in disbelief as a tall humanoid like robot slid forward beside Hitler. It stood twice his height. A few hatches opened up on it, enough space for a man. They watched him climb into the suit, and it sealed around him.

“What the hell?”

The glass that had separated them began to slide open, and Hitler in his armoured suit jumped out and landed on the hangar bay floor in front of them. Corwin could barely believe his eyes.

‘This is more like it,’ said Harland.

The Fuehrer walked forward with heavy footing in the thickly armoured suit. It dwarfed even Rane, and they spread in readiness to take him on.

“How we gonna do this?” Nylund asked.

Corwin looked around for anything to use to fight with besides his wrench, but there was nothing. Hatches on the forearms of Hitler’s suit opened, and short-barrelled light machine guns rose out.

“Oh, shit, everyone run!”

They all scattered. The two weapons opened fire, and the hangar once again erupted into a vicious gun battle. Harland and Nylund tried to return fire, but their weapons were useless against the thick armour. They ducked back down for cover, but Rane went forward. He charged at Hitler as his focus was elsewhere. He hit into him like a freight train, and it was enough to knock him off his feet. But from his back he picked Rane up singlehandedly and threw him off.

As he got up, he found Corwin at his side. He smashed the wrench against Hitler with all his might. He lifted an arm to parry, and it stopped the wrench, but not before it had crushed the barrel of one of the machine

guns. He swung at Corwin, but it was slow and clumsy. Corwin ducked under and smashed the mechanism of the other gun in the same way, but before he could marvel at his own work, he was struck by a backhand and thrown through the air and crashed through the glass of an aircraft cockpit.

Corwin let out a cry of pain as he noticed a shard of thick glass from the cockpit housing had embedded in his arm. It had gone right through and out the other side. He took one end and pulled it out in one. He cried out once again. Blood dripped out over the controls as he looked back at his friends being thrown about mercilessly. Then he realised where he was, in the cockpit of a jet fighter.

“Right, you motherfucker, let’s try this on for size!”

He fired up the engines and waited for them to come to life. Meanwhile, all he could do was watch. He saw Harland get his arm broken and be tossed aside. A large blade extended out from Hitler’s right hand, and Corwin watched in horror as it was thrust through Porter’s stomach. The man dropped down limp as he was thrown off the blade.

The engines were alive now, and Corwin began to taxi and then slammed on full power. He squeezed the trigger on the guns, and the two cannons roared to life. Round after round hit Hitler. They forced him back and pinned him against the far wall until finally the nose of the craft smashed into him. The refuelling line pierced his body like a lance and skewed him before embedding in the wall. The craft slammed to a halt, and Corwin lurched forward, smashing his nose on the console. Blood burst out, but he knew it was worth it.

Above him the armoured head of the suit had collapsed over the nose cone. Hitler looked dead. The top of the helmet was split and broken from the impact, but not enough to see inside.

“Told you we would get you, you son of a bitch,” said Corwin.

But even before he had finished speaking, the head rose up and glared at him. He pushed back the aircraft so that the pole was pulled from his body, and when he was finally free, he lifted his hand as if to strike a hammer blow down on the cockpit. It would have been strong enough to flatten Corwin. He lifted his feet to jump out but found they had become trapped by the impact. He had nowhere to go.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Porter fly past. He had his mace in both hands and smashed it down onto Hitler’s head, right on the seam of the crack. The impact rocked the Fuehrer and sent him tumbling back. He hit

the far wall and dropped down onto one knee. Porter did not let up and went forward, beating on the helmet with strike after strike. It finally split open and one got through and hit the top of his head, splitting it open.

The suit went limp and began to collapse. Porter stepped aside and let it come crashing down between him and Corwin's wrecked fighter.

"Next time I say I need something, believe me, I need it," said Porter, as he himself collapsed onto one knee, feeling the weakness of blood loss kicking in. Nylund rushed to his side to look at the wound.

"We need to get you some help, right now!"

Porter shrugged him off and got back to his feet. He walked over to the body as Corwin clambered out of the aircraft. He could see the bloody top of his vanquished foe and a crack in his skull, but he could not see the face.

"Just leave him. It's done," said Nylund.

"No, we have to have proof. You can't just kill the biggest villain in the world, and then return home without proof."

"Why? He's dead."

"Yeah, well let's make sure," added Porter.

He carefully studied the suit and found the release mechanism, but it was well locked. He lifted up his mace once more and crashed it down on the mechanism, and then twice more before it broke apart. He got his hands on each side of the helmet opening and tried with all his strength to prise it apart, but it would not budge.

"Give me a hand here!"

Corwin moved to his side and Rane the other. They heaved with all their strength, and the suit opening broke apart to reveal the man inside.

"It's him. Can we get the hell out of here now?"

"Nylund, quit your bitching for one second and let us be certain," said Corwin.

Porter ripped open the rest of the armoured entry doors and pulled out the body in one go. He had the ridiculous moustache, the side parting, and appeared to be of the right age, but Porter turned him over for another look.

"What is it?" Corwin asked.

He pointed to scars behind both ears.

"He's a monster, doesn't mean we have to tear him apart with no dignity at all," said Nylund.

But they ignored him as Porter ripped open his uniform. Beneath was the body of a much younger man, and in much better physical condition

than Hitler could have been. He was well muscled and half the Fuehrer's age. There was another scar around his neckline, almost as if a noose had hanged him.

"What the hell is this?"

"It isn't Hitler, Nylund. That's what it is," said Porter.

Nylund shook his head in disbelief. "What? No, it has to be!"

"They've modified this man to be a double, and it was a fucking good job."

"So we did all this for nothing?"

"No, not nothing."

"Corwin!" Chas shouted from across the hangar bay floor.

They all turned towards her. She was pointing out to a small group of soldiers carrying stretchers to a craft in the hangar. As Corwin noticed them, a glass divider began to shut between them at quite some speed. Their comrades were being taken to the transport. One man had stopped and was watching them.

"Villiers," said Corwin.

He rushed forward at a sprinting pace to try and make it under the door, but it was closing too fast. It slammed down shut between them, effectively dividing the hangar in two. He smashed into the glass and wailed against but he realised it was far stronger than they could hope to deal with in the time they had. Villiers looked calm and collected. So much so that it was as if everything had gone to his plan. It made Corwin feel sick.

"You lose, Sergeant." Villiers' voice was transmitted over the intercom.

"I'm gonna fucking kill you!" Corwin smashed his fist on the glass, his despair visible, but the sound did not carry through. He fell to his knees.

He watched Lecia being loaded into one of the craft. She was so close, so close to his grasp, and yet so far away.

"I thank you for providing me with such fine specimens to continue my research. Be assured, they will be quite useful in my programme. And, Sergeant, this will be a goodbye. As much as this has been fun, all good things must come to an end," he said as he lifted up a timer and pushed it to the glass. Its suction system held it in place, and Villiers began to laugh uncontrollably.

"You would destroy this whole place just to get us?"

“I would destroy an entire city to kill you, Sergeant, but who knew it could be so easy?” he replied with a wicked smile before turning and heading for the craft.

Corwin looked around for some help, and a few of them were looking for a way in.

“It’s no good. We have to find another way out!”

There was just seven minutes left on the count.

“There is no other way out!” replied Nylund.

“Just one.” Rane pointed up as if to the sky and remembering the helicopter on the way in.

“What? It might not even be there anymore, and who the hell is going to fly it?”

“I will, now move!” Corwin ordered.

He looked back one last time as the aircraft began to taxi with their three friends on board and Villiers himself. He grabbed Chas in both arms and rushed on as they each helped one another. Nylund and Rane seemed to be the only ones not hurt. Rane carried Frasi, but Porter and Harland would accept help from nobody.

“He’s really going to blow this place just for us?”

“What would you be willing to destroy to kill him?” Corwin asked breathlessly.

Nylund could see it was a fair point, and they kept going, using every ounce of strength they had left. He fired the last two shots he had in his pistol into a remaining soldier as they took the bend. Corwin checked the time. They were quickly running out of time. Finally, they were on the ramp up to the roof, and there seemed some sign of hope. They ran on and could just see the outline of the rotors of the helicopter. They were in luck, but as they drew nearer, they were stopped in their tracks. Robak was blocking their way. He was covered in blood, but still standing, and very much alive.

Nobody had a bullet left, and most of them were too badly hurt to fight. Corwin passed Frasi to Nylund and stood his ground.

“He’s mine,” he stated.

The others went to protest, but he carried on, “Don’t argue with me. Go!”

He drew his knife and slowly moved ahead. The rest of them went around, and Robak let them pass. It was as if he cared for nothing now but

killing Corwin, and Corwin him. The Captain took one last look at his watch; they were painfully short on time now.

“All this loss, and what did you achieve?” he asked, laughing loudly.

“Your death will be enough, Robak!”

Corwin jumped forward and slashed into Robak’s face. His legs were too badly wounded to move as he was used to, and the blade cut deeply into his nose. He responded by going forward, parrying Corwin’s next strike, and then punching to his already bloody and painful nose. Corwin spat out blood and staggered back, but he managed to keep hold of the knife.

The rest of his people jumped into the aircraft and looked at one another for answers.

“Who’s going to fly this heap of junk?” Chas asked.

Everyone looked to Nylund.

“Oh, what the hell!”

He went to the cockpit and looked around at the controls, shaking his head in disbelief.

“What the fuck is this?” he said quietly, not sure where to start.

Corwin staggered back and looked at a fresh slice he had placed on Robak’s arm as the engines of the helicopter fired up. He looked down at his watch again.

Only one minute to go!

“Boss, we gotta go!” Chas shouted from the door of the chopper.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Robak snapped.

“Just go, now!”

Nylund listened to the orders, whether through loyalty or to save his own neck, none of them were quite sure.

“You know you really are an ugly piece of shit,” Corwin replied.

The helicopter slowly began to lift.

“Now you are mine,” said Robak.

Corwin rushed forward without another word and ran at Robak. He swung for him, but Corwin rolled under him and slashed his hamstrings out with his knife. He then rolled back to his feet and kept going. Robak collapsed down. His blood poured out onto the ground, and he desperately tried to stem the bleeding.

Corwin was running with everything he had, but the helicopter was lifting. He felt the ground beneath him shake. The massive explosive

charges in the complex had ignited, and the ramp behind him collapsed into the mountain.

“Run!” Chas screamed at him.

The ground of the landing bay was collapsing in after the ramp quicker than he could run. He gave it his all and could hardly breathe, but leapt at the last moment. He covered a massive height and distance, landing with just his hands gripping the edge of the door. At that moment the helicopter quickly rose up higher, and a dust cloud erupted beneath him. Chas reached down to help him. She took his arm and hauled him in through the door. She stumbled back as he collapsed on the floor beside her.

Corwin breathed a sigh of relief. “We fucking did it.”

“Did what? We didn’t get Hitler. We didn’t get Villiers,” said Porter.

Corwin looked sad, but he still shook his head.

“No, but we came close, and that terrifies them.”

“But we’re still half a team,” Harland said solemnly.

“I know where they are being taken,” a faint voice said. Frasi was conscious, and he carried on speaking, “I know where Villiers’ base is and how to reach it. I know how to get our people back.”

Corwin shook his head in amazement.

“We all know what we have to do. We struck a blow today that let the Nazis know just how close we are on their tails. Next up, it’s time to get our people back!”

Table of Contents

[PROLOGUE](#)

[CHAPTER 1](#)

[CHAPTER 2](#)

[CHAPTER 3](#)

[CHAPTER 4](#)

[CHAPTER 5](#)

[CHAPTER 6](#)

[CHAPTER 7](#)

[CHAPTER 8](#)

[CHAPTER 9](#)

[CHAPTER 10](#)

[CHAPTER 11](#)

[CHAPTER 12](#)

[*OceanofPDF.com*](#)