



A Ship Possessed

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Chapter 1

A hushed voice: “Stanton has to be happy with this. After slicing his drive into the rough, then two stroking onto the green, he now lacks a fifteen-foot putt to be one over par. Of course, fifteen feet is a long way, especially over mixed grass with a diverse cross grain that . . .”

“Do you mind?” J. D. Stanton snapped. “I’m trying to play a little golf here.”

Jim Walsh cleared his throat and grinned sheepishly. “Sorry, just trying to create a little atmosphere.”

“I know what you’re trying to do. You’re a stroke behind. If I miss this putt we’ll be even and you’ll have your first and best chance of beating me.”

“I . . . I’m hurt,” Walsh said, his voice oozing with insincerity.

“Sure you are.” Stanton lowered his head, eyed the cup, then the ball. Slowly he drew back the putter and gently swung it forward. The club head made a soft “clack” as it struck the ball. Starting off straight, the ball began a slow curve toward the hole. A moment later it dropped in.

“You are the luckiest man in the world, Captain Stanton,” Walsh said loudly. “That ball should have stopped short by two feet, but no, it just kept rolling. And do you know why?”

“Because the universe is centered around me?” Stanton replied with false arrogance.

“There are plenty of people who would debate that with you—including my sister.”

“I remind you,” Stanton said as he placed his putter back in his golf bag, “that your sister has been my wife for twenty-five years. She’s still happy about that, you know.”

“That’s because she doesn’t play golf with you.” Both men laughed as they stepped into the golf cart.

“True, she is a wise woman.”

“I still think you’re the luckiest man on earth.”

Stanton looked around the verdant golf course. He agreed. He *was* fortunate, indeed. His whole life seemed blessed, a fact that was not wasted on him. Of his thirty years in military life, four had been spent as a student at Annapolis, fourteen in service aboard or around submarines, and six years as captain of his own Ohio class nuclear sub. The final six years, he had taught naval history at Annapolis. Forty-eight years old and six months into retirement, he spent his days writing history books, reading, and playing golf.

“Well,” Stanton said finally, “are we going to talk until it’s dark, or are we going to play the final two holes?”

Jim Walsh did not answer right away. He was looking toward the frontage road that ran by the golf course. “That may depend on those two.” Jim nodded toward a man and woman, each dressed in standard khaki naval uniforms. They had emerged from a dark blue sedan and were walking toward them.

“What do you suppose they want?” Stanton asked. “They look serious.”

“Don’t ask me, I’m just a chaplain, remember?”

“Yeah, well, I’ve been retired for six months. They can’t be here for me.”

“I bet the fine print on your discharge papers says different.”

Stanton sighed heavily. Jim was right; he could be recalled back to duty on a moment’s notice, but that was unlikely. Only something extremely urgent could trigger such a recall.

“Well, if they’re here for either one of us, it can’t be good. When they come looking for the chaplain it means something bad has happened.”

“Amen to that,” Jim exclaimed.

Neither man moved from the golf cart to meet the two officers, preferring to wait until the last second to find out why the navy had dispatched two of its people to a golf course.

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” the woman said. She had a pleasant round face graced by intelligent brown eyes and short auburn hair. Stanton judged her to be no older than twenty-five. Her lieutenant bars looked as if they had just been taken out of the box that morning. With her was a stocky ensign with a ruddy complexion. He looked even younger. “I’m sorry to bother you. We are looking for Captain Julius D. Stanton.”

Stanton cringed. He hated the name Julius. “That would be me,” Stanton said without humor. “That’s Captain J. D. Stanton, *retired*.”

“Yes, sir,” the lieutenant replied. “I’m Lieutenant Donna Wilcox and this is Ensign Harold McGlidden.”

Stanton nodded slightly, but said nothing.

“Sir, I’ve been asked to escort you to—”

“Perhaps you didn’t hear me, Lieutenant,” Stanton interrupted. “I’m retired. I’m no longer in the navy. Now I play golf three days a week. This is one of those days, and you’re burning my daylight.”

“Yes, sir. I understand.” Donna stiffened. “Nonetheless, sir, my orders are to present you with this.” She held out an envelope. “I am to escort you to the location specified in that document.”

Stanton snatched the envelope from the woman’s outstretched hand and quickly opened it, barely noticing the bold words *Eyes Only* printed on it. It took only a moment for Stanton to examine the paper.

“Is the admiral inviting you to tea?” Walsh asked with a wry smirk.

“Hardly,” Stanton replied solemnly. “It’s an invitation, sure enough. I’m being recalled to active duty.”

“Does it say why?” Walsh inquired sympathetically.

“Not specifically, no.”

Donna cleared her throat. “Excuse me, Captain, but those orders are secret and for your eyes only.”

“I’m aware of that, Lieutenant,” Stanton retorted sharply. He was angry and frustrated by the recall. “This is Lieutenant Commander Jim Walsh. Please don’t insult the chaplain to his face.”

“Yes, sir,” Donna responded. “No insult was intended. It’s just that—”

“It’s just that you’re doing your duty.” Stanton softened his tone. “I can’t fault you for that.” Turning to his brother-in-law, Stanton continued, “It looks like the game’s over, Jim. They’re pulling in my leash.”

“I understand. Just as well, I was going to beat you anyway.”

“Not in this lifetime,” Stanton snorted. Addressing Wilcox and McGlidden, Stanton said, “Very well. Meet me at my home. I’ll change into my uniform—”

“Begging the captain’s pardon, but we’ve taken care of that,” Donna said. “We first went to your home looking for you. Your wife was good enough to provide us with a uniform.”

“My wife gave you one of my uniforms?” Stanton said with surprise. “You actually had the audacity to tell her that I’ve been recalled and then to ask for a uniform?”

“Yes, sir.”

Stanton looked the lieutenant over. “I don’t see any bruises. You seem to have come through that unscathed.”

“Yes, sir. She was very gracious to us.” Donna smiled. “But if I may, sir, I would suggest taking flowers with you when you return home.”

“Saving it all for me, is that it?”

“I can’t be sure, sir, but flowers never hurt.”

Stanton laughed. “I’ll take that under advisement. Take me to the clubhouse; I’ll change there.”

“Very good, sir.” Donna and McGlidden stepped aside to allow Stanton to walk to the car.

Turning to his brother-in-law, Stanton said, “Why is it I feel that this is going to be a very long day?”

“Instinct,” Walsh said. “I’ll take care of the clubs and the cart; you take care of yourself.”



Stanton stood looking at himself in the mirror. Despite not having worn the khaki uniform in half a year, it still fit. He would never admit it to the two naval officers who waited in the hall outside, but he enjoyed the feel of the uniform. Despite his protestations about being called back to duty, he missed the daily routine of the navy. He missed giving and receiving salutes, he missed the missions, but most of all he missed the sea.

While many sailors complained about the required WES-PACS that bound them to six-month excursions at sea, Stanton relished it. He did not miss land, did not miss the city. All that

he ever missed was his wife whom he loved dearly. He knew the months he spent at sea were lonely and difficult days for Peggy, but she was resilient and never complained.

The very weight and feel of the uniform made Stanton feel good. He had always liked the way the cut, the emblems, and the color made him look. At middle age, he was still trim and fit. The gray in his short, dark brown hair was just enough to make him look refined and experienced without appearing old. His hazel eyes still sparkled, still beamed intelligence and confidence.

A knock on the door jarred Stanton's mind back to the moment.

"How are we doing, sir?" It was Donna's voice.

Instead of answering, Stanton stepped briskly from the men's room. His two escorts immediately came to stiff attention.

"As you were," Stanton said. "Let's get this over with." He walked down the aisle to the country club dining room and out the entry doors, Wilcox and McGlidden close on his heels.



August 1, 1943

150 nautical miles northeast of the Azores

Richard Morrison was angry.

Concussion.

Rocking.

Lurching.

An ear-ringing noise reverberated down the metal cylinder in which Morrison stood.

It shouldn't have happened, Morrison thought. It was a bonehead mistake—my bonehead mistake. Looking up from the fingernail

he pretended to nonchalantly clean, he looked at the men who surrounded him. Each gazed at him with anxious eyes, awaiting any words that came out of his mouth. He said nothing, returning his gaze to the chosen fingernail.

He wanted desperately to reach up and pinch the bridge of his nose, or to rub his eyes, but that could be interpreted as nervousness or even fear. Although such an interpretation would be correct, it would send the wrong signal to his crew, something he did not want to do. He had to appear unflappable.

Concussion. Once again, Morrison was rocked back and forth. The sharp sound pierced his ears and made his head pulse with pain. The deep underlying rumble that accompanied the concussion vibrated through him, threatening to liquefy the very marrow of his bones. He and his crew were in hell.

“Depth?” he asked quietly.

“Passing one-five-zero,” came the loud reply. Answering was a sailor in the control room who Morrison knew could not be over nineteen years old. The lad was scared stiff; fear oozed through his words.

“Very well,” Morrison said calmly. “Water temperature?”

“Five-three degrees and dropping steadily.”

“Maintain crash dive until two-two-five feet, then ease the bubble to zero. They should have lost sonar by then.”

“Aye, Captain, maintain dive to two-two-five feet.”

Creaks and groans echoed off the metal bulkheads as the water pressure compressed the submarine’s skin.

“Two more splashes, Captain.” The words came from a sweaty sailor who monitored the hydrophones.

Morrison could feel his crew tense. Each one knew that more depth charges were on their way, and if they exploded close enough to the USS *Triggerfish* they could cause severe damage, maybe even send her to the bottom with her crew encased in

the hull of a massive metal coffin. An explosion just fifty feet away could cripple the boat; twenty-five away the blast would be lethal. Their remains would never be recovered.

It had happened to many others before. Already the United States had lost over twenty submarines. In each case an epitaph was written in the record books: "Overdue and presumed lost."

The words appeared in Morrison's mind like the credits at the end of a Betty Grable movie: "USS *Triggerfish*, overdue and presumed lost." Sixty-five brave men overdue and presumed lost; six officers, overdue and presumed lost; scores of wives, children, parents, and sweethearts left to wonder at the final fate of those whom they loved.

It was that last thought that most bothered Morrison. He had been in tough situations before. He had even had to endure depth charges before, but in those times he had endured knowing that his life was right and that he had taken care of matters that would arise in his death.

This time was different. He had left something undone, words unspoken. Morrison had always been a family man. He loved his role of husband and father and had taken great care to protect his family from disruption and anxiety, at least the best he could during a world war. But the day he shipped out, he and his wife had a rare argument. Morrison was tense about the upcoming mission; he hadn't slept well and was feeling slightly ill. His wife Sandi, a normally quiet and reserved woman, had been pressing him on some matter that he considered unimportant in light of his departure. Now for the life of him, he couldn't remember what it was she wanted. All he remembered was snapping at her and she returning words of like kind. Soon they were shouting, their hot words permeating the small navy house with anger.

Morrison had stormed out of the house, his duffel bag over his shoulder. As he looked back he saw his wife in tears and their

four-year-old son standing at the door. He turned his back and walked away.

That image haunted him every hour he had been at sea. Once his anger had settled, he realized the foolishness of the argument and recognized its source as simple fear. He was afraid he would never hold his wife in his arms and never see his boy grow. She had been fearful that her husband might lay entombed in a submarine at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. Instead of facing those fears they had argued.

Morrison felt the perfect fool. He wished with all his might that he could have those moments to live over again. There would be no argument, only embraces, hugs, and kisses.

Concussion.

The lights flickered, blinked out for a moment, then returned. A second later another explosion. The submarine rocked harshly, causing the crew to frantically grab for any support possible to keep themselves from falling headlong into a bulkhead.

Morrison heard his executive officer swear in the control room one deck below him. "This guy really knows what he's doing."

"Splashes."

The exec swore again.

Not only had Morrison left home under the worst possible conditions, he was also responsible for their present danger. It had been a mistake, the kind of mistake that a junior officer would make, not something a seasoned captain on his third patrol would do. They had been bearing down on a German supply convoy and, in keeping with their general orders to sink any and all enemy ships, had taken a depth of fifty-five feet. Through the periscope, Morrison had counted the number of ships in the convoy. It was a small one with a troopship, a tanker,

and a supply ship, as well as two smaller craft. All of this was led by a warship fore and aft.

Plotting torpedo solutions based on the bearings given by Morrison, the crew targeted the trailing warship. The idea was simple: kill the aft warship, then take a new bearing on the lead ship which would attempt to circle back on the sub. Two torpedoes for each would leave two more in the bow tubes for one of the supply ships. Once those “fish” were in the water, Morrison would call for a crash dive, level off deep allowing his crew to reload the bow tubes, and then they would again assume periscope depth. If possible they would begin a pursuit of the remaining ships.

It was a good tactic and would have worked well had not Morrison’s mistake and bad luck short-circuited the plan. Morrison’s blunder had been an elementary one. Normally when the periscope broke the surface, Morrison would check for ships by making a 360-degree search. But when he had looked through the periscope, he immediately saw the convoy, and forgoing normal procedures he began issuing attack commands. Had he searched the entire horizon he would have seen yet another ship, a German destroyer, bearing down on them from close range.

Still the plan might have worked if the MK-14 torpedoes fired had exploded instead of impacting the side of the target with an impotent thud. He wished his boat had been equipped with the more reliable MK-18 torpedoes. Too many men had died because of faulty magnetic detonators.

A third of the *Triggerfish’s* crew was new, including the radar operator who took a few minutes too long to note that the smudgy blip on his screen was a ship closing on their location. When he did realize the significance of what he was seeing he shouted a warning:

“Conn, sonar, target bearing one-eight-five and closing fast.”

Morrison immediately spun the periscope around. What he saw made his stomach turn: the bow of the destroyer making thirty knots right at them.

“Down scope,” Morrison shouted. “Crash dive.”

The exec relayed the command and added: “Take her deep. Fifteen degree down bubble. All ahead full. Dive! Dive! Dive!”

The Klaxon belched its dive call. Immediately the ship, directed by its bow planes digging into the water, dipped sharply down.

Issuing more commands, Morrison barked, “Rig for collision!”

Throughout the Gato class submarine, men scrambled to shut hatches and to take positions. In the maneuvering room seamen pulled levers that would crank the electric motors to full speed. On the surface the *Triggerfish* could make twenty-one knots with all four of its diesel engines churning. Submerged, however, her top speed was limited to nine knots.

Five minutes later the word came that splashes were heard on the surface. The sensitive hydrophones were picking up the sound of explosive depth charges hitting the surface and beginning their deadly descent.

“Hard right rudder!” Morrison commanded.

“Aye, hard right rudder,” came the reply from the control room.

The first explosions were too far away to cause physical damage, but the sound alone shook the crew. Fortunately, the destroyer did not yet know the *Triggerfish*'s depth or bearing. Morrison's hope was to dive deep enough to lose the surface ship. The water became colder the deeper the sub traveled. If the submarine could drop below a cold thermal layer, then the destroyer's sonar would be reflected back without revealing the *Triggerfish*'s position. The density of the cold water would surround the sub in a blanket of protection.

Ping!

Ping! Piiiiing!

Sonar from the surface had found them. A crewman began to swear unrelentingly. The executive officer, Steve Sapolsky, shot him an angry glance that carried more meaning than any words could. The sailor immediately fell silent.

Although Morrison and his crew were well below periscope depth, he could still see in his mind the activity on the surface. One of the battleships would circle back to help the destroyer track and sink their prey. That meant that many more depth charges would soon be on their way. It was a cat and mouse game, and the *Triggerfish* was the mouse.

In review, some would call this a comedy of errors: torpedoes that would not detonate, a captain who made a fundamental mistake, and a radar man who failed to see a target. Except there was nothing comedic about the situation. Each underwater explosion rocked the submarine violently and each concussion was felt with teeth-jarring intensity.

There was only one goal at this point: survive. If they were lucky their craft would remain functional and they would not have to return to port for repair. If they were unlucky, then there would be nothing to repair and they would all be dead—buried in a grave of cold, dark seawater, the surface with its warmth and air eight hundred feet above.

Morrison's mind raced back to that recurrent image of his wife, eyes red from crying, and his son standing in the doorway, thumb resolutely stuck in his mouth, as Morrison walked away in a huff. That was no way to part. As far as he was concerned, he had to survive if only to make amends.

"Depth?" Morrison asked firmly.

"Passing two-double-zero."

"Very well," Morrison replied with a nod, then to his executive officer he said, "Secure for silent running."

“Aye,” the exec repeated then barked the related orders. “Secure for silent running. Bring us level at two-two-five feet, ahead slow. Rudder amidships.”

The *Triggerfish* slowed as it leveled in the dark, cold waters. Throughout the boat crewmen began shutting down all machinery that might make noise that could be radiated through the hull and heard by the enemy “on the roof” 225 feet above them. Even the circulation system was shut down so that its fans would not give away their position. Then every man stood silently in place. When essential words were uttered they were done in the quietest possible whisper.

“Splashes.” The words were spoken breathlessly. “Sound distant.”

Moments later the sound of two depth charges, conducted by the thick seawater, rattled through the sub. This time, however, there was no rocking. The explosions were too far away.

“All stop,” Morrison ordered.

“All stop, aye!”

The exec leaned forward toward his captain and whispered, “You don’t want to take her deeper? We’re capable of greater depth.”

“I know that,” Morrison said quietly. “I’m betting they know it too. They’ll assume that we’ll level off just above our crush depth. If they do, the depth charges will drop below us.”

Sapolsky nodded. “Now what?” he asked.

“We wait,” Morrison replied softly. “Now we wait.”



Stanton spent several moments taking in the sight before him. He blinked repeatedly, unwilling to believe his own eyes. “This is a joke, isn’t it?” he asked no one in particular.

“No, sir,” Lieutenant Donna Wilcox said evenly. “It’s not a joke. It’s not a drill. It’s not a test. It is the real thing.”

Stanton continued staring.

“It’s a submarine, sir,” Donna offered.

“I know it’s a submarine, Lieutenant. I write books about naval history; I skippered a submarine for a lot of years. I know a submarine when I see one.”

“Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.”

“Of course,” Stanton said, softening his tone, “I never served on anything like that. It’s a museum piece.”

There were a few moments of silence as Stanton took in the long straight lines before him. The tide was moving out, revealing more of the sleek shape that peered through the waves. Its bow was sharp and angular, unlike the modern teardrop shape that was standard on nuclear submarines. Its conning tower, which leaned slightly to one side, was boxy and cluttered with periscopes, antennae, radar dish, and lookout stations.

“Incredible,” Stanton offered.

“It’s a little before my time, sir,” Donna replied.

“It’s a lot before both our times,” Stanton said, walking closer to the shoreline. “She’s magnificent, but her kind went out of service over four decades ago.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Look at her, Lieutenant,” Stanton said like an auto collector eyeing an antique car. “Improved Gato class. They were the workhorse of World War II. They were a masterpiece of nautical engineering for the time. Quick on the surface and deadly underwater. Long range too. If you had to be on a submarine during the war that was the type to be on.” Stanton chuckled. “They even had air-conditioning.”

“I wouldn’t know, sir,” Donna replied. “I never understood the wisdom of getting on a boat that sinks on purpose.”

Stanton glanced at the lieutenant next to him. He knew that she was not a submariner from the moment he met her. Not only because she was a woman and women didn't serve on submarines. That observation was obvious. But there was something that went beyond gender. An officer who earned the submarine logo of two dolphins bracketing a submarine always wore them proudly.

"Fill me in, Lieutenant," Stanton said firmly.

"At 0645 this morning a Mr. Jeffrey Thompson was hang gliding when he spied the sub aground here on Torrey Pines beach. He called SUBCOMPAC and made a report. The Coast Guard was notified as were the local lifeguards. Between them and the San Diego Police Department the area was secured before the beach crowd arrived. This being March the crowds are minimal, especially here."

Stanton nodded. He had been driven to the top of the cliffs overlooking the beach and then began the slow and slippery trek to the shoreline, leaving Ensign McGlidden with the car. His highly polished shoes were now covered in dirt and sand. This was not an easy place to reach, and for that he was thankful.

"After the area was secured, my commander sent Ensign McGlidden and me in search of you. He felt that with your experience and understanding of naval history, you would be the best one to oversee the investigation."

"I'm honored," Stanton said with a slight touch of sarcasm. He was, however, glad he had been called. Just seeing the old submarine was a thrill.

"Has anyone been aboard yet?" he asked.

"No, sir," Donna replied. "We were awaiting your orders."

"Do we have an identification?"

"We're working on that. All we have is the designation SS-210."

“The *Triggerfish*,” Stanton said, bewildered.

“Excuse me, sir?” Donna said with amazement. “You know the name of the sub?”

“I know more than that,” Stanton explained. “The *Triggerfish* was Captain Morrison’s boat. He was her skipper when she went down in 1943. Exceptional man.”

“Went down?”

“Well, she was believed to have been lost in August of 1943. Her last position was a couple of hundred miles north or north-east of the Azores. She never came back.”

“It looks like she just has.”

“Yeah, over fifty years late.”

A tall, imposing man in a Coast Guard uniform trudged through the sand toward Stanton and Donna. He held his head high as if attempting to ignore the little plumes of fine powdery sand that were kicked airborne with each step. It was difficult, Stanton decided, to look dignified when walking through sand.

Upon reaching the two, the Coast Guard officer offered a sharp salute to Stanton, who returned an equally crisp response. Although the Coast Guard was assigned to the Department of Transportation during times of peace, military courtesies still held across service lines.

“I’m Commander Ira Stewart, U.S. Coast Guard,” the man said in words delivered as sharply as his salute. “I take it that you’re Captain Stanton.”

“Correct.”

“I’m your liaison with the Coast Guard,” Stewart said. “I’ve been ordered to support you in any way possible.”

Stanton looked the man over briefly. He was taller than Stanton by three inches, stately, and possessed a self-confidence and dignified intelligence that made him look as if he should be smoking a pipe. There was a hint of gray in his hair that aug-

mented his warm gray eyes. His quick smile and easy delivery contrasted with his sharp, angular features. Stanton judged him to be a man that was quick to laugh, but who took his work seriously. He felt an instant rapport with him.

“Pleased to meet you, Commander,” Stanton offered. “This is Lieutenant Wilcox. She is . . .” Stanton paused for a moment and looked at Donna, perplexed. “What exactly is your function here, Lieutenant?”

“Personal aide, sir,” the young officer answered. “I’m your personal aide.”

“She’s my personal aide,” Stanton said with a wry smile. Stewart reflected the grin and nodded at Donna. “You were the first on the scene?”

“Correct,” Stewart replied, turning to face the bulky metal enigma stuck in the mire. “We immediately set up an ocean perimeter with one cutter and several smaller craft patrolling just beyond the breakers. We also stationed some men along the beach to make sure no one approached the sub. As you can see, the navy sent a few marines to secure the shoreline.”

“Has anyone actually been on the sub?” Stanton asked.

“No. We have orders not to approach. Besides, most of the deck was still underwater at the time. If we had opened one of the hatches we would have flooded the interior.”

“Good,” Stanton uttered, walking toward the shore.

“Good?” Donna asked. “Shouldn’t we get on the boat as soon as possible? I mean, what about the crew?”

Stanton shook his head. “Too much is at stake. The only people I know who use ancient subs like these are third world countries. For all we know, some terrorist could have planted explosives or worse on that boat and is just waiting for us to open a hatch.”

“What could be worse than explosives?” Donna asked.

“Chemicals. Biologicals. Many things really,” Stanton said.

“As far as the crew is concerned,” Stewart joined in, “they’re most likely not in there. If there was anyone on board, they have either left under the cover of darkness before she beached, or they are all dead.”

“But it doesn’t make sense,” Donna continued. “How would a terrorist get hold of a World War II submarine?”

“There are any number of countries that would sell a surplus sub for the right price. Although that’s not likely in this case.”

“So what do we do now?” Donna inquired. “I mean, we have to do something, don’t we?”

“Yes,” Stanton answered patiently. “But we are going to do it step-by-step and with the greatest care.”



Without the benefit of forward motion the *Triggerfish* slowly rose through the ocean depths. The easiest solution to the problem would be to order all ahead slow. The bow planes would then force the nose of the craft down into the depths. But starting the engines meant the sub ran the risk of detection, and that could be the end of its crew. Morrison had convinced himself that he was through making mistakes.

“Depth?” he asked quietly.

“One-three-five feet and rising slowly,” came the whispered reply.

“Time?”

“One hour ten since the crash dive, sir.”

“Very well,” Morrison replied, then turned his attention to the sailor monitoring the hydrophone. “Anything?”

“Nothing, sir.”

Thirty minutes ago the same sailor had informed Morrison that he could hear the propellers of both surface ships moving away.

The air was becoming heavy with the smell of men. With the circulation system shut down, the filters could not properly convert carbon dioxide into oxygen. Nearly eighty pairs of lungs struggled to seize their share of the diminishing breathable air.

Enough was enough, Morrison decided. There was a chance that a mistake had been made and that one or more of the attack ships still hovered above them like deadly, steel blimps ready to send the *Triggerfish* to the bottom the moment she broke silent running. Still, the odds were low that such was the case. Most likely the hydrophone had correctly relayed the truth of the matter: the destroyer and warship were gone.

There was only one way to find out.

“Take us up, Mr. Sapolsky,” Morrison said aloud. His voice sounded strange in the silent sub. “Make it periscope depth.”

“Aye, sir.” Turning, he commanded, “Secure from silent running. Three degree up bubble; ahead slow. Let’s stay alert. This may not be over.”

Men who had held their silence for what seemed an eternity began to chat idly. The sound of the prattle was a welcome relief to the suffocating blanket of reticence they had all been forced to wear.

A wave of relief washed over Morrison as he realized that the danger was past. He and his crew had survived, overcoming mistakes and bad luck. His thoughts ran to his family. He wished he could pick up a phone and hear their voices. That was impossible. Later, he could take time to write them, but it could be weeks before he could send or receive a letter.

Part of him hoped that the *Triggerfish* had sustained sufficient damage to require a return to port; another part of him felt stabbing pangs of guilt at just the thought. He had a job to do; he had been commissioned to fight for his country. But he was human, and no captain’s insignia could remove his emotions. In battle he

could be as cold and firm as the steel hull that surrounded him, but even that hull could fold beyond its crush depth.

“Periscope depth, sir,” Sapolsky said.

“Very well, Mr. Sapolsky. Up periscope.” A crewman pushed a lever that activated the hydraulic lifts that would raise the sighting device through fifty-five feet of murky Atlantic.

Pulling down the control handles, Morrison draped his right arm over one and held the other tightly in his left. Spinning quickly around the axis of the periscope, he made a quick survey of the surrounding sea. Not wanting to repeat his previous mistake, Morrison took another sighting, this time more deliberate.

“Seas are calm, two-foot swells at most. No targets visible.” Morrison’s words were calm and professional, but his heart was racing. They had really made it. “Sonar?”

“Sonar clear, sir.”

“Very well. Surface. Mr. Sapolsky, please make sure that we’re clear on the SJ and SD radar. I don’t want some plane or ship unloading on us now.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Once we’re on the surface, have the chief-of-the-boat compile a complete damage report.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Once we’re clear on the radar, then let the men take turns topside. I think they might like some fresh air.”

“Yes, sir, I’m sure they would appreciate it.”

“You have the conn, Mr. Sapolsky,” Morrison said soberly. “I’ll be in my quarters . . . writing a letter.”



Morrison’s quarters consisted of a small desk, a single bunk, and a sink all crammed into a space only slightly larger than the

walk-in closet of his home. On the walls were a rack for books, an intercom box, and a picture of his family.

Spartan and cramped as it was, it still had its advantages. Unlike the enlisted men who slept in a bunk that a crewmate had just vacated (“sharing the stink,” they called it), he had a bunk to himself. He also had a small degree of privacy. There was no door to separate his quarters from the activity in the corridor, only a curtain hung across the doorway. In a submarine, however, a curtain provided some seclusion, an item coveted by any submariner.

Penning the last words of his log entry, Morrison closed the book and placed it in the wall rack. The chief-of-the-boat had brought a better than expected report. The *Triggerfish* had sustained only minor damage, most of it electrical. Estimated repair time was less than two days. That was the good news; the bad news was that any thought of pursuing the German convoy had to be dismissed.

Taking a lined piece of paper from the tiny desk he laid it out and began to write:

Dear Sandi,

It's near midday here in the Atlantic and we are staying busy with some minor repairs. I have much to write, but only two words come to mind: I'm sorry. I should never have left the way I did, and now each moment that passes is filled with regret. I should have left with words about my undying love for you and little Ronnie. I am proud of you both. Being married to a navy man is no easy task—especially in war. I only wish . . .

“Captain to the bridge!” The tinny voice of Steve Sapolsky poured from the intercom, invading Morrison’s thoughts. Quickly he folded the letter and placed it in the desk. Walking briskly, Morrison made his way from the cabin down the narrow

gray passageway, up a slender metal ladder, and through the hatch that led to the open-air bridge.

The air was cool and heavy with the smell of salt. A gust of wind blew through Morrison's dark hair. The sun was high in the sky, and its bright light forced the captain to squint and his eyes to momentarily tear. Sunlight was vastly different than the dim artificial light in the boat.

Standing on the wet metal deck, he took a quick survey of the sea around him. Gentle ocean swells caressed the hull of the sleek submarine as it moved slowly in its northeasterly direction.

"What is it, Mr. Sapolsky?" Morrison asked wearily.

"Lookouts have spotted something fifteen degrees off our starboard bow," Sapolsky replied, pointing out the direction.

Morrison took his exec's binoculars and held them to his eyes. He scanned the sea in the direction that Sapolsky had indicated. At first he saw nothing, but then a small, dark object bobbed into view.

"I have it," he said, "but I can't make it out."

"I think it's a raft," a voice above him said. Morrison turned to see one of the two lookouts perched on the conning tower. "It looks like there may be someone aboard, sir."

"Mr. Sapolsky, bring us to bear on the raft. Let's also get some men with side arms up here just in case our unknown doesn't want visitors."

"Aye, Captain."

Orders were barked out by Sapolsky, and soon the *Triggerfish* had turned to its new bearing. No one spoke on the crowded bridge. There was nothing to do but wait until the sub had closed the distance of rolling sea between it and the raft.

Men on deck, who were enjoying the few moments of sun allowed them, watched intently as the raft grew from a mere speck on the water to a recognizable shape. Every eye above-

board, except the lookouts who maintained a constant vigil of both sea and air, was fixed on the mysterious float.

“Whoever he is, he is a long way from home,” Sapolsky offered.

The captain was peering through his binoculars. “Judging by the uniform he wears, home is somewhere in Germany.” Turning to the lookouts, Morrison asked, “Do you see any other rafts or any sign of debris?”

“No, sir,” both lookouts answered in near unison.

“Odd,” Morrison said. “Why would there be only one survivor if a ship went down? Why don’t we see debris? There should be an oil slick at least.”

“I don’t know, sir. Maybe our guest can tell us—assuming he’s alive. He’s not moving.”

“All stop,” Morrison ordered. There was still better than thirty yards between the raft and the *Triggerfish* but Morrison knew the momentum of the sub would continue to propel it forward.

A crewman with a long pole equipped with a hook on the end leaned forward, pressing his stomach against the metal cable that served as a balustrade along the edge of the deck. He stretched until he had snared the small raft, then took a step back, pulling the float to the hull.

Several other crewmen, two armed with military issue .45 caliber pistols, helped pull the raft to the edge of the deck. Together they pulled the mysterious occupant over the steel cable barrier and laid him down on the wood slats that covered the top of the metal hull. The pharmacist’s mate pushed his way through the crowd of sailors and knelt next to the man.

“His uniform is German navy, sir,” the corpsman called out.

“I can see that, Mr. Armstrong,” Morrison shouted in reply. “Is he alive?”

“Yes, sir, he seems to be breathing regularly.” Armstrong paused as he looked down at the unconscious German. “He looks dehydrated and has a heck of a sunburn. He’s been out here a long time.”

Morrison and Sapolsky looked at each other with surprise.

“That means that he’s not from that last convoy,” Sapolsky said. “They’ve been gone only a few hours.”

“True enough,” Morrison agreed. “But where did he come from?”

Sapolsky shook his head and looked down from the conning tower to the deck. “What’s that in the raft?” he said to Morrison.

It had escaped Morrison’s notice at first, but the raft, which at first appeared empty, contained a satchel or some kind of bag. “Mr. Armstrong,” Morrison called out. “What’s that in the raft?”

Armstrong walked over to the raft which, like its former occupant, lay on the deck. He reached over the rubber floats, pulled out the bag, and set it on the deck.

“It’s a leather bag, like what a doctor carries,” Armstrong noted. “Shall I open it, sir?”

“Unless you know another way of seeing what’s inside,” Morrison said strongly.

The sailor bent over the satchel once again, fumbled with the latch, then opened the mouth of the bag wide. He peered in. He gazed at the contents for a moment, then stuck his hand into the bag and moved it around.

“Well?” Morrison asked.

Armstrong turned to face his captain. Morrison could easily see his puzzled expression.

“Dolls, sir! It ain’t got nothin’ but dolls.”

Captain Morrison stepped from his cabin and started down the narrow corridor. At barely over thirty inches wide, the passageway was too tight to allow two men to pass each other without one of them turning sideways. The submarine was designed for war, not comfort. Every inch of the boat's interior was utilized with priority being given to mechanical, electrical, and weapons systems. Everything else was squeezed into what little space remained. There were not even enough bunks for the crew. Instead, they "hot bunked," with one crewman waking up another for his shift, then crawling into the still warm rack for his turn at sleep. Those not lucky enough to be assigned a berth in the crew's quarters slept in the forward or aft torpedo rooms with the twenty-one-foot-long, 3000-pound torpedoes as bunk mates.

Morrison's destination was less than six steps down the passageway. A stout, black sailor stood guarding the door to one of the officer's wardrooms. The *Triggerfish* was capable of sustaining seventy crew and ten officers. On this patrol, however, the complement was smaller with just sixty-five crew and six officers. That left one corner of an officer's stateroom free for their guest.

The black crewman came to attention as Morrison approached. "Captain," he said.

"As you were, Benton," Morrison replied. "Any change in our friend?"

"Not that I know of, sir. Armstrong is in there with him now."

Morrison nodded and stepped into the wardroom. Armstrong, a willowy, red-haired young man from upstate New York, was seated in a padded metal chair. He started to stand, but Morrison waved him off.

"How's he doing?"

Armstrong shook his head. "I can't find much wrong with him. He's dehydrated and sunburned real bad. I can't get him to come to for more than a minute or so. He's been able to drink some water, but then he passes out again. There's not much more that I can do for him."

Morrison took in the still form that lay on the thin mattress. The skin of his face, neck, and hands were a deep red. Small white blisters dotted his forehead and checks.

"We searched his uniform," Armstrong offered. "Found nothin'. Chief Hill was with me when I went through it. He noticed some loose threads on the shoulders and sleeves. It looks like all his insignias were ripped off. He sure must have made somebody mad."

"The chief filled me in. He also brought me the statues."

"Those little dolls? Beats me why he would hang on to those things. And why would they put them in the raft with him? It just don't make sense."

"I think they're more statues than dolls, Armstrong. They mean something to him." Morrison nodded at the unconscious German.

"I guess so."

"When do you think I can ask him some questions?"

Armstrong shrugged. "No idea, Skipper. But I'll let you know as soon as he comes to for more than a minute."

"Very well." Morrison turned and walked from the room.



Americans, Karl Kunzig thought behind closed eyes. He had been conscious for more than two hours by his estimation, but he did not want his rescuers to know that. He wasn't ready to

answer questions, and he needed time to think, time to formulate a plan.

His throat was raw, his face hot and tender. Every part of him ached. It hurt to breathe, but he had to lie still. He had to listen, had to think of a story—a believable lie. All he knew at the moment was that he was on an American submarine. That could be bad, but it was better than dying of exposure in a raft on open sea. Still his next step must be carefully considered and executed or all could be ruined and he would spend his days in an Allied prisoner of war camp.

That will not do, Kunzig thought to himself. *That will not do at all.*