

GLAZER IN ACTION

It is June 6, 1944, at 3 am. The C-47 Dakota, “Hey Jerry”, along with a hundred other aircraft, is carrying units of the 82d Airborne Division to bail out over enemy territory, and thus to begin the Great Battle of Normandy.

On the benches in the dark, waiting for the green light for the okay to jump:

“Hey Glaze!” It was Joe, a young guy about 25, chewing gum fiercely. “Are you scared?”

“Sure thing, Joe; everybody is. ”

“ Well I’m one of ‘em.” He paused for a moment. “How old are you, Glaze?”

“I’m seventy eight,” said Glazer.

“Good, Glaze, ” observes Joe. “Damned good.”

A deafening blast – flak - shakes the aircraft , but the plane is okay.

Suddenly, the Green Light comes on. They struggle up, and hook their chutes to the wire above. Each man checks the pack in front of him, and Glazer assures Joe, “You look great; you’ll be fine, kid.”

The door gapes open; the roar is deafening. “See ya, Glaze!”, shouts Joe, who pauses momentarily, then leaps into the void. Glazer follows. A strange silence as the earth rushes toward him. He hits the ground, knees lightly, and rolls over, just as directed.

But now he finds himself sinking rapidly under water. Landing in a marshland! It grips him tightly and pulls him under.

Struggling desperately, unwilling to yield, he glimpses a shaft of bright light. With what he knows to be his final effort, he lunges toward its glow; a

moment later, his head breaks the surface. He is in surrounded by warm sunshine; he is free of the grip of the deadly marsh, and he lies immobile in what seems to be a shallow run of warm water. He is panting, thankful to having survived, but the bright light surrounding him is troubling, and he sits up.

And that's when he finds himself sitting in his own bathtub at home, naked! Even the several toys which he'd come to like were floating happily into him. He cannot understand what had happened. He's dazed and angry. He's bewildered and distressed.

It must be remembered that he is a retired dentist of 78 years of age, who has been advised by his doctor that he had displayed early signs of Alzheimer's, and that he must be careful. He has never yet been to war.

He knew all that, of course; Alzheimer's is not a medical diagnosis that a patient was likely to forget. But he also knew, just moments ago, that he had been with the 82d Airborne in a great enterprise, and now, suddenly, he's in his bathtub.

He walked about his apartment, nervous and unhappy, paying no attention to his beloved two cats, even when one of them clawed at his ankle for refusing to play with her. But the issues were colossal; the matter immense, and something needed to be done – soon. The outfit would quickly realize he was missing; they would think him dead or captured, and would shortly forget about him. So what little he could have contributed to the war would forever be lost.

So deep in thought is he, that it is only when the chill in the room reminds him that he is still naked, and he hastily pulls on his robe – though he neglects to pull it tight. And this is because he suddenly had an idea.

He is sure that his connection with the 82d occurred when he fell asleep in the bathtub; what he needs to do now is to activate the same procedure as before, and that should awaken the guys to bring him back. “It’s simple, ” he said to Serena, who had been the his first of the two cats, and who now displayed her fearful teeth because she had not been fed. “All I need to do is to fall asleep here. Right? Don’t you agree?” he asks her, while quickly filling her dish.

He is now humming the “Pass the Ammunition” song, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. He is too excited to sleep; maybe by tonight he could.

Meanwhile, another fertile idea presents itself:

He will try to awaken the guys that he is still alive by taking a hammer and tapping at the tub as close as possible to the drain!

And in a few minutes, he is leaning over the tub and tapping regularly, speaking his name and calling out to Joe, his partner in bailing out. Yet he knows quite well, and feels it deeply, that what brought him to the 82d without any effort at all might not respond to any of his crude commands to bring him back again.

Meanwhile, the door opens, and Melinda Hoxenhorn, Manfred’s sister, has arrived. She is a tall, very lean woman, almost gaunt, whose head is large and stately, but, alas, she lacks a neck, or at least a visible one, which makes her head appear very much like a medicine ball. She has become concerned about Manfred after she had tried to reach him all morning. It would be a touching pleasure to

say that her thoughtfulness reflects a sister who adores her brother; unfortunately, it's not the case. She is terrified that Manfred has lost his mind, and is now a potential madman whose Alzheimer's disease might at any moment commit something disgraceful that would ruin her hopes of joining a group of mah jong women whom she greatly admires.

As she hears the slow and relentless pounding emanating from the bathroom, she can't help recalling the movie depicting the dreadful sound that accompanied the guillotining of Marie Antoinette. Is Manfred preparing for murder? Though knowing that she should fly to safety, she has a curiosity that was too strong, and on tip toes, she peeks in and can see only his back. He is pounding senselessly into the bottom of the tub! And he hasn't even covered himself up! Disgusting! She looks away quickly and is about to dart for the door, when Manfred looks over his shoulder and sees her.

"Do you know me?" quavers Melinda.

"Oh, I think I do," he said, smiling. He is a man who welcomes people quite readily, even to the point of folly, and he likes his sister, notwithstanding her peculiar qualities. "It's been about seventy years."

"Please put down that hammer, Manfred. If you need help, let me call the hospital."

"Oh, I'm all right", he said, setting it down. "I'm not getting any luck with it anyway." He thought for a moment that he might reveal his disappointment, perhaps to receive her sympathy, but he quickly realized that such an attempt

would be disastrous. She would think him crazy, as would anyone else, even his supportive friends. It meant that he would have to remain alone, absolutely silent.

“The drain’s been a problem”, he said blandly.

But Melinda has already lost interest in his plumbing troubles, since he isn’t immediately violent. She turns instead to his clothing. Gesturing to his robe, her eyes glancing delicately else- where, she said: “Shouldn’t you tighten your robe, Manfred? You used to look well dressed. I hope it isn’t because of...let’s not talk about it.”

He agreed heartily, “let’s not”, and soon after telling him that she was off with her friends to see “Rent”, supposedly an exciting juvenile ballet, she was gone, leaving him with his bewilderment and his sadness.

The days that followed simply deepened his unhappiness. He had been sleeping in his bathub for a week and nothing had come of it, except to annoy the cats who saw his conduct as bizarre and unreliable. He spent long hours trying to find a link to the day and hour when he had been called to the colors. He plied through the online materials about the battle and watched all the black and white movies that he liked so much, hoping that his affection for these great movies had brought about his election.

Never once did he doubt that he had served with that combat outfit during that day – and before too, because the guys seemed to have known him before. And though he understood that the war had long been over before the event, he felt that somehow he was needed because of some strange twist in the regular course of time.

And as time went on, he held on fixedly to his belief.

About a year later, he is returning home from meeting a friend of his of the dental days, when he fell asleep on the Metro.

He was moving up a hill with a couple of buddies toward what seemed to be a broad intersection of four roads; and as he got closer, he could see that there were several Sherman tanks on both sides, and that the outfit was spread out all around the road and into the trees. Right now there was no fighting.

A jeep was bounding down toward them moving fast and raising a cloud of dust; it pulled up suddenly and the driver was his old friend Joe.

“Hey, Glaze! Hey, get in this heap.”

“Sure,” Manfred said, breathing freely at last. “What’s up?”

“I dunno. The colonel wants to see ya; he didn’t tell me why, and I didn’t ask.”

“You look good, Joe,” Glazer said, though a lot thinner than Manfred remembered.

“You too,” Manny said. He put the jeep in gear and started up the hill.

“How old are you, Glaze?”

“Seventy eight, Joe.”

“That’s cool, Glaze,” He nods with approval. “That’s real good.”

The jeep careens to a stop just before it would crash into a stand of huge oak trees, leaving Manfred dazed and aching from the blow to his back caused by the sudden halt.

“Here you are, Glazey,” Joe says. “Gimme a good word for the boss, ok? Maybe he’ll give me some of that Italian booze. See ya!” He backs the jeep up, swings it around, and takes off with a carefree wave.

“This way, Sir,” says a freckled soldier who conducts Glazer to the colonel’s headquarters located in a combat truck a few more yards into the woods. The truck is connected to an artillery piece, making it a bit difficult to work his way to the door, but his guide helps him to do it, and he’s shortly standing before the colonel.

“Good to see you Glazer,” he says, shaking hands. “Sit down.”

He is a tall lean officer, with dark hair, and a commanding voice. He offers Manfred a cigarette, which he accepts as a matter of courtesy. As they light up, he saw with compassion the wan fatigue and worry that spoke in the deep lines of the colonel’s face and behind his eyes. But he also saw that the colonel’s fierce green pupils were bright and alert, and were fixed upon him with the brightness of a summer’s day.

“Glazer, here’s the story: I’ve been commanded to set up a new outfit twice the one we’ve got now, maybe more. I want you to be a part of it.”

Glazer was jubilant. He was about to say so when the colonel lifted his hand, palm up.

“But I want you at home until the new force is built; can you do that?”

Glazer was disappointed, yes; he was about to protest, to implore the colonel to let him stay right here with the 82d, but if that officer has asked him to do it, the man who has only his will to keep him going, then he, Glazer, would do what he could to lift his burden.

“Yes, sir. It’s fine with me, Sir.”

A smile came from the colonel. “Excellent. We’ll let you know when and how. But be ready, you’ll be moving fast.”

A smile came from the colonel. “Say, Glazer, how old are you?”

“Seventy eight.”

“That’s good.” the colonel thoughtfully acknowledged. “Very good.”

Dr. Glazer was now outside with the freckled young man, and about to leave, when a squadron of mustangs appeared very low overhead; and as he stood to watch the furious planes disappear taking their wrath with them, he found that he awoke in the Metro, just in time for his Foggy Bottom station.

He walked from the dark overhanging train into the sunshine, thinking with pride about the appointment the colonel had given him. He hailed a taxi for his condo.

Sitting back in the car, he knew that he would be ready when the time came, when they needed him. That he knew.

END

