PREFACE

In the following story of the establishment of Tito's supply lines across the Adriatic fictitious names have been assigned to some of the characters, but the characters themselves are portrayed exactly as they seemed to the author.

Virtually no other departure from meticulous accuracy has been made in this narrative, which covers a period of four eventful weeks, a period in which felicitous circumstances and the loyal help of many British and American officers of all ranks, not excepting Admirals and Generals, made possible the accomplishment of an important mission.

The story is not complete. There were difficulties of all sorts in addition to those recorded here. Sometimes our effectiveness was impaired by lack of understanding or ill will, but our true friends were legion. With their assistance our purposes prevailed.

Nothing has been added to the record.

This is how it was. . . .

CHAPTER I

My orders came through late in September.

Italy's forces had secretly surrendered to the Allies on September third—a surrender that was announced to the world five days later when our American landing near Naples had been completed. The guerrillas in the Balkans, Tito's Partisans in particular, were still disarming Italian garrisons.

I read the orders several times and each time with mounting excitement, for they marked the end of a long period of planning and conferring, they inaugurated a new phase in my work . . . action.

Since early in the year I had been responsible for the American part of certain combined British and American secret operations in the Balkans. Headquarters in Cairo had despatched Allied liaison officers, supplies and equipment by parachute to many points in Jugoslavia and Greece where the forces resisting the Axis were most active. I had personally selected and "briefed" American officers sent in for many of these operations and had planned their activities.

During most of this time I was the only American officer to see all correspondence between men in the field and the Headquarters to which they reported in Middle East—an ideal spot from which to study the unfolding events, and

throughout that time Tito's name, still little known to the public, loomed ever larger in despatches.

The new orders relieved me of my desk job and directed that I join my friends in the Balkans. I should get to see Tito now and find out for myself what explained the success of his fabulous troops. First, however, I was to proceed to southern Italy to see what could be done about establishing advanced bases there from which future operations in Jugoslavia could be launched and controlled.

For weeks we had been waiting to shift our bases to Italy. All our sorties were from North Africa and most of our work was done by air. Moving to new ports and airdromes just across the narrow Adriatic from our objectives would give us a terrific impetus.

Bombers based in southern Italy would carry to points in the interior of the Balkans four times as much parachute cargo in any given month as they could transport from bases across the Mediterranean in Africa.

One small wooden schooner sailing across the Adriatic would take more medical supplies and clothing and weapons and food to the besieged guerrillas in one night than fifty of the biggest bombers could ferry over in three weeks.

In September, as the war itself entered a new phase with the Russians shattering German forces in the Dnieper Bend and the Allies working their way north toward Rome, every effort to rush aid to the heroic defenders of the Balkans had to be accelerated to the limit if we were to get there in time. At the end of the month a particularly acute and threatening situation existed in Jugoslavia.

In July and August Tito had deployed his forces between the Germans in the interior and the Italians who garrisoned the Adriatic coast. When news of the armistice reached him

on September eighth he had rushed most of his troops to the sea and overwhelmed or obtained the surrender of virtually every garrison from Dubrovnik in the south to Susak (Fiume) in the north, and he had also succeeded in delaying German columns that attempted to fight their way through, thus acquiring control of virtually the entire coastal reach, including all the oudying islands.

How long would these intrepid Slavs be able to maintain their hold on this vital area which had now, in a sense, become the right flank of the Allied forces advancing in Italy?

By the end of the month one German column, driving south through Knin, had already fought its way to the sea and regained control of the key city of Split, which the Partisans had held for a fortnight. In those late September days no Allied vessel had yet made contact even with the islands off the Dalmatian coast. Indeed, no Allied vessel had yet conducted a reconnaissance of Jugoslav waters.

My first impulse was to rush to Italy, borrow a ship from somebody and hurry across to the other side of the Adriatic to see what could be done about opening sea-routes for Tito's supplies, but innumerable obstacles stood in the way.

First was the fact that the Adriatic itself was the boundary line between two separate theatres of war. At that time the North African Theatre of Operations under General Eisenhower included everything on the southern side of the Mediterranean as far east as Tripoli, all of Sicily and Italy and southern France. The Middle East Theatre included the entire Balkan peninsula as well as Egypt, Libya, Cyrenaica and, of course, the Middle East proper.

The line of demarcation was clearly drawn between these separate commands and no officer in one theatre crossed into the other without first obtaining permission. Lieutenant-

General Sir Maitland (Jumbo) Wilson was as definitely in command in the Balkans and the Middle East as General Eisenhower was in North Africa and Italy.

Wanting bases in southern Italy, the first thing to do was to obtain General Eisenhower's permission to put them in. His approval was necessary before we could even go to Italy on reconnaissance, and when we returned he or his officers would have to specifically approve every detail of our plans, sanction our requests paragraph by paragraph.

Meanwhile, the Allied Forces working their way north in Italy against very heavy opposition would be straining the facilities of the forward ports and airfields to the limit. It might be difficult for us to obtain docking facilities in the larger Adriatic ports, like Brindisi and Bari. There are few all-weather airdromes in southern Italy and it might be weeks before suitable airports could be made available for squadrons of heavy bombers whose operations would not contribute directly to the Italian campaign.

It was certain, too, that in Italy there would be a shortage of the type of supplies the Partisans needed. Such supplies were at least theoretically available in North Africa, but there would be a great shortage of transport to carry them across to Adriatic ports from which they could be run through in small boats to Tito. Even if we succeeded in having them brought over would we be able to dock them? store them? trans-ship them in the crowded harbors?

All these difficulties had to be overcome before we could get to the problem of the supply lines themselves, and when we did get to it there could be no question of boldly sending ships loaded with guns and ammunition across from Italy. The Luftwaffe would see to that! The Luftwaffe and the coast patrols. The job before us then would be a delicate gun-

running operation. We would have to use small ships, little wooden schooners and fishing boats, and slip them through the ever-changing mine-fields in the darkness, probably in spite of patrolling E-Boats, submarines and destroyers. . . .

Any and all these problems could be solved, presumably, but how long would it take? It might be weeks, even months, before the first shipload of supplies could be sent across. Would Tito be able to hold on until we got there?

Nevertheless, mine was a coveted assignment and officers who had been working with me in Cairo were green with envy. To a man they had been counting the days until they could abandon their responsibilities at Headquarters to some newcomer from Washington and join their friends in Jugoslavia, Albania or Greece.

"Who's going with you?" was the first question asked by every one of them.

Well, it was clear there would be jobs for most of them in Italy, at least—and that was a little closer to the field—as soon as the new bases were put in; meanwhile, there was a job for one of them as my assistant, and competition for that duty was keen.

That night, while I was trying to decide whom to take with me, Lieutenant Tim Faulkner called at my billet to plead his case.

"There are plenty of good men and good officers around," he said, modestly, "but you need somebody with you that's got brains as well as guts. This is no easy job you're tackling, and your assistant's job won't be easy either: it's made to order for me."

He had only recently arrived in Cairo and was not as well known to me as some of the other officers in the section, but everything I knew about him was good. He had determina-

tion, resourcefulness, a great deal of guileless charm and absolute integrity.

Tim is big and loosely made. His is not the compact strength of the athlete but rather the flat-muscled big-framed stamina of a farmer. His head is big, too; broad at the forehead and narrow at the chin. His eyes are deep-set and expressive, as serious as a thoughtful child's at some moments, full of merriment at others, and always very direct. He is accustomed to making an impression, conscious of his forceful-ness, but sensitive and careful not to be a bully in the use of it.

His approach on this occasion was characteristic. He had not lived thirty-one years without discovering that his intelligence was above the average. Allusion to that fact, if strictly relevant, would not seem to him boastful. Failure to mention it in listing his assets, as he was doing now, would seem to him a lack of moral courage rather than an expression of modesty—almost a form of dishonesty.

He had a peculiar deadly-earnest way of presenting his arguments in a low voice, without emphasis, setting his words out carefully and watching the person to whom he was speaking with a level and unblinking gaze, like a hypnotist. As he talked that evening I recalled a scene that had taken place in the office some days before, soon after his arrival from the States.

On that day he had come in with a sheaf of maps under his arm to talk about a group of industrial installations he wanted to destroy in the Balkans. There were four of them,

some distance apart, and a real blow would be struck at the enemy if they could be put out of commission.

"I've done a little work on these targets," he had said, as he came in. "I believe they deserve a high priority." Then very deliberately he had selected a map from the bundle

under his arm and spread it before me on the desk. There were four little red circles to indicate the location of his mills and mines. Production figures and statistics were on the tip of his tongue.

"If this data is of any value," he had remarked, in conclusion, "I could summarize it briefly in a written report." I had asked that he do so and observed: "The operations seem feasible, although everything would depend upon the support we could rally in the target areas. The plant that appears most important would be difficult to get at."

"If we proceed against them," he had replied, "that's the one I should like to tackle myself."

That was my first real conversation with Faulkner and I had been rather surprised by the turn it had taken as he sprawled in the chair on the far side of my desk studying the effect of his soft-spoken words.

"I don't want to remain here in an office," he had blurted out suddenly. "I didn't join the army to do that."

He had, I knew, been trained in field-craft, sabotage and demolition, but I had always thought of him as a planner, an executive. He, obviously, had other ideas.

"If you could get in and do the job the odds are probably five to one against your getting out again," I had observed, watching him as sharply as he had been watching me. He had countered, "But the odds are ten to one that a few determined operators would get the job done, and it would be a real kick in the bottom for Hitler. There's a sporting chance of getting out afterward. That's about as good as the odds ever are in this business."

As he sat at the foot of my bed I remember thinking he would get it done, all right; that or anything else he tackled. He was talking now with the same low-pitched intensity,

following my expression with the same unblinking Svengali gaze, still trying to get out of an office and into the field.

I was deeply pleased that he should be eager to come with me on a mission that presented so many difficulties. His "targets" had proven momentarily inaccessible, and should we decide to proceed against them later we would start from the Italian coast, in any case.

So three days later, on October 4 at one o'clock in the morning he and I left Cairo by air, bound for Algiers and General Eisenhower's Headquarters.

The American officer commanding in the Middle East, Major General Ralph Royce, who was, of course, familiar with our projects, would be down in a day or two to attend the conferences and support our requests.

CHAPTER 2

One of the engines faltered on the take-off and our C-54, the Air Transport Command's giant Douglas airliner, made altitude very slowly as we worked our way across the city toward the pyramids. Up front in the control compartment they were fussing with knobs and reading pressures. There was something wrong.

For a while we cruised westward on our course but number three engine seemed "out of sync" and backfired from time to time. Presumably the engineer expected that the trouble, whatever it was, would right itself after a little while, but suddenly the number one engine, out on the far side of the port wing, began to show signs of similar indisposition. Ours was an inauspicious start, but we persisted toward the west.

The pyramids sailed by in the moonlight, scarcely a thousand feet below as we began to make altitude, but suddenly the number two engine coughed and sputtered. Then all the engines roared as the pilot opened his throttles and banked us over in a steep turn.

A few minutes later we were back at the Cairo airport, piling out with our equipment.

"Keep in touch with us," the skipper said. "We ought to get off later today; but when three out of four God-damned engines are temperamental it's time to quit."

"Check!" Tim said, with a big grin. "I'm glad you feel that way about it."

By five o'clock we were back in Cairo and by eight o'clock we were both on the job, attending to details that had been washed out at the last minute on the previous evening because there had been no time for them. At dinner they had seemed unimportant; now they appeared to have some screaming urgency about them. We worked frantically all day long, keeping in touch with the airport. Departure time was finally set for one o'clock in the morning and we were both completely worn out as we rode back to the airport soon after midnight, hoping that this time "it would take," as Tim put it. There are good seats on the C-54's and we would get some rest aboard since Algiers was nine hours away. There was little likelihood of any rest there until after our first day's work was done.

We got off that night, but not until almost three o'clock in the morning. Tim was still sustained by a sense of adventure, but I was beginning to think we were taking a lot of trouble to rush to a place where there would be nothing waiting for us but bad news and frustration and delays when we could delay a day or two and fly quietly out with General Royce in his private plane. Fatigue is a saboteur in wartime. It's a soldier's worst enemy. It deprives him of his will to get things done, unless he is constantly on his guard.

By noon the next day we were circling the airport at Maison Blanche—"White House," the airport of Algiers. An hour later we had lunched and were ready for business, freshly shaved, at AFHQ.

There we were told that all the "Special Operations" in the theatre, such as commando raids, the provisioning and controlling of guerrilla bands behind enemy lines, the gathering of intelligence about the enemy's strength and position, and

other activities, were all under G-3—the division of a headquarters staff which is concerned with plans and operations. We hurried to the indicated office and there met an American Lieutenant-Colonel, Kenneth Mann, who proved to be familiar with Middle East's desire to obtain bases in southern Italy; certain reports and recommendations had already come to his desk and he gave them to us to read.

Colonel Mann sent us on to various other offices that afternoon and by evening the pattern of the next few days was clear. There would be a conference with General Eisenhower as soon as General Royce arrived; our plans would receive official blessing—at least we hoped they would; then we would be free to make a reconnaissance trip to the east coast of Italy.

Indeed, there was already a plan afoot for such a reconnaissance. It was the only action envisioned in the reports Colonel Mann had been kind enough to show us. A motor launch or some other small vessel of this type would be made available to all the special operations officers from Middle East. As soon as the meetings in Algiers were over it would ferry them across to Brindisi.

This procedure was strictly logical and sane . . . but slow. Yet there seemed no way to avoid these preliminary steps, no way to move directly toward our objective without submitting to routine and "going through channels."

Late in the afternoon Tim and I found a billet. We got some dinner and turned in early, both tired and a bit discouraged. We were dealing with big wheels and so we knew they must turn slowly, but was there not some way in which we could get on with our part of the work? There seemed no way, that Tuesday night, but the events of the next twenty-four hours were to precipitate a flood of action that would sweep us away right into the heart of Jugoslavia, that would

carry us to Italy by air and across the Adriatic in a matter of hours, leaving us in possession of a fleet of ships and thousands of tons of supplies. . . .

We needed rest that night and we slept better, no doubt, because of our state of mind: neither of us would have slept at all had we known what the next day had in store for us.

Early Wednesday morning as we hurried through a meager breakfast the telephone rang. Colonel Mann was asking for me.

"Can you get down here right away?" he said. "There's an interesting development in your affairs."

"Yes, sir, I'll be right down."

Tim was on his feet and ready when I got back. "Is Royce here?" he asked.

"No. I don't know what's up. Mann says it's important. Got to get down there right away."

Tim and I parted company at the door of AFHQ. Our commanding officer was coming through Algiers that morning on his way to Washington. We had decided during the night to see him and explain the situation, asking his blessing for any slightly unorthodox measures we might employ to force the pace and get on with the job. Tim would have to go to the airport at Maison Blanche alone. He promised to hurry back. I rushed up to the Special Operations office.

When I got there Colonel Mann said: "Two Jugoslavs who claim to be Partisan officers blew in this morning. They claim they just got over from one of the islands. They're an odd-looking pair, but you know more about these birds than we do. Maybe they're all right. Do you think you could tell?"

"Probably."

He got to his feet and opened a door leading into an adjacent office. "Come in, please," he said, pleasantly.

The two who entered were Steve Mladineo and Ivo Radic. They wore a nondescript mixture of German and Italian uniforms. Both were clean shaven, both carried little blue caps tailored like the garrison caps of the American army, but with red stars sewn to the front of them. They appeared to have nothing else in common.

Mladineo was slight and of medium height. There was almost a suggestion of adolescence about his personality, although he was obviously in his early thirties. His hair was fair and wavy. His features were sensitive and handsome in a delicate, almost fragile way. He looked like a Hollywood crooner dressed up to play a part in a Balkan farce.

His companion, Radic, was thick-set and stalwart. He appeared about fifty. His features were typically Slav. Shrewdness and good-nature and ingenuousness competed with one another to rule his expression, but a certain worldliness remained. He had good hands that now twisted his cap selfconsciously.

Mladineo's pale blue eyes blazed. There was something prophetic in his appearance. A modern John the Baptist, perhaps. . . .

"Do you speak English?" I asked, shaking hands.

"I do," Radic answered. "Commander Mladineo speaks only Italian and German and French—and, of course, Serbo-Croat." Mladineo said nothing. He was studying the faces in the room.

A little investigation revealed that Radic spoke Mladineo's languages and three or four more. His English was nearly flawless and his French proved almost as good, so we adopted that tongue as the common ground and settled down to a serious conversation.

Their story was simple. On the last day of September they had set out at dusk from Vis, an island on the coast of Jugoslavia, aboard a little steamer, a passenger vessel, loaded with wounded Partisans who needed hospitalization. On the morning of October 1 they entered the port of Bari and made arrangements to unload and hospitalize their wounded, then they called on the local military authorities to solicit them for aid in other forms.

Their little ship, the Bog s Noma—her name caused much mirth at Headquarters, and even more when it was learned that the phrase means "God be with us"—had empty coal bunkers, no water and no food aboard. The Partisans, with the religiously named little steamer, wanted coal and water and food—and guns, if possible—to carry back.

British authorities in the port were interested in the strange pair and felt sure that down the way, at the headquarters of the Allied Military Mission in Brindisi and at the Admiral's Headquarters in Taranto, there were officers who would have innumerable questions to ask them. They asked a good many themselves, but they were not sure just what questions to ask. Jugoslavia, across the narrow sea, was as far from their normal preoccupations as the moon. So they bundled their Partisan guests into a staff car and sent them down to see Lieutenant-General Sir Frank N. Mason-MacFarland, head of the Allied Mission in Brindisi.

"Mason Mack," as he is known in the service, received them well. He was interested in their story and promised them every assistance he could give, but he was sure they should go on to Taranto to Naval Headquarters to call on the Admiral. So he put them into another staff car and sent them on.

Vice Admiral Arthur John Power, C.B.R.N., was interested too. He saw them personally and devoted some time to their interrogation. He promised them a couple of hundred tons of supplies—mostly food. He would, he said, be pleased to do anything he could to help them; but he thought they should go on to AFHQ to make a full report to the intelligence officers there who would be eager for fresh information from Jugoslavia. AFHQ might also be able to give them substantial assistance. So he loaded them into an aeroplane. . . .

"And here we are . . ." Radic finished.

Radic told most of the story. He finished it with a flourish of his hands and a smile which indicated pretty clearly that he and Mladineo were way out of their depth but that they were eager to do whatever was expected of them and get back to the ship they had left at Bari.

"Did Tito send you out?" I inquired.

"We were sent by Coastal Command," Mladineo answered.

"What, precisely, is your mission?"

'We were to take the wounded out and do everything possible to come back with our bunkers full of coal and as much food as we could put aboard, which is to say about seventy tons," Mladineo answered.

He looked slightly defiant. I wondered if he felt he had been kidnapped. In a sense this is precisely what had happened to him.

"How strong is the Partisan position on the coast?" I asked.

'We control all the coast but a few cities and towns," was the proud reply. "We held those too for a while, but the Germans attacked with heavy armor and we had nothing to use to stop them. They came through. They retook Split and Omis and Makarska and the mouth of the Neretva River and some other points; but we still hold all the islands and most of the coast."

Half an hour's interrogation yielded abundant proof that they had both been in recent actions and knew the situation on the coast. Mladineo knew quite a little about the Allied Mission at Tito's Headquarters in Jajce. He knew the names of several of the British and American officers there. Radic appeared to have less knowledge of the Partisan movement as a whole, but it was difficult to judge. It was impossible to ascertain absolutely from their answers that they were bona-fide Partisans and not a pair of German agents; but the impression that they were perfectly honest and authentic grew. Mladineo, in particular, was convincing. By ten o'clock I was ready to give them a clean bill of health.

"They're all right," I told the Colonel. "What do we do next:'"

"G-2 and ONI" (the Offices of Military and Naval Intelligence) "want to see them," he answered. "Will you take them down?"

I agreed at once. These conversations would provide a further opportunity for interrogation. They would also give me a chance to find out what those officers had in their files about Jugoslavia and the Dalmatian coastal waters.

Tim got back from the airport just before noon. By that time the interviews with G-2 and ONI were over and I had released my Jugoslav friends until three o'clock. Our Colonel from Cairo, he reported, sent his best wishes. He approved in advance any reasonable measures we might adopt to hurry things along and get our supplies moving across to Tito.

We lunched hurriedly and returned to AFHQ to inquire whether General Royce was expected during the afternoon and were pleased to learn that he would arrive soon after three o'clock. At Colonel Mann's offices we also learned with pleasure that an officer—a major—from our special detachment in Middle East, who had been loaned to AFHQ to go into Corsica ahead of the invasion, was now back from that detail and once more available for duty with us. So there were now three of us instead of two in Algiers. That might prove useful. I hurried to his billet to say hello and see what sort of condition he might be in. There was a report that he was ill.

I found him suffering from dysentery and in need of hospitalization for a few days. He looked pretty shaky but he had enough spirit left to regale me with a hilarious account of his Corsican adventures in his own extraordinary profane and scientific style. He was glad to be back in Africa and eager to be with us again.

"If we should decide to push on to Italy without waiting for all the conferences to take place could you sit in for us?" I asked him, when he had finished his story and I had explained our mission.

"I can for a few days, until I'm well enough to get out of here and join you in Italy," he grinned.

We could hear the doctor coming in so I said good-bye and promised to keep him informed about our plans and movements. Things were looking up, I thought, on the way back to AFHQ. A plan was beginning to take form in my mind. If the Eisenhower conference should come off well . . . then we might get going. . . .

When I met Tim twenty minutes later I had a plan.

"If this afternoon's conference conforms with our expectations," I told him, "we can leave the Major here for the rest of the meetings and catch a plane to Italy tomorrow. You and Mladineo and Radic and I had better get up to Bari and find out what's happening there. Until we know a great deal about the Adriatic that we can't find out there we must phrase all our requests in general terms, and that won't get us anywhere.

We must find out precisely what we want to do and how we want to operate."

Tim's eyes were shining. "Say the word," he answered, "and I'll attend to everything. I'll have our orders out and obtain the necessary priorities."

"Get the orders out and attend to all the details except the actual priority: we'll leave that until after the meeting."

"Yes, sir."

He went off then with "the jugs," as he called Mladineo and Radic, leaving me to stand by for General Royce's arrival. And it was while waiting for the General outside the

offices of G-3 that I was overtaken by another stupendous piece of luck. Lieutenant-Colonel Jerry Benson strolled up the passage.

"What the hell are you doing here?" was his boisterous greeting. "You Middle-Easters haven't at last decided to take an interest in Italy, have you?"

I answered his question as briefly as I could, telling him of our haste to establish supply routes to Tito.

"That's fine," he said. "I've been worried sick about operations into Jugoslavia."

Jerry's job in Algiers was exactly comparable with the one I had just left in Cairo. His operations were the same as ours but geared to the Italian campaign, focussed on northern Italy and France.

"How's that?" I countered. "You haven't been burning your fingers on Balkan affairs, have you? I thought that territory was exclusively reserved to us."

"We don't want to have anything to do with your Balkan affairs," he answered sharply. "We don't want to tinker with them at all, and we don't want to be dragged into them either."

Then he explained that Middle East—or perhaps it was London acting on behalf of Middle East—had cabled asking that he obtain a shipload of supplies for the Partisans in Jugoslavia. The order called for ten thousand rifles and several million rounds of ammunition, machine guns, light field guns mounted on rubber wheels, several thousand battle dress, several thousand pairs of boots, heavy socks, shirts, medical supplies, chocolate, cigarettes . . . the sweetest assortment of guerrilla bon-bons anyone heard of!

All this he had managed to obtain, taking time out from his own urgent affairs to get it done; then he had arranged for one of the Royal Navy's net layers to take it all aboard and ferry it across to Brindisi. The ship would be leaving a port on the African coast that very night.

"You can't just send a ship to a busy port in wartime and expect it to anchor there and wait until someone thinks of something to do with the cargo," he explained. "I tried to get the Navy to take it all the way across and deliver it to the jugs, but they refused: too dangerous without fuller knowledge of the coast: so I've had to cable Commander Watson, who's in charge of our operations on the east coast of Italy, to meet the ship and get the stuff docked somewhere. It's all consigned to him and by the time he gets it unloaded everybody in the port will have a pretty good idea what line of business he's in. I can't afford to take chances like that with his security."

"Would it help you any to consign the stuff to me?" I asked. "I'm probably going up there tomorrow morning and it looks as though we already had ships enough to ferry the cargo across. With a bit of luck it might be in Partisan hands within a week."

"It's yours," Jerry answered. "Come on into the office and we'll straighten it out."

Half an hour later Jerry and I approved the telegrams—one to the net layer consigning its cargo to me, another to Commander Watson, telling him to forget the whole matter. I tried not to look too pleased, but inside I was aglow with enthusiasm. It really began to look as though Tim and I were in business.

General Royce arrived at four o'clock and was immediately taken in to see General Eisenhower. The little group of officers that had come down with him waited with me in the anteroom, expecting to be called in, but the commander of the Allied Forces had no time for big conferences: he told General Royce to advise us that every effort would be made to meet our needs; we were to go ahead and formulate our requests and take his support for granted. This was the message we received after twenty minutes of waiting. All the special services in the Middle East were represented in that group of British and American officers and several of them looked disappointed, but the situation was made to order for me. Before General Royce had finished speaking the green light was burning. ... I could hardly wait to take leave of him politely before rushing off to find Tim and check arrangements for our departure.

When I told him we were off he abandoned himself to a restrained, "Yi-pe-e-ee!" and a joyful wave of his long arms. "Tito, here we come," he cried. Mladineo and Radic contemplated him with admiration. His exuberance was a source of wonder and delight to them.

We discovered that nothing but the very highest priorities would get us out of Algiers the next morning. The airlines to Italy were clogged with high-priority traffic, but G-3 fought our case through valiantly. Colonel Mann talked with the priorities board, then gave Tim an order on that section for

our transportation. The rest would be up to him. Knowing Tim, I reckoned that would be good enough. He would do the rest.

"How much equipment have you?" the Colonel had asked before making out the order.

"Regular baggage and about two hundred pounds of excess," Tim answered, quick as a flash, before I could say anything. As we left the office I said to him: "What's this two hundred pounds of excess? The four of us don't have more than a hundred pounds of baggage between us—and we're allowed fifty-five pounds each. Where does the other two hundred pounds come from?"

"I've arranged to draw a dozen Marlin machine guns and fifty double clips, half a dozen pistols and plenty of ammo, boots, flannel shirts and some rations," he answered. "I'll pick the stuff up as soon as I get us booked out of here."

Wonderful guy! I lived to bless him for this particular bit of foresight on many occasions before the month was out.

It was ten o'clock that night before Tim and a GI driver came staggering into the billet with our arsenal. Everything was set. The car would call for us at seven o'clock in the morning. For "security" reasons we had moved our Jugoslav friends in next door, being unwilling to leave them to their own devices during the night; now Tim insisted upon turning them out for a drink before going to bed.

"Wait 'til you see those jugs," he called over his shoulder as he went out of the room in search of them. They were all three back a moment later, Mladineo and Radic immaculate in GI khaki and army boots. He had equipped them from head to foot, from the skin out, forgetting nothing—not even extra socks and underwear, they told me happily. Only the blue Partisan cap with the red star remained of the original garb—that and one other detail: they wore no neckties. But I learned later that this was no omission on Tim's part. No Partisan ever wears a necktie. I doubt if any Partisan owns one.

They were very pleased with their new clothes and studied themselves in the mirror like a couple of chicks with new hats while Tim poured four little cups of whiskey.

"Tito himself is not so well dressed," said Radic.

"Oh, yes! he has a proper Partisan uniform now," Mladineo protested. "Several of the big men at the Jajce Headquarters have Partisan uniforms. . . ."

"Have you ever seen a Partisan uniform?" Radic asked him.

'Well, no, I haven't," he answered reluctantly. "I've never had a chance to go to Jajce. . . ."

I asked: "Have you ever seen Tito?"

Radic shook his head negatively.

Mladineo replied: "Not yet. I have always been on the coast or on the islands. He has been continuously in the interior. Someday, perhaps, I shall meet him. . . ."

The word was magic to him. Tito! It galvanized him. We could see Radic regretted his jest. For Mladineo he had blasphemed. There was an awkward pause while Tim handed out the whiskey, then, suddenly:

"To Tito!" Mladineo cried, raising his cup and throwing his head back.

"To Tito!" Radic echoed, sturdily.

We glanced at one another and replied in chorus: 'To Tito!"

CHAPTER 3

The trip out provided us with our first real opportunity to get acquainted. It also provided me with an opportunity to examine our position in detail.

We were aboard the usual C-47, the Air Transport Command's stripped-down DC-3, with half a dozen fellow passengers who looked like the tail-end of a commando unit. Their equipment, like ours, consisted largely of automatic weapons and "K" rations, the little waxed cardboard packages of food used by parachutists. And there was a young corporal who was going back to his unit, now in the fray near Naples, after completing some special detail. He was very young and came from Brooklyn and he was lonely and wanted to talk about home. I talked to him for a while, but I wanted to stare out of the window at the blasted African landscape that was rolling and pitching below—it is always rough on that run to Constantine—and do some serious work in my mind. I neglected him a while and he got into conversation with Radic. Tim was wrapped in thunderous conversation with Mladineo, shouting in his bad French to make himself heard through the din of the engines.

It was Thursday morning. We had spent forty-eight hours in Algiers and now we were speeding on toward Italy. If the plans we had before us prospered we would be operating our supply routes within a few days. It was hard to believe, but I refused, after a moment's thought, to speculate and doubt. There were too many imponderables in the problem. We would simply do the best we could. . . . One thing was certain, however: we were going too fast. We were presuming on our luck and leaving too much unfinished business behind us. If all went well we would be forgiven for not attending to all the details that had taken us to Algiers in the first place, for not waiting on the conferences that would be in progress there during the next ten days, making sure that our Middle East interests were properly represented. The Major from Corsica would speak for us, but he was out of touch with Balkan affairs and might find himself unable to act with any conviction or authority. All sorts of things might go wrong at those meetings, and if anything at all went wrong for "operations," it would be my fault.

Before leaving Algiers I had cabled a report of our activities and plans to Cairo, but the officers there would be somewhat baffled. It was not easy to present the whole argument in favor of the course we had adopted in a few words. It might well be felt that we would have done better to wait in Algiers for a reply to our message and an authorization to amend the rough plan that had been agreed upon at the beginning of the week. In this connection it was comforting to remember Tim's conversation with the Colonel at the airport and the latter's expressed indulgence for any slight irregularity our haste might engender; but he was on his way to Washington and might be gone for some time.

Well, there was nothing for it now but to hope that Cairo would take a good view, at least provisionally, until they could see the results of our amended program, and to hope that the amended program itself would prove as sound as it now appeared. It is of the essence of responsibility that he who has it shall exercise it at his own discretion and take the consequences. Our only problem now was to get results.

Tim had drifted into conversation in English with Radic, which left Commander Mladineo out in the cold. I crossed over to where he sat looking out of the window and found room on the aluminum bench beside him.

He proved to be in high spirits. "It's wonderful to think that a shipment of guns and equipment will be in Bari in a couple of days," he began. "Who would ever have imagined that our trip"—his and Radio's—"would be so fruitful! I thought everything was supposed to move at a snail's pace in big headquarters like General Eisenhower's. But even we Partisans couldn't act any quicker or more directly than you do."

He and Radic had covered much ground since putting into Bari aboard the Bog s Nama only six days before. At no point had they experienced the slightest delay in getting through to officers of high rank who unhesitatingly took decisions. It was nice to think we were like that! They had been met by British officers in one place and Americans in another, or by British and Americans working together; nowhere had they seen the slightest evidence of conflict between us. That was nice too.

to the bar and actually practice law. He would have become a full-fledged lawyer, like Radic, in a few months more, he explained. But the bombing of Belgrade had put an end to that. He had joined the Partisans in 1941.

After taking part in a series of minor actions he had been promoted to his present rank, which made him about equal to a company commander, a captain, in the American army; and he had been placed in charge of the garrison on one of the islands opposite the spur on the Italian boot—Vis, the island from which they had set out with their wounded a week before.

Mladineo then surprised me by adding that he had been married quite recently and that his wife, who was a Partisan soldier too, had come over with him. She was an official member of his "mission." The chief engineer on the Bog s Noma, Mirko Petrinovic, was also a member of the mission. Indeed, the three of them constituted the official group. Radic had been brought along by them to act as interpreter and to advise them in various ways, he being a worldly man accustomed to doing business in Paris and London and New York; but the responsibility for everything they did rested pretty squarely on his (Mladineo's) shoulders—his and his young wife's.

I was full of curiosity about his wife. They must have been married in the woods and spent their honeymoon stalking fascists in the darkness instead of lying together in clean white sheets. After a moment I asked him how it was.

"The village priest married us one afternoon under a pine tree," he said. "We have had very little time together since, and practically no privacy when we were together."

"How old is your wife?" I asked.

"Nineteen—but she is very serious-minded, not frivolous at all. You will see," he answered.

"What is her task in your mission?" I asked.

"Olga types out all reports and keeps a record of everything we do. She writes any letters that are necessary. She can write French and English as well as our own language—and Italian too."

"Does a Partisan officer have to make out many reports?" I wanted to know. This seemed odd in a guerrilla army.

"It depends on his duty," Mladineo replied. "I shall be expected to make very full reports about our trip, covering every detail of it. . . ." The thought brought a troubled expression to his countenance and after staring out of the window for a while he added: "I would not want the authorities to think I went off to Algiers on my own. ... I must make them understand that it was not my idea, that it was the only thing I could do. ..."

So he too was worried about acting—or being accused of acting—ultra vires. There were two of us in that predicament. I laughed and slapped him on the back. "Don't worry," I told him. "When you sail back at the head of a fleet of ships loaded to the scuppers with food and guns Tito will not be angry with you."

"The Command might be displeased with us for going to General Eisenhower's Headquarters," he said. "We certainly were not authorized to open negotiations with the Allies; but it will probably not be too difficult if we bring back shiploads of food and guns. . . ."

I reflected that we were entering a new world as we flew eastward over the mountain ranges, a world about which I had been curious for months—the Partisan world. There must be stern discipline among the Partisans . . . nothing else would explain Mladineo's great anxiety.

A few minutes later we stopped briefly in the dust and the wind at Tellurgma, the airport that serves Constantine, then we went on toward Bizerte, flying low through the Kasserine Pass. We followed a road down which I had driven in a jeep a few hours after the battle that stopped the German drive on Tebessa, back in February, then swept out over the plains across which the Eighth Army had advanced after turning the Mareth line. Those exciting days seemed only a few weeks back. The months pass like days in wartime.

At Bizerte we stopped long enough to gulp some GI food in a canteen at the edge of the airport. Planes were moving through there at the rate of one a minute, most of them doing shuttle service to the Sicilian bases. Crowds thronged the little canteen where two Italians did their best to set up hot food faster than the ravenous crews devoured it. We served

ourselves, using unwashed plates. Everything was dirty but the food was good. Half an hour later we were back in the air on our way to Catania.

We saw dozens of C-47's as we crossed the water. There appeared to be an almost continuous stream of them moving in both directions along the route we followed. Our aircraft, The Snafu Express, was flown by a sober lad, but some of the other transport pilots on the run apparently were bored. One of them joined us to do a little formation flying, bringing his wing-tip in close to our cabin windows, and there he remained for mile after mile.

When we reached Sicily, the formation flyer left us. We flew along parallel to the sea over rugged landscape that showed few signs of having been so recently a battlefield. The great bulk of Mount Etna rose slowly out of the hills before us and soared to its volcanic peak. We circled its flanks until Catania lay below, then we landed once more on the clattering steel web of an improvised runway. The plane taxied to a halt and we climbed out in a sea of mud.

There was plenty of evidence of recent combat at Catania. Everything there was wrecked. Airports acquire a particularly desolate appearance after being under fire and this one was no exception. Drizzling rain heightened the effect.

A group of passengers and crews were crowded together before an improvised bench in the rubble of a shattered hangar, watching a British army captain's apparently vain efforts to complete some business over a field telephone. We joined the back of the crowd and watched and listened. The Captain, as we had supposed, was a one-man priorities board controlling the movements of passengers and freight bound for the front. He looked efficient and exhausted.

"I'm already overloaded on that run," he explained patiently, studying his loading schedules. "There may be another aircraft the day after tomorrow. No, I can't promise anything. It all depends on the priorities. Even the freight often goes through here with a number one."

Several officers asked about facilities for getting on to Taranto or Brindisi or Bari when he hung up. There was nothing open for the next few days.

"You had better hitch-hike into town and try to find a billet," he advised them. "It's about seven miles. Quarters are awful scarce as much of the town was blown down, and there's no light or water."

It was discouraging. We withdrew a little and waited until the crowd thinned out before approaching him. The officers ahead of us stacked their equipment against the only dry wall in the hangar and left afoot or in one of the RAF lorries that came grinding through the mud every few minutes. Several officers unrolled their sleeping bags on the damp floor and prepared to spend the night there.

I sauntered over to the Captain's desk with a copy of our orders when he was finally alone, calling to his attention a phrase Tim had very astutely contrived to have inserted there: ". . . highest operational priority. . . ."

"Any chance at all of getting us out of here tomorrow?" I asked. "There are two Jugoslav officers—Tito's men—with us."

"Tito's men?" he said, "from Jugoslavia?" He peered at them a moment. "If I could rearrange the load in the first two planes I might get you on," he said thoughtfully, going to work once more with paper and pencil to juggle out his freight and human cargo. "The trouble is they have no petrol for us up there and we have to take enough aboard here for the round trip. It cuts the pay-load way down." As he worked I watched his face, which was grey with fatigue. Since daybreak he had been there alone, struggling with the field telephone and surrounded hour after hour with impatient officers most of whom considered him personally responsible for their delay, quietly trying to get his gallon of cargo and humanity into a pint of aeroplane.

"Be here at seven o'clock,"* he said finally. "We'll get you out on the first run if the weather's any good. I'll have to put those two captains off for another day, but they can take it."

The Captain not only got us off the next morning on the first plane; he also provided us with transport into town that night, right to the door of the hotel where the American officers' mess was situated and where we found the billeting officer; and there was a car waiting for us at six o'clock in the morning to take us back to the airport too. In the confusion that characterizes a recently fallen city whose streets are still blocked with rubble, a city reduced to ghostly ruins by naval gunfire only a few days before, that was good!

There was something sinister, almost terrifying, about the quiet streets through which we walked to our billet, after dinner. We had been cautioned to go armed and to stay together. Silvery moonlight flooded the ruins that lay all about. There was no overtone of sound in the city: there, was oppressive silence, isolated sounds. We heard a restless child crying in the night and the voice of its mother speaking the soft Italian words, a scratchy gramophone far away, and drunken Italian sailors quarreling in the street. . . .

A disheveled young woman with yellow hair and a frightened baby in her arms admitted us when we reached the house to which the billeting officer had directed us. She was alone there in the semi-darkness with her child, and she looked frightened too. The one oil lamp she had was guttering as though it were about to go out altogether. "Olio finito," she apologised. The bombardments had broken all the windows and smashed half of the furniture in her house.

She wanted us to pay her twenty lire each—twenty cents— for the night's lodging. We gave her five dollars for the four of us and told her to keep the change for her bambino. Perhaps she guessed what we were trying to say but dared not believe . . . she appeared

not to understand until Mladineo explained carefully in Italian, then she burst into tears, muttering expressions of abject gratitude. The baby was alarmed by her emotion and cried again. . . .

Who was she and where was her man? What had become of him in that land of heartbreak and ruin?

As we went in to our moonlit rooms and began undressing in the house with its gaping windows, Mladineo said, as though talking to himself: "Just like home!"

CHAPTER 4

I WAS SHAKEN BY THOSE WORDS—"JUST LIKE HOME"—AND they rang in my head as I began to undress in the room Mladineo and I were to occupy that night. The broken window-panes admitted the soft night, and a flood of moonlight. Mladineo, after taking off his GI shirt and turning it admiringly in his hands, feeling the soft warmth of the material, hung it carefully on a doorknob and turned to his musette bag, seeking something in its depths. Suddenly a beautiful tenor voice filled the street below. Someone serenading? Half-clad, we both stepped across to the balcony to look for the singer.

There was only one phrase of the song. We were high and could see far up and down the street as well as deep into the broken buildings that lay across from us, but there was no sign of the singer. Tim and Radic shouted a good-night from their room down the hallway. We answered together. No other words were spoken as we lit cigarettes and stood soaking ourselves in the warm, shining night. The magical silver light imparted to the scene before us a quality of indescribable, forlorn beauty, an atmosphere as specific and evanescent as a strong perfume.

"Just like home!" The phrase obsessed me.

"What made you say that?" I asked Mladineo after a few minutes. " 'Just like home' . . . was it the look of the streets or the woman with the whimpering child ... or what?"

For him too there had been no break in the continuity of his impressions and his thoughts. He answered: "I don't know. There's a sameness about war, an emptiness in the streets, women hugging their children in the ruins. ... It was just a fleeting impression, a spectator reaction I have felt before. It is more than two years since I have been a real spectator, although I have often pretended to be one. . . ."

"That must be hard to do. ..."

He had been leaning on the balcony rail, his face toward the street. My words turned him toward me. A strange expression hardened his delicate features, set them in a grim mask-like rigidity. What awful scenes was he witnessing again in his mind? I waited, hoping he would speak, but he turned again toward the street.

"How was it on the islands under the Italians?" I asked, trying to draw him out.

"We did little fighting and there was not much to eat. For a long time we used the islands as a place of refuge and convalescence for our wounded, ferrying them over from the mainland at night. The Italians tried to stop this traffic and searched for boats in every cove and backwater from low-flying aircraft. When they found even a tiny rowboat they threw a bomb on it. We had to keep our boats submerged under five or six feet of water during the day and raise them every night."

"How about patrols at night. Were there no patrols on the narrow waters between the islands and the shore?"

"Oh, yes. There were many patrol boats. We often brushed with them in the darkness and invariably got the worst of it as they were fast and heavily armed with machine guns. But they never stopped the traffic in wounded men."

He paused, then added: "The patrols were bad but the rheumatism from being wet and cold twenty-four hours of the day was considered worse by the boatmen. They could at least hope to avoid the patrols. They had no hope of keeping dry or getting warm. They filled the boats with rock and sank them when the night's work was done, then dove into the icy water to get the rocks out and salvage the boats when darkness came again; but they saved hundreds who would have died had they been left on the mainland."

"I should think it would have been easy for the Italians to find your wounded once you got them there," I said.

"Not as easy as you think. Some of the islands are very wild and mountainous. There are lots of places to hide. Of course they did find them, sometimes."

"Then what. What would they do?"

"Shoot the men, burn down the village guilty of harboring the enemy. You'll see when we go over. There are burnt villages everywhere. . . . But they didn't like patrolling the islands," he added, grinning meaningfully. "Most of the time they stayed in the larger towns where their barracks were. Then things would be pretty quiet unless we molested them."

"Were you ever strong enough to attack a whole garrison?"

"Yes, if there was some reason for it. On the island of Vis, for example, we captured the entire Italian garrison only three weeks before capitulation—about six weeks ago."

Somewhere nearby reverent fingers stroked the strings of a guitar. Mladineo paused to listen. Suddenly, the tenor voice filled the street again, exquisitely tracing the frivolous pattern of a Neapolitan love song. We listened breathlessly. He was just below us somewhere in the depths of silver ruins on the

far side of the street. He might be in some moonlit room without a roof—or in a courtyard, sitting on the rubble. There could be no partition between him and us.

"Wonderful!" Mladineo said, ecstatically, when the song ended. He was waiting for another song, but now there was only the voice of the guitar, a thoughtful, aimless strumming.

"Tell me about Vis," I said to him.

"We needed arms," he began. "The only place on the island where they could be obtained was the little fort which the Italians occupied on the southern side of the island. It was a very old fort—perhaps four hundred years old—and not terribly strong, but it would be easy to defend with automatic weapons against attack by men on foot. We knew that but decided to storm the place and accomplish by surprise what we could not hope to do by siege.

"One night we rushed them. There were only seven of us in the attacking party, as we had but five rifles and twenty hand grenades on the island.

"The fort was occupied by a colonel, a major, one captain, two lieutenants and about forty men. . . ." He broke off to listen again to the guitar, then when he noticed that I was watching him, went on: "That's the way guerrillas operate . . . against Italian garrisons. It would have been a different story if we were attacking Germans or Ustasha. . . ." (The fascist troops of the Croat Quisling—Pavelic.)

'Well, we had decided to approach from all four sides simultaneously, shouting and throwing hand grenades into the little walled court that surrounds the old fortification. There was a sentry at the gate but he never fired a shot. All he wanted to do was get back into his compound. By the time we reached him he had the door unlocked. My cousin knocked him out with a rifle butt and we went in. . . ."

"O, questa, o que-e-a. . . ." The singer's voice rose again, this time in the opening tenor song from Rigoletto. . . . Mladineo waited for the last note to die away before resuming.

"My cousin and I went in," he said. "The other five stayed outside and kept on screaming and shouting and shooting and throwing hand grenades. I fired two shots close together to indicate that we were in and that no further grenades should be thrown, and we shouted for the garrison to surrender.

"Getting into the courtyard had been just too easy; it was hard to believe that we'd get away with it; but the officers began to file out with their hands in the air and I motioned with the barrel of my rifle for them to line up against the wall on the north side of the courtyard. They looked terribly frightened. I guess they thought we planned to shoot them all. Even if that had been our intention we would have had to kill them with clubs. We had no ammunition left.

"The rest of our 'attacking force' then worked its way around to the front of the courtyard and came in through the gate. My cousin made the prisoners stand facing the wall and they began to blubber and beg for their lives. I told them no one would be hurt if they followed orders and kept their faces to the wall, their hands in the air, then I went into the little fort to see what weapons I could find. We needed some grenades and machine guns and we needed them immediately, before our prisoners could realize we were almost unarmed. The men standing guard had eight rounds between them, and only one grenade. But we found the arsenal at once and hurried back to the courtyard with a sub-machine gun and two grenades for every member of our party."

Mladineo reached over suddenly and touched my elbow. He looked at me and laughed.

"Do you know what the toughest part of that raid was?" he said earnestly. "It was keeping a straight face. We all wanted to laugh hysterically. It was too ridiculous!"

'What did you do with your prisoners?" I asked.

"We just left them there, in the end; but first we carried away twenty-four sub-machine guns, twelve pistols, a hundred rifles, lots of ammunition and six cases of grenades. It was a nice rich haul. And we got a lot of other valuable stuff, too, including several big boxes of spaghetti, maps and official documents.

"Our attack had been launched while they were having dinner. We finished the food in the officers' mess. By eight o'clock we had completed our search of the premises. The prisoners were still standing with their faces to the wall, but as they had now all been searched for arms they were no longer obliged to keep their hands in the air. My original instructions to the guard, after we found the machine guns, had been to shoot any man in the line who spoke or turned around, but I had made it clear by a wink and a grin that the words were for effect only. We wanted to get our job done without spilling any blood to avoid reprisals, if possible. When the men in the line got restless the guards roared or fired a short burst over the wall. The prisoners must have been wondering how many of their number had been cut down. When the job was finished the instructions to our guards were loudly renewed as we worked our way silently out of the courtyard. We just left them standing there. I have often wondered how long it was before they discovered we were gone."

He paused and stared into the moonlight, the expression of amusement fading from his boyish features, then he added: "We should have shot the whole pack of them."

I gave him another cigarette, watching his face as he lit it. He was excited and tense. The singer was silent and Mladineo's mind was on his story.

"We waited then to see what would happen," he continued. "Everyone on the island knew about the raid. It's just a little island and the men in the garrison had been there for some time. We had worn no masks and all seven of us had been recognized, of course, so we

stayed in the hills, keeping some of our loot and sending the rest of it off to Hvar, another island about twenty miles away.

"We were all right but we were worried about the civilians. Suppose there should be reprisals after all. . . ."

"Well, the Italian patrol boat called two days later. Until then we saw no one from the garrison. Perhaps they were still standing at the wall where we had left them. . . . The Colonel reported that hundreds of Partisans had attacked . . . the little garrison had never had a chance against the overwhelmingly superior numbers of the heavily armed raiders. . . . . No, his men had recognized none of the guerrillas. . . . He supposed they had come from some of the other islands, or even from the mainland. . . . You see, they feared reprisals too.

"In the end they solved the problem in a way that was typical. They picked up ten citizens at random in the town of Vis and ten more in Comisa and announced that if the arms were returned within three days the prisoners would be released: if the arms were not returned the hostages would be shot."

"My God! and what did you do?"

"There were meetings in both towns attended by the families of the hostages. We agreed to do whatever was decided at those meetings, after explaining to the people that Tito wanted us to arm ourselves well so that we would be ready to strike on the coast when he gave the signal, which might come at any moment now. The deliberations were brief. In Comisa we were told: 'Keep the arms. And when the time comes use them well. Remember what they cost.'

"In Vis we were simply told: 'Keep the arms.' "

The fragile-looking story teller stared straight before him. His whole person was tense as he spoke the last words. The young prophet for whose head Salome danced ... he must have looked like that. . . .

After a moment he turned and smiled sadly, the tenseness going out of his face, adding in a tone of resignation:

"All twenty of them were shot nine days before the Italians became our allies, just nine days before the armistice which was signed last month on the third. I was a 'spectator' at the shooting in Comisa. . . ."

We smoked a while in silence, then I asked: "What happened to the garrison?"

"The Colonel was relieved before the executions and one of the other officers was left in charge. When news of the armistice reached us we disarmed them all again and let them

go home to Italy on the first boat that crossed. What else was there to do? They were not responsible for the executions."

There was a strange quality of acceptance in Mladineo which came of long familiarity with the horrors of war. It was puzzling, at first. He could tell the most appalling tales, always with a wan smile as he completed them, and it was not until later that I understood this. He and his kind burn almost visibly with the intensity of their purpose, but they are seldom indignant, never outraged, never righteous or complaining. These are moods reserved for men of milder feelings.

"Smrt Fashizmu!" Mladineo said, reading my thoughts. "That means 'Death to Fascism' in our language. We find all the comfort we need in that phrase, which is the Partisan salutation."

I was to acquire a fuller knowledge of his meaning soon in Jugoslavia.

Catania was as still as a graveyard now. There seemed nothing further to talk about and we went to bed. Mladineo fell asleep but I lay long in my bunk, listening to his regular breathing and thinking of the island of Vis.

CHAPTER 5

NO TOUCH OF COLOR FOUND ITS WAY THROUGH THE PAINT mist that wrapped the city as we walked the half-mile back to the hotel just after daybreak. A few unkempt figures hurried through the streets, stumbling over the debris that littered them: ghouls . . . trying to get back before cockcrow. In the shadowless light Catania showed its awful wound mercilessly.

We had a good breakfast at the mess—the last for some weeks, then the car arrived and we rumbled and bumped our way over the battered roads back to the airport where a C-47 was waiting to take us to Bari.

The one man priorities board was functioning normally at its improvised desk. The Captain looked about the same as he had the night before. Undoubtedly, there had been a time during the night when he was off duty, but a powerful illusion persisted that he was still there, still juggling loading schedules, and that there had been no break in the continuity of his efforts. I stopped to shake hands and thank him before we went out to the waiting aircraft and noticed that he had had a shave. So he had been off duty after all!

We had the aircraft all to ourselves, that day. There were no other passengers. A mountain of freight was lashed to the floor in the center of the cabin and the four of us gathered in a huddle at the forward end, sitting comfortably on our baggage.

After a little while we roared out across the Straits of Messina and cruised up the coast of the Italian mainland, an awe-inspiring accretion of mountains; then we turned east again on a course that would take us to Taranto, the first stop.

One of the first things to do on reaching the east coast, Radic suggested, was to call on the Admiral at Taranto to report the results of the journey to Algiers and inquire about the supplies that had been promised a few days before. He thought time would be saved if he and I got out and attended to these matters while Faulkner and Mladineo went on to Bari with our gear and equipment. We would get to Taranto before noon. The others would reach Bari about two o'clock.

I gave Tim a safe sum of money and told him to buy or requisition two cars, and to get us a billet. He could arrange all that by going to the town mayor and obtaining the necessary papers. We would be along in time for dinner. Presently, we landed in the sunshine on a rough field among the olive groves. Radic and I said good-bye and hailed a half-ton truck waiting there for the mail. The plane left and we climbed in to bounce and rattle about in the back for forty minutes on our way to town.

Radic knew the way—knew the very building we had to get to—and the obliging truck driver took us to the door. We stopped before a great edifice overlooking the port of Taranto where a variety of small naval vessels lay at anchor, each destroyer surrounded by a neat square of floats from which the anti-torpedo nets were suspended. The building itself was pretentious with huge fascist symbols worked into its stone facade.

Our luck was still in. Everything seems to have fitted together in an amazing way in those October days. We never lost a moment waiting for anyone. The gods were with us and the timing was always perfect.

The Admiral himself was out when we reached his office so we were received—and very gallantly—by his chief of staff, Captain Orr Ewing. He remembered Radic and said the Admiral would be eager to see us. He would be back soon. Brigadier General Maxwell B. Taylor, the American representative on the Allied Military Mission, was with him and they had gone off somewhere together.

We had been wondering whether it would be necessary to stop at Brindisi on our way up that night to contact him or Mason Mack, so his presence in Taranto was most opportune.

We chatted with the Captain until the Admiral returned, then we were at once shown in. His face was strong and gay with sharp blue eyes and weather-beaten skin. He looked like a man who had spent all his days at sea. His personality had so strong a nautical flavor I almost expected to feel the decks heave and roll under my feet as I walked across the room to shake hands.

Radic introduced me as an officer from Middle East who happened to be in Algiers in connection with the same business that had taken him and Mladineo there—"a great piece of luck for us," he said.

"Have you got anything to do with the establishment of these Middle East bases on the Adriatic?" the Admiral inquired at once.

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Well, what sort of tonnage are you going to move through our ports?" he asked. "We are terribly overtaxed, even without you."

The question was one I had been asking myself for days. The truth was I had no idea. Two hundred tons a month, two thousand tons . . . one guess was as good as another at that juncture. I did my best to explain.

"We can fit you in almost anywhere as long as your operations are limited to a few thousand tons a month," the genial old sailor said, looking relieved, "but we'd have a hell of a time if you started handling a really big tonnage. Where do you want to work?"

That was another of the questions I had been asking myself. I answered that we would have to look around before we could say; that there was some question of Monopoli. . . .

"You'll probably want to stay in Bari," he interrupted. "I fancy that will probably suit you best, whether we like it or not," and, turning to Radic, he added, "that's where you've got your little steamer tied up, isn't it?"

Radic confirmed that it was.

"Have you managed to draw stores for your crew?" the Admiral asked him. "Have you got plenty of coal aboard? Have you had any trouble getting yourself watered?"

Ivo Radic could answer none of these questions.

"Have the supplies we promised you arrived?" the Admiral wanted to know. We didn't know. "Under what flag and what papers are you going to clear the . . . what's her name? . . . Bog s Noma out of the port?"

We had no idea. The Admiral threw his head back and laughed merrily. I felt very grateful to him, not only for his good humor but because it was helpful to meet someone who at least knew the questions we would have to answer.

There was evidently some bond between the Admiral and Radic, something in the latter's personality that pleased His Majesty's officer. They chatted together for a while about shipping and I learned that Radic was not only a lawyer - he was a director of several Adriatic steamship companies, an old shipowner who had traded in many of the great ports of the world. The Admiral's secretary arrived to announce that General Taylor was in the waiting room.

"Show him in," the Admiral shouted.

His voice carried well beyond the secretary in the doorway and a slim young officer in American uniform, the badge of the airborne divisions on his tunic and a silver star on his

shoulder, pushed past into the office. He greeted us very kindly and inquired about our plans.

"We have just finished confessing to the Admiral that we have none," I explained. "However, we're going up to Bari tonight and it won't take us long to make some once we get there."

"Well, just call on me or on General Mason-MacFarland for any help we can give you," he offered.

"I shall also be glad to do anything I can for you," the Admiral said at once. "Go and see NOIC—(pronounced as it is written, the letters being a contraction for Naval Officer in Charge)—at the port and if there's anything you need that you can't get from him—and there will be plenty—just call through to me on his telephone. I'll fix it up for you."

We thanked him warmly and before leaving I asked: "What information have you here about the situation on the Jugoslav coast, sir?"

"Damned little," he answered. "The destroyers beat up from Dubrovnik as far as the Peljesac Peninsula and sink anything they find on the way; you might stop by and see the Flag Officer, down the hall. He can tell you anything we know. And call on Captain Dee (the captain in charge of a destroyer flotilla in the Royal Navy) as soon as you get to Bari. He may be able to help you . . . and don't forget! call on me if you get fouled anywhere."

We left him then and so did the General, who inquired as we walked down the hall whether we had any transport to take us on to Bari. We said we hoped to rent a car and he invited us to ride to Brindisi with him. From there he would send us on in a military vehicle. We accepted at once and agreed to meet him in an hour, for we still had to call on the Flag Officer and Radic thought we should check on the movement of the supplies the admiral had promised.

The Flag Officer's staff had little information of the sort we needed, but the supply situation proved worth investigating. Nothing had been done about that requisition. Indeed, the whole matter had apparently been forgotten. We were obliged to call on a British brigadier in charge of stores at the Taranto base and remind him of the transaction. He remembered and apologised for the delay. What, specifically, did we want? A lieutenant-colonel in his department was summoned. He knew, apparently to the ounce, just what supplies were on hand, and for twenty minutes he and Radic worked over the list. Finally it was complete. Twenty carloads—two hundred tons—of medical supplies and food! The train would be on the pier at Bari in forty-eight hours.

Our work in Taranto was done, for the moment, and we set out for Brindisi with the amiable young General in his staff car on a road that winds through miles of olive groves, all of which appeared to be in perfect condition. There had been no fighting in this region and it was restful to feast one's eyes on the bucolic landscape after the harsh scenes in

Sicily. It was hot in the afternoon sun and Radic soon fell asleep, leaving the General and me deep in discussion of parachute-dropping techniques.

We got on well and the time passed pleasantly.

At Brindisi he found a car for us and posted us on to our destination in the care of a mad but wonderfully skillful little Italian driver in sailor's uniform. We arrived at the Hotel Imperial a little before seven o'clock.

Tim and Mladineo were waiting there, standing at the registration desk, looking hot and tired and frustrated, our baggage piled nearby at the foot of a pillar. The clerks behind the desk were doing their best to pretend unawareness of their presence. Tim was obviously relieved and happy to see us, but anger smouldered in him.

"What's wrong?" I asked, after reporting that all had gone well in Taranto.

"Everything," he answered. "Everything! . . . this son of a bitch"—with a wave at the desk clerk—"who can't understand my French and who doesn't speak English and whose Italian is incomprehensible to me has nevertheless managed to understand that this requisition"—he waved a scrap of paper—"from the town mayor's office entitles us to some rooms and has made me understand that he doesn't have any to give us. What do you think of that:1"

The requisition was categorical. It was an order on the hotel to give us two double rooms, and I knew the town mayor would not issue the order unless he knew there were rooms available.

"Are there any civilians in the hotel?" I asked the clerk, through Mladineo.

This inquiry resulted in a voluble outburst and much gesticulation from behind the desk. No interpreter was needed to communicate the sense of it; there were plenty of civilians but they could not be put out like that, on a moment's notice, etc., etc.

"Tell him we'll settle for one big room for tonight—one instead of two—and that two of us will sleep on the floor; but the room must have a bath and we shall occupy it in ten minutes," I told Mladineo.

He translated faithfully. The gesticulation and the outcry behind the desk redoubled.

". . . and tell him that if the room is not ready in ten minutes we'll go up and pick it out for ourselves," I added. Mladineo passed that on too, and the storm subsided instantly. Two porters appeared after a moment, picked up our luggage and beckoned us to the elevator. Five minutes later we were setded comfortably in a big room overlooking the sea which was to be home to us all through the eventful weeks of October.

CHAPTER 6

There are things that are done in the light of the moon, but making our first contact with the coast of Jugoslavia when we were not certain that the port to which we sailed was in friendly hands would not normally be one of them. This caused us some anxiety from the outset.

On that first evening in Bari, Mladineo left us to dine aboard the Bog s Nama with his wife and I decided not to visit the vessel until the next day. Tim had already been aboard and he could tell me about it. He and Radic and I dined together at the hotel, faring very well after giving the hard-working "maestro" in charge of the dining room a large friendly tip, then we adjourned to our room to confer until late in the night.

There was a balcony beyond the big French windows on the east side of our room. It looked out across the gleaming Adriatic. The port lay further up to the north of us about a mile. The scene was flooded with moonlight.

"How do you propose to sneak across that ocean when the nights are like this?" Tim asked. "We're right at the beginning of the moon period. Mack and Steve"—two of our fellow officers in Cairo who were on the point of going in by 'chute when we left for Algiers—"may be dropped over there this very night. This is weather for them, not for us."

He was right. The moon would not help us. The parachutists can go out only on moonlight nights, as dropping in the dark is considered too perilous; but we needed darkness for what we had to do.

"Might as well be a woman as be in this business," Tim complained; "our lives and activities could hardly be more intimately geared to the cycles of the moon—by the way, did you notice those hot numbers in the lobby as we came up?"

"You won't have much time for them," I ragged him. "When your days are over in this town you'll be ready to sleep."

He laughed: "Okay, but how do you expect to conduct a reconnaissance along the Dalmatian coast on nights like this? ... or are we going to wait ten days before we go across?"

"I don't know. Perhaps. We haven't even found a ship to take us over, so why worry? Perhaps we'll go in the moonlight. What does the Bog s Nama look like?"

"Not much good for a job like that," Tim answered, in his deadly-earnest manner. "She's an old passenger steamer, dirty and run down and slow. Engines are bad and there's six inches of barnacles on her bottom. She has too much freeboard and you could see her coming for miles. She's practically defenceless too—and she couldn't run for it if she got into trouble."

Radic said: "Why don't we just load her up and sneak back to Vis? We can find out anything you want to know about the coast when we get there."

"Are you certain that Vis is still in Partisan hands?" I asked. "Did you find out anything about that today, Tim? Are there any new arrivals from the other side in port?"

"Nothing new," he answered, "but Commander Mladineo seems to have no anxiety about it: he thinks we should simply load up and go over, as Radic suggests."

We talked for a long time. I learned that when Radic and Tim arrived at the Bari airport they succeeded in thumbing a ride to town with all their equipment in an army truck which had dumped them out at Brigadier Trollope's 86th Sub-Area Headquarters. There they had found the town mayor busy setting up shop. He had just arrived and was not yet in a position to assist them very much, but he gave them the requisition for our room and told them to stop any car they fancied—as long as it was not an official vehicle—and get the name and the address of the owner, together with the license number: he would give them a requisition for the car. But they had made no progress toward actually obtaining any transportation. Private vehicles were scarce and army vehicles were out of the question, being practically non-existent in that area.

From Headquarters they had gone to the port to visit the Bog s Nama and meet Petrinovic—and Olga, Mladineo's wife.

"What a smile she had for the commander when she saw us on the pier!" Tim said. "He kissed her a little stiffly, I thought, but I suppose he was conscious of all the Partisan eyes watching: even so, I could have done it better."

The third member of the "mission," the engineer Petrinovic, was at the hospital. I learned he had had a bad fall on the greasy steel deck in the blackout and had fractured his skull.

"Was there any food aboard?" I asked.

"Damn little," Tim replied. "We were there at midday and lunched with them. It was meager. But Olga said it was all right. They have wine they brought over with them. Apparently there is lots of wine produced at Vis, and it's uncommonly good, much better than that red ink we drank at dinner."

"What's Olga like?" I asked.

Tim answered in his most solemn style: "She's beautiful! Brown hair and big brown eyes, heart-shaped face and turned-up nose . . . good figure, on the sturdy side . . . wears slacks and a flannel shirt and probably never owned a lipstick in her life ... no make-up at all, of course, and doesn't need it . . . wait 'til you see her! She's a soldier, too. I had one of the Marlin sub-machine guns with me and I noticed she couldn't take her eyes off of it, so I gave it to her to examine. You should have seen her handle it! She took the clip out, shot the bolt, squinted along the sights, tried the balance from the shoulder and the hip and

flashed me a great smile of approval. One minute later she had stripped it and was examining the dismantled pieces. I never saw a gun fall apart in more expert hands . . . and it was the first time she had ever seen a Marlin. She handles a machine gun the way ordinary girls handle a powder puff . . . but with half her clothes off she's a pin-up.

"What's a pin-up girl?" Radic asked. Tim explained, not without a touch of embarrassment.

Radic rocked with laughter. "She's a very serious girl," he said. "Sometimes it seems to me she is too serious; she has the soul of a revolutionary and has read all the revolutionary books, but her understanding is still a little childish, a little doctrinaire and over-simplified. Mladineo, as you may have noticed, is also a bit unworldly in his directness."

He paused briefly, glancing first at Tim, then at me, and added: "They are typical Partisan leaders, both of them. I guess that's what it takes, a simplicity of purpose that is almost naive. You've got to add or subtract something from an ordinary man or woman to make a person capable of living a Partisan leader's life."

We talked a little longer, then I unrolled my sleeping bag in the moonlight on the clean stone floor of the balcony and we turned in for the night; but for a long time I lay snug and warm in the covers, looking east across the narrow sea-thinking of—trying to imagine—the other shore.

CHAPTER 7

"Soon after six the sun woke me and I propped myself on my elbow for the first cigarette of the day. Below the shore curved toward the port, a broad street following the sea wall. A hundred yards from the hotel a Bofors gun cocked its flared muzzle at the transparent sky while its crew drank coffee and chatted with a little band of urchins. The air was still and warm. A few fishing boats lay in the gentle swell just off the shore, nets bobbing behind them. Two destroyers, their night's patrolling finished, steamed slowly toward the port, moving north, one behind the other and about a mile off shore. Holiday mood!

I turned Tim and Radic out and we got dressed.

When we had finished breakfast we set out in quest of taxi-cabs, walking half a mile to the railroad station. Back from the water-front Bari had the look of any old Italian town. Only the water-front streets that had been built up by Mussolini looked modern and clean. Our quest was successful and by eight o'clock we had acquired a fleet of five little Italian cars and five volatile gesticulating drivers to whom we had agreed to pay a flat rate per day and supply all gas. At the head of this little procession we advanced on the fort to pay a call aboard the Bog s Nama. She was lying at the lighter pier, tied up on the north side, near the end; and she was quite as Tim had described her.

A tattered barefooted young man, with a light machine gun slung across his arm, stood watch at the gang-plank and all the men and women who could be seen beyond him on the deck were armed with pistols. All were dressed in outlandish clothes and nothing was needed to make the Bog s Nama a pirate ship except a black Jolly Roger floating from the mast. Petrinovic was back from the hospital, adding a touch of color by sauntering on the deck with his head wrapped in bandages. The man with the machine gun saluted us crisply in the Partisan style with "Zdravo!" and the clenched fist to the temple as we went aboard.

Mladineo, who had been finishing his breakfast below, appeared at once, alerted by the grape-vine telegraph which constituted the ship's communication system. We were introduced to Petrinovic, who appeared none the worse for his accident, except for the romantic bandage, and a "slight headache," he explained, as though it were nothing, then we made a tour of the ship.

"Two weeks ago we took her from the Italians who had had her for two years," Petrinovic said, "and we have had no opportunity to clean her up. They kept her like a pig-sty."

The ship was dirty enough, in truth.

"How many are you aboard?" Tim asked.

"There are twenty-seven of us," Mladineo answered, "counting members of the crew and a variety of passengers we brought along, having room for them, in the hope that they might be of some use."

Further questioning revealed that of the twenty-seven, twelve were women, all dressed in the Partisan garb, which meant with the blue cap bearing the red star on the front and a skirt or slacks of grey material. The rest of the outfit varied in effect, but military shirts from one of the half-dozen Axis armies operating in Jugoslavia were universal. Individuality found expression in the way they were worn rather than in any variations in their cut or style.

The ship had a small dining saloon where the remains of breakfast were still in evidence and a forward cabin that was half forecastle, half captain's saloon. Just what it was intended for it is difficult to say, but it was comfortably appointed with two long benches, nicely upholstered, down either side. The space behind the top of the benches, between them and the bulkheads which were actually the sides of the little vessel, were wide enough to serve as bunks for four men—two on a side, end to end—and appropriately fitted with cushions. Eight men could sleep there and five or six could dine comfortably at the triangular table rooted to the floor in the center.

That pleasant little cabin became our harbor office, then and there, and it served us in this capacity almost continuously for some weeks, our official Headquarters moving to other ships only during the days that the Bog s Nama was actually at sea.

Olga arrived soon after we had settled ourselves in this compartment to drink a glass of rakjia, the Jugoslav white brandy which is made of the pulp left in the wine presses after the juice of the fruit has been squeezed away. That drink was an inescapable formality whenever one went aboard a Partisan ship for the first time, no matter what time of day it was.

Tim had seen Olga in her working clothes the day before: she called on us now in her best Partisan uniform.

He was right about her beauty. She was lovely, splendid of physique and radiant of expression. She possessed an odd charm, half childish, half inspired . . . rather like her husband, in a way. Her uniform, which she had made herself, was of heavy grey material, full skirt and tunic of military cut, open at the throat for comfort—she was too direct and guileless to wear it that way to expose the fine architecture of her neck. Beneath the tunic she wore a man's white shirt. A polished Sam Brown, to which was fastened her automatic pistol, emphasized the trimness of her waist. She wore no stockings, but unlike most of the Partisans on board she had a pair of shoes, very good flat-heeled brogues that completed the neat and efficient effect of her dress.

Mladineo, the bridegroom, acutely conscious of her charm, blushed as he introduced her, but her brown eyes were level and there was nothing to suggest the slightest self-consciousness in her demeanor.

"This is Olga," he said. She walked into the room easily and shook hands with us, her broad palm firm in its grasp, like a man's. There was a friendly warm smile for each of us. I was struck by her dignity and presence.

An unshaven, bedraggled individual who answered to the name of Peter brought another glass and she joined us in the indispensable rakjia, then we settled down seriously to decide who should do what on that Sunday morning and when we should sail the first cargo of supplies across to Tito's forces on the coast.

We learned that the Bog s Noma had no more food aboard. She had no coal in her bunkers. Her engines were in such a dilapidated condition that it was not certain that she would be able to make the trip back to Vis without repairs. She had no water aboard, and her condensers were leaking. But she had a three-inch gun in excellent condition mounted on her poop and there were two hundred rounds of the big stuff it fired in coffers made fast to the deck.

We learned, too, that there were a number of other Jugoslav ships in the port of Bari, some of them under their own flag, others flying the Italian colors. Just how many there were in all no one knew, and there were wild guesses of all sorts to be heard, according to Petrinovic. There were several of them in the Port of Bari. That was helpful. We could check on them quickly. But there were others reported strewn along the coast in half a dozen or more little ports from Manfredonia to Taranto.

One thing was clear: the Jugoslav ships could be divided into two categories. A few of them had been brought over by Partisan crews. These were ships that had been under Jugoslav registry, up to the time of the war when they were taken over by the Italians. The Partisans had "taken them back," as they put it, in September, immediately after Italian capitulation, and a few of the ships so recovered had been sailed to Italy by crews that knew no better way of keeping them out of German hands. The second category of Jugoslav ships on our coast included all the vessels of pre-war Jugoslav registry which the Italians had captured and still held, having used them to ferry themselves back to their own shores after capitulation.

Ships in the first category flew the Jugoslav flag with a red star in the white field—the Partisan flag, an emblem that had no legal status in the world; and there might be a good many of them. Ships in the second category lay in Italian ports under the Italian flag and were now probably part of the Italian Navy—which meant they were under the jurisdiction of our friend, Admiral Power. That might prove helpful.

But the legal position of ships in both categories appeared most indeterminate and unsatisfactory. Those in the first category were doubly prize ships, having twice changed hands in the course of the war; those in the second category were prize ships too, although they had changed hands but once, and our problem was to find some way of making them change hands again.

It seemed to me extremely doubtful that any of the ships in either category would be allowed by British naval authorities to clear Italian ports unless their legal position was first established.

And there was one other big problem. Where were the mine-fields?

Several of the ships that had come to Italy had done so because they had no idea how to find their way back to the Dalmatian coast, having once left it, without being destroyed by the mines Italians and Germans had sown on their side of the narrow sea. They had come across to Italy and followed some Allied vessel into one of the Adriatic ports, keeping to deep water until they could see their way in. We would need access to the charts of the mine-fields on the Italian coast, which should be fairly simple; but we would also need to know where the mines were on the far shore and in the channels between the islands that lie just off of it, and this might be difficult information to obtain.

"Anyway, there's plenty to do," Tim said, his high spirits coming to the rescue again. And to me he added, "I see now what you meant last night when you said we'd be ready to sleep when the days were over. . . ."

We divided up the tasks before us, then. Tim and I would take two cabs and set out for NOIC's office—(the "Naval Officer in Charge," it will be remembered)—to see what we could do about coal and food and repairs for the Bog s Nama, to arrange for loading her when the supplies got in from Taranto the next day, and to see whether she could be

cleared. Radic and Mladineo would make an inventory of the Jugoslav ships that could be found in Bari and in other ports along the coast.

Olga would be busy with Petrinovic aboard ship organizing our own "security" system, keeping a check on the movements of the persons who lived aboard and establishing discipline. It was to be anticipated that sooner or later the port security officers would want to know a good deal about every man and woman with the Partisan cap that passed the sentries at the entrance to the docks, and unless we were ready with the information they would consider us very careless.

I pointed out that the situation was precarious in the extreme and that there was no authority in Italy that could go to bat for the Partisans if anything went wrong. Their only hope lay in being as self-sufficient as possible, in imposing upon themselves a very strict and impressive discipline, and attracting as little official attention as possible in the port during the few days that—we hoped—would give us an opportunity to regularize their position.

The advice was well-received and I saw a stern look cross Olga's young face. She was picturing herself laying down the law. The gaiety was gone from the brown eyes and she nodded her head solemnly.

CHAPTER 8

"Do YOU THINK WE'LL EVER GET ACROSS?" TIM ASKED, AS WE climbed into a taxi, instructing a second cab to follow us.

"Sure. Why not?"

"There are so God-damned many difficulties in the way. . . .

"There are fewer than there were when we left Cairo," I reminded him. "We had no idea where to begin then: now we know what we have to do. . . ."

"But not how to do it," he laughed. "Have you ever had anything to do with shipping before? Do you know how to have a ship watered or coaled or repaired? Do you know where to go for rations and food? It can't be bought in this town. Do you know how to write a ship's sailing orders in wartime? Do you . . ."

"Shut it off!" I told him. "It's bad enough not to know the answers without having you rub it in. Here's the form: you'll get half of them before the day is out and I'll get the rest. We haven't both been newspaper reporters for nothing. As a reporter it would be easy to find the answer to any of those questions, so we'll be reporters for a while and find the answers to all of them: then we'll become officers again and act on the information. How's that?"

"Okay," he answered. "Here's Navy House. Let's go in and give NOIC the old 'one-two-three.' "

When we introduced ourselves to "NOIC" we understood what the Admiral must have had in mind in implying there might be difficulties in obtaining from him the things we needed. As we came to know him better in the days that followed it was obvious that he was overworked and that his responsibilities were heavy. He was in charge of the most forward Allied port in the Adriatic and enormous demands were currently made upon his resourcefulness. It was not unreasonable that he should look upon the Partisan ships without enthusiasm. They had nothing to do with his work, which was to keep supplies moving up to the Eighth Army and the advanced air bases.

"Who are these people who call themselves Partisans?" he asked without curiosity—really a rhetorical question that he wanted to answer himself. "There was a Colonel from the Jugoslav army here asking about them. He said they had simply stolen the ships, that the ships belong to the Jugoslav Government. They're an awful frowsy ill-clad lot of beggars. Who are they anyway?"

Tim and I exchanged glances. This was bad news and the question was difficult to answer in a few words, but I did the best I could to tell him about Tito.

"Well, I'm not interested in Balkan politics," he answered. "All I want to know is how long are they going to stay tied up at the only lighter pier in the port? How soon can you get that ship out of here? . . . that one and the others."

"Would you prefer that we move to some other berth?" I asked.

"Hell, no. That's probably the place where you're the least trouble; but it's the only lighter pier we have. How soon can you clear them out of here?"

"The Bog s Nama needs some repairs to the engine," I answered, "and she ought to have her bottom scraped. There's no food aboard and no water and no coal. Can you help us make her ready? Admiral Power is sending us two hundred tons of cargo and it should be here tomorrow."

"The nearest dock you could get her into to have her scraped is in Taranto, and that's booked full for a month. Go across and see Commander Roberts at 'Q' about repairs and stores. I can't give you any coal."

"Where can we get some coal? Whom should we see about that?" - "There isn't any here," he answered. "We're short of coal. What there is I issue."

The flat stare that went with this contribution to our peace of mind made it clear that our nuisance value in the port was high, but that we had no other standing.

"Then may I borrow your telephone to make a call to Taranto?" I asked. "I'll only be a moment. As there are twenty carloads of food coming up here tomorrow, perhaps the Base could add a few carloads of coal."

"Certainly, if you can get through," NOIC answered. He obviously had noticed we meant to ask for the Admiral himself. That was like telephoning to God after a row with the Bishop.

As we waited I thought: everything depends on the Admiral now. If he remembers his pledge of help and speaks a few of the right words to NOIC our troubles will be much diminished; if he happens to be in a bad temper and answers sharply we're sunk. Tim and I waited nervously until the operator called back to say the call was through. I asked for the Admiral and heard switches click. He was on the line.

"Hello, Huot," he bellowed, when I had introduced myself. "What do you want?"

"Some coal, sir, the NOIC says he is very short. I wondered if it would be possible to have some sent up from Taranto."

"Let me talk to NOIC," was the reply.

The Admiral's big voice filled the room, punctuated occasionally by "Yes, sir," from NOIC.

"They can't want much coal," we could hear the Admiral saying. "What are they asking for?"

NOIC turned to us and relayed the question. It was evident that the Admiral was as good as his word, but it would not do to call him up every few hours. Might as well get enough for several sailings. . . . The coal bunkers would hold about fifty tons. . . .

"About four hundred tons," I answered.

The information went back to the Admiral and we could hear him say, "Well, let 'em have it. You can spare four hundred. What else do they want? Better put Huot on again."

In the next few minutes I attempted to familiarize the Admiral with our principal difficulties, including the question of registry for the Bog s Nama and any other ships we might find in port.

"I'll see what I can do," he said. "Now let me talk to the NOIC again—unless there's something else?"

"No, that's all, thank you, sir."

"And give my best to your lawyer friend, what's his name . . . Radic," the admiral added. "Is NOIC there?"

We heard him tell NOIC to do the best he could for us and felt much cheered by the hearty voice, then he rang off. NOIC's manner was much changed as we said good-bye to go across to "Q"—the section that handles supplies in the British Services—in search of Commander Roberts.

"That's hardly what I'd call 'giving him the old one-two-three,' " I said to Tim as we left.

"I'm not so sure," he answered thoughtfully. "It may be."

Everything was easy at "Q." We explained our position to the Commander, a red-faced, genial, sea-going officer who nodded sympathetically on learning that neither of us was accustomed to handling ships, not even in peacetime, and that he would have to bear with us if we appeared a bit amateurish in our efforts to get things done.

"I'll give you all the supplies you want," he said. "I can give you rations in any quantity you require and such ship's stores as chandlers handle, that is, rope, sail, and ship's accessories; and I'll take you around and introduce you to the officer that looks after ship's repairs; but who's going to sign for it all?"

"I'll sign for it," I answered.

I was already stuck for four hundred tons of coal and probably for the two hundred tons of supplies from Taranto as well as the four hundred tons of cargo aboard the S. S. Brittany which would be arriving in a day or two, and there's an old saw which states one may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. . . . If everything worked I'd be praised for my initiative, and if not I'd be tried . . . well, amen! I had no authority to acquire and distribute such stocks of war material, but there had been no way of knowing that I would need it when we set out, and there was no way of obtaining it now: neither was there anyone else who could sign for it.

The Commander made everything easy for us and got us a top priority for our engine repairs. By the time we got back to the dock the workmen were already on the scene, carrying their heavy tools down into the metal bowels of the ship.

CHAPTER 9

Mladineo and Radic had little trouble in finding a substantial number of ships actually in the port of Bari to which they felt we should lay claim at once. Members of the crew of the Bog s Nama had been strolling about in the port for several days and had recognized a number of vessels that formerly plied the Dalmatian coast under Jugoslav colors. Counting the Bog s Nama, there were five ships in Partisan hands, two of them little motor vessels of forty-ton capacity, one a big motor vessel of 400-ton capacity, and two of them steamers—our ship and a 530-ton freighter.

There were also nine vessels under the Italian flag, ranging from thirty to two hundred-ton capacity, all of which had once been under Jugoslav registry. And there were two customs launches, big enough to move at sea in favorable weather, and King Peter's private launch or speed boat, a little mahogany Chris-Craft thirty feet long.

It was arranged that Radic would see the skipper of every vessel under the Partisan flag and obtain from him his name and the names of the men in his crew, together with all available data about the ship itself, its length and beam and cargo capacity and power and speed; and the immediate needs of each vessel should be listed.

No action would be taken until later to acquire the Jugoslav ships still held by the Italians.

Five Partisan ships to take over at once, nine Jugoslav ships in Italian hands to be taken over a little later—fourteen ships in all! It was better than we had hoped, better than we had dared to hope. The admiral would have to help us straighten out the position of the five Partisan ships and tell us how to acquire the nine now held by the Italians; one method would then apply to the lot of them.

As there was more cargo due on the pier within the next twenty-four hours than Bog s Nama could take aboard without capsizing, the first thing to do was to call on the skippers of the other Partisan ships and gather them into our company. NOIC had softened up some, but he was still none too friendly. There was no telling what he would do if we tied up the tracks on our pier for hours or even for days by using freight cars as warehouses.

I made it clear to Mladineo that no one was to approach the ships still under the Italian flag, that nothing whatever was to be done that might indicate or betray in any way our interest in them.

Petrinovic, looking pale and tired, listened intently to all that was said in the little cabin. When we had completed our discussion of the ships I asked him how soon Bog s Nama could be made ready for the sea. He rose and left us to go and consult the captain, a dirty, slothful man (we later fired him) who had made a poor impression on both Tim and me. When he returned it was to say the ship would be ready in the latter days of the week, about Friday or Saturday.

I said: "Then there is time for a reconnaissance."

"Do you think it's really necessary?" Mladineo answered.

"Where will you find a ship to take us over? Why not just sail across in Bog s Nama?"

"How can we be sure that Vis is still in Partisan hands?" I queried.

"We can't be absolutely certain," Mladineo answered, "but one has to take chances in this business."

"No point in taking any that are avoidable."

"That's right; but how will we get over?"

"I don't know. We'll have to find something. Maybe the Navy will help us," I answered.

But there was no time that day to do anything about it. Mladineo and I set out a few minutes later in a rowboat to recruit the other Partisan ships.

The crew of the Bog s Nama was under Mladineo's orders, he being the head of the little triumvirate mission which, they knew, had been sent across by their own Coastal Command. They were still under the strict discipline Partisans impose upon themselves in Jugoslavia, but this was not true of the Partisan crews aboard the other vessels in port. Beyond the fact that they would be held accountable for their deeds when they got back to Jugoslavia they were under no discipline at all, and Mladineo was not briefed to extend his authority to cover them. This point worried him a little as we set out to call on the other skippers, each of which would be absolute lord and master aboard his ship.

"Don't worry," I told him. "We have plenty of authority of a kind. You can report them if they refuse to help us, but we have food and water and money and my uniform and that's authority enough."

There is always lots of protocol about life in port and it was scrupulously observed aboard the Partisan ships. We had to board each vessel after hailing her skipper, introduce ourselves and go below to his little cabin for a glass of Rakjia and a leisurely palaver about his trip across. An inspection of the vessel usually followed, then, after half an hour's aimless talk, we would come to grips with the problem. They all fell in with our suggestions eagerly and one by one they upped anchor and started engines, then chugged slowly across the port to moor just opposite the end of our pier. Some of the ships were wonderfully clean and well kept, others were filthy and in disrepair. Clean captain, clean ship; dirty captain, dirty ship: it was as simple as that, apparently. But all of them were in need of food and repairs.

By six o'clock that Sunday evening truck-loads of food had been delivered to us at the dock and distributed to the hungry crews. We had also watered the ships and established a heavy guard with sub-machine guns on the end of the pier not only to frustrate any attack which might be made against the Partisans but to keep away unauthorized persons and prying eyes, for there was already evidence of much curiosity in the port.

Suddenly, a messenger arrived, asking that I go at once to NOIC's office. I left immediately.

When I arrived there, to my surprise, he (NOIC) announced: "Well, I've got your coal for you. It'll be out there on the end of the pier at six o'clock in the morning—forty car-loads of it. Please arrange to take it off at once as we shall need the tracks for other work a bit later in the day."

I thanked him and promised to get the cars unloaded, but I left the office cursing him under my breath. What a dirty trick! He knew perfectly well how ill equipped we were for that task. The little ship tied up on the end of that pier could only take aboard fifty tons . . . but he had made it clear, when I told him that we wanted to take the coal a little at a time, as needed, that it was already on the cars and would have to be taken off. . . .

Back at Bog s Noma I explained the situation to Petrinovic.

"How many men can you get together to work on the coal when it arrives in the morning?" I asked.

"I can probably raise fifty Partisans, here in the port," he answered. "We'll bunker the coal-burners and put the rest in the hold of the Mila—she could take the whole lot by herself."

"How will you handle the stuff?" I asked

There were no cranes on our pier. It was difficult to understand how so much coal could be moved by hand in any reasonable time.

"Don't worry," he said. "We'll get it stored in no time."

So I left it to him. Tim and Radic arrived soon after from a visit aboard one of the motor vessels and Olga strolled aboard a few minutes later from some excursion in town. We were all together again and exchanged notes on the events of the afternoon. All in all, it was not unsatisfactory. We were all tired but in good spirits and Tim invited Olga and Mladineo to join us for dinner at the hotel.

CHAPTER 10

As WE WASHED UP BEFORE DINNER THAT EVENING WE MADE an inventory of the first day's profits. Instead of one ship we now had five with a total cargo capacity of about twelve hundred tons. We were—or soon would be—the proud owners of four hundred tons of coal. Within the next twenty-four hours we would receive some six hundred tons of supplies for Tito. We were on the trail of nine more ships and reasonably confident that the Admiral would find some way of placing the whole fleet safely under our control. Once this legal detail had been attended to and contact established with the other coast, we would be in business. Meanwhile, we were progressing at a tremendous rate.

Ivo Radic, with a cigarette and a glass of whiskey beside him, shaved. He had opened all stops on his big baritone voice and shook the walls of the bathroom between dabs with the brush as he lathered his jowls. From the balcony Tim and I watched the last light of a colorful sunset fade slowly on the sea.

"By the end of this week we should be operating—and on a big scale, too," Tim said. "By the end of this week we may actually land our first shipload of stores over there."

"If nothing goes wrong. ..."

"That's true. We still have a couple of big hurdles ahead, but the Admiral surely will get us the authority we need to clear the ships. . . ."

"He will if he can, but it may not be up to him. It may prove very complicated."

"There's one point I can't figure out," said Tim. "Are we helping the Partisans—Mladineo and his group—to get their work done, or are they helping us? Whose show is this?"

"Let's say that as far as Tito is concerned it's Mladineo's show; we're helping him. As far as our headquarters are concerned, we'll call it our show; he's helping us. How's that?"

"It's good as far as it goes," Tim answered thoughtfully, "but it doesn't really go far enough. Cairo is going to ask you to justify. . . ."

"The operations themselves will be our justification or downfall. We either get results now, before complications begin to develop as a result of our having left Algiers without waiting for the conferences to be run off, or else . . ."

There seemed no point in finishing the phrase. Tim knew what I meant.

"We improvise," I told Tim, "and at our own risk. The alternative is to do nothing. We have a good chance—a better than even chance of getting these supplies moving. If we succeed we make a big contribution to the war effort. If we fail I'll be relieved, but I would rather be tried for proceeding here without specific authority than allow these opportunities to pass while waiting for Cairo to sanction every step we take."

The truth is I was worried about the irregularity of our position, but most of the time we were so busy that I managed to forget it.

"We can send Cairo a cable tomorrow and bring them up to date on what we're doing," Tim suggested.

There was no need for me to explain my point of view to Tim. I knew he was with me to the end, no matter what, even if a court-martial inevitable as doom awaited both of us.

Radic joined us on the balcony and a few moments later Mladineo and Olga arrived. Both wore pistols and kept them on when we went down to dinner. We left ours in our room that night, but it was the last time we ventured out without them. We learned the secret of their caution the next day.

The dinner was a complete success. We were "Ivo" and "Steve" and "Olga" and "Tim" and "Louis" to one another before it was half over. We drank a toast to Tito, then we drank to our operations, to the success of our endeavor to get supplies across, and, of course, our chivalrous guests proposed a toast to President Roosevelt.

Our Jugoslav friends were happy. They were amazed at the speed with which we moved. To them, there was nothing Tim and I could not do, nothing we could not obtain from the British or American authorities. The complication about clearing their ships caused them little real anxiety; we would solve that problem. It was not conceivable to them that we could fail.

There were flowers on the table and I told Olga she was our guest of honor—that the dinner was for her, which made her blush with pleasure. She looked prettier than ever with her tumultuous brown hair carefully brushed back and her eyes sparkling.

"Sometimes you embarrass me," she said ingenuously. "You treat me like a grande dame instead of just a little girl."

"But you are a grande dame in your own way," I protested.

"No I'm not," Olga insisted. "I've never even had a grown-up dress. I was at the convent in uniform until I put on these things." A pretty gesture indicated the severe uniform.

"Were you married in them?" I asked.

"Yes. These very ones," she said, straightening her tunic and brushing it with the back of her hand as though it had suddenly turned into an ermine wrap.

"Steve told me you were married under a pine tree. Was it a nice wedding? Were there many present?" I asked.

"It was very nice," she answered. "My mother was there, and all our friends on the island were there too. It was before they shot the hostages, when everything was quiet. Steve gave me two presents, a portable typewriter"—captured from the Italians, I learned later—"and this pair of shoes." Her un-stockinged leg came out from under the table to expose the brogues for my admiration.

"Haven't you ever had a party dress?" I asked.

She laughed: "No. I've never even had one on."

'Would you like to wear one?"

Olga treated me to that peculiar glance children reserve for adults who ask stupid, patronizing questions, then answered in more grown-up style: "Would I!"—rolling her brown eyes like a colored girl.

Tim had been listening to the conversation.

"I'd like to go out right now and buy her one," he said. "I'd like to buy her the most beautiful God-damned evening gown there ever was." He appeared to be on the point of bolting from the room to get it.

"I'll wear one after the war," Olga laughed. "These clothes are best for now. Can you imagine me playing the grande dame in an evening gown aboard the Bog s Noma?"

That idea provoked gales of laughter. It was a very gay dinner party, even though the food was atrocious and the wine was worse, and when it was over we all went back to the port to see that everything was in order there for the big stevedoring job we would have to tackle at six in the morning when the coal cars arrived on the pier.

The crowded harbor was indescribably beautiful in the moonlight. The vast clean shape of ships lay all about, their grey hulls gleaming silver or wrapped in velvet shadow. A soft night wind rippled the lake of mercury between them. We left our cab at the foot of the pier and walked out along the tracks past mountains of freight that had been landed at dusk and would be carried away at dawn.

The sound of many voices singing in chorus drifted down to us—voices like the Don Cossack choir. . . .

Suddenly Ivo threw his head back and poured forth great golden notes as he recognized the song and joined in the refrain. Olga, in full soprano, did the same. It was a Partisan . marching song coming from the Bog s Nama. We fell in step and linked arms as we advanced along the pier.

"Our stevedores are limbering up for tomorrow morning's work," Radic said, when the song was finished.

A little crowd had gathered at the end of the pier, coming from all parts of the harbor. There were British and American sailors from ships anchored a mile away and a small group of naval officers accompanied by Red Cross nurses from a hospital ship. One of the Partisan girls had strummed a few phrases of music on a guitar, sitting in the moonlight on the boat deck of the Bog s Nama; the Partisans had come over from all the ships—for the Jugoslavs are a musical people, like the Russians—and gathered to sing their rousing battle songs; the audience had drifted in. Now it was a full-fledged concert with the music sung in four voices and the audience as quiet and serious as they would have been in Carnegie Hall.

Our arrival caused a break in the program and Olga had the excellent idea of serving a round of rakjia to all the singers and their guests on the pier. The singers crowded 'round, eager for her to take her place among the sopranos and I learned that she was famous among them for her fine voice. Tim and I joined the sailors on the pier, sitting on a five-hundred-pound bomb unloaded that afternoon from one of the lighters, but our dinner guests joined the choir on the boat-deck and the wonderful songs pealed forth again. The repertoire appeared inexhaustible, as, indeed, it very nearly is; for every great incident in the Partisan struggle against the fascist invader is celebrated in song produced at once by the nation's leading poets and musicians. A new Partisan recruit's first task is to learn them, so that he can add his voice to the choruses when marching. These stirring and heroic songs sustain them in their darkest hours, help them to keep going when they have already marched beyond fatigue and exhaustion and the limits of endurance—and must still go on.

It was one o'clock in the morning before the singing ended and we drank our last round of rakjia and said goodnight. Petrinovic reported everything ready for the coal-heaving task in the morning. There was not a professional stevedore among the Partisans; some of them were sailors, some were business men; many were well educated and spoke several languages; but all of them would be there at six o'clock to take the coal off the cars.

"What wonderful people," one of the British naval officers said as we walked away. "Who in the world are they?"

"Tito's men from the National Army of Liberation in Jugoslavia—Partisans," Tim answered.

"I know," the officer answered. "That's why they wear the star on their caps, isn't it? But who are they and what are they doing here? They sing like a great professional choir. Is it true that they are all Communists?"

"About nine out of ten of the people on these ships are good Catholics," Tim answered. "What is a Communist?"

CHAPTER 11

We were all at the dock again before six o'clock on that Monday morning. The four-hundred-ton motor vessel Mira had been brought alongside and was waiting to take aboard the coal that would be left when our two little steamers were bunkered. The men—our improvised stevedores—were there, waiting with sacks and shovels.

So NOIC thought he was going to put one over by dumping the whole lot on us at once. We'd show him!

But no coal arrived. By seven o'clock there was no coal, and at eight o'clock there was still no coal. At ten o'clock, Tim went off to Navy House to inquire and was told it was on the way, to stand by and be ready to whisk it off.

At ten-thirty Admiral Power's gift of supplies arrived. There were twenty-two cars—two hundred and twenty tons— in the train that backed slowly out on our pier and we went to work at once, off-loading. That was our first stevedoring job and it taxed Partisan ingenuity to the limit as some of the pieces were heavy and there were no mechanical aids for swinging them aboard. Even so, we made good progress and quickly loaded the little Bog s Nama to the Plimsoll mark; cases of biscuit, chocolate, cigarettes, medical supplies, and other such treasures were stacked in all available cabin space when the holds were full. By one o'clock even the well decks were piled deep and Tim was obliged to put what still remained—about half of the consignment—on one of the other ships for temporary storage.

As the coal was still expected from one moment to the next we worked at a furious pace to clear the tracks. Early in the afternoon the job was finished. The little train crept off the pier, back into the marshalling yards, but there was still no coal. Not until nine o'clock at night did those forty carloads arrive.

Tim was in charge on the pier that day. I was busy with other things. We needed, in addition to what the Admiral had sent, certain specific items for our first cargo, and these had to be obtained in Bari and hauled down to the pier in trucks at once. We needed boiler plates, lubricating oil, gasoline, heavy grease, diesel oil, kerosene. The mechanics working on the boilers needed an acetylene welding outfit. And above all we needed a ship to take us across to the other shore that very night, if possible. No two of these items appeared to be controlled by the same authority and once the items themselves had been obtained there was always the difficult matter of finding trucks to bring them to the pier; nevertheless we kept going and every hour brought fresh truckloads of supplies to our berth- Tim and Radic and their weary stevedores were a miracle of efficiency and kept the quayside clear, no matter how fast the goods arrived. By three o'clock in the afternoon everything appeared under control and I set out to find a ship for our first Dalmatian cruise.

There seemed no better way of proceeding than to walk about in the harbor in search of a suitable vessel. I wanted something small, well armed and fairly fast, if possible, and presently I found a ship that appeared to answer this description. She was an American sub-chaser that had come in with a convoy during the morning. The next step was to go aboard, hail the skipper, find out to what duty he was assigned and whether he could be pried away from it for a day or two and would consent to ferry us across.

The "Captain" was a rangy, fair-haired Lieutenant, Junior Grade, from Chicago. He received me gallantly and introduced his second-in-command, another blond amiable young giant from the same part of the world. They were a couple of wonderful lads whose only complaint was that convoy duty had grown dull of late. After a little while I learned that they expected to lay over in Bari for several days and that they were thinking of having some work done on their engines . . . then I asked whether they would consent to take me across, if permission could be obtained for them to go.

Their response was overwhelming. They were madly eager to make the trip and insisted upon showing me over the little ship from the engine-room to the guns on the deck—an all-out effort to prove that her builders had created her specially for this mission. I promised to get in touch with the Admiral if orders for them to go could not be obtained through NOIC, but in their enthusiasm they followed me all the way to Navy House priming me with arguments which, they hoped, might soften the Admiral's heart if, at first, he took a poor view of the request.

NOIC could do nothing. The ship was not under his orders. There was no alternative but to go through to the Admiral's headquarters in Taranto and see whether anything could be done there. In due course the circuit was set up and once more the Admiral's hearty voice came booming down the line:

"Hello, Huot. What do you want today?" was his characteristic greeting. He was always wonderfully—almost alarmingly—direct. I never completed a conversation with him without thanking my stars that I was born without a stutter.

"I'll see what I can do," he said, when I had stated the problem. "That ship probably has her orders right now, but if she can't go I'll try to find you another. How are you getting on up there? Have the supplies arrived?"

"Everything is going fine, thank you, sir; and the supplies are here. We already have them stowed."

"I'll send a man up to see you about that shipping line of yours in a few days, and he'll have an Italian naval officer along to help you seize the vessels that are still under the Italian flag."

"That's wonderful, sir. Will they be officially made over to the Partisans?"

"I don't know. He'll fix you up, I think. I don't know how he'll do it."

"Well, a thousand thanks to you, sir. We are greatly indebted. .. ."

"That's all right, Huot. Glad to help you. Good-bye."

An hour later my Chicago friends called at the Bog s Noma with long faces. I knew they had their orders—and not the orders they wanted—before they found their way aboard from watching them walk down the pier.

"We're taking a convoy out of here," the Lieutenant said. "Ain't it hell?"

It was disappointing. The idea of going across with them had been most attractive. The sub-chaser was not ideal, her speed being considerably reduced by the engine trouble they had hoped to deal with while laying over at Bari. In spite of their valiant efforts to persuade me that she was the best craft in the harbor for the mission I had been left with

some misgivings; but they were ideal; there could be no misgivings about that. While we were commiserating with one another a messenger arrived from Navy House to say I was expected there at six o'clock for a conference; and would I bring the head of the Jugoslav group with me.

"The old boy has found someone else to take you over," the Lieutenant said, "God-damn it. We haven't fired a round except to check the guns in two months."

One ugly incident marked that otherwise felicitous day and forced us to pause and consider a new complication in our work.

In spite of her look of radiant vitality Olga was not too strong. Undernourishment during her adolescence, when she bloomed into her present rich womanliness, had left her with a cough that sometimes sounded suspiciously like tuberculosis. Tim and I knew nothing of it then, but Steve told us later, after we had noticed his anxiety and pressed him with questions. She needed lots of sleep and often went without it, but on this occasion, having been up at half past four to see that our stevedores were fed, nature asserted itself. During the morning she was taken ill and feeling faint went to bed.

Tim, realizing that she would not rest well aboard the noisy Bog s Nama where so much was happening, any more than an American housewife could rest in her own home during spring cleaning, had chivalrously run off to the Majestic Hotel and bullied the management into giving us the second room to which our requisition from the Town Mayor's office entitled us. It was a pleasant double room like ours, with bath, and Steve had taken Olga there at once and put her to bed.

As soon as she was comfortably installed, at about one o'clock, Steve had returned to the dock, and two hours later her unlocked door had been thrust open by an armed man who stayed a long time at the foot of her bed, keeping his pistol pointed at her head and delivering a most extraordinary ultimatum.

On entering the room he told her not to move her hands, which were holding a book, then he introduced himself, without giving his name, as an officer—a captain—in the Jugoslav army. He acknowledged, as his chief, Draja Mihailovic but he laid no claim to be acting under his orders.

"There are a good many of us here in Bari," he told her, "and we know what you and your American gangster friends are doing. There is no room in Jugoslavia for Communists and in our eyes those who refer to themselves as Partisans instead of by their right name are the worst of the lot. Those of us who are here are sworn to kill the lot of you unless you desist at once from this work you are doing in the port. Persuade your husband to go back where he came from with you and all your friends or take the consequences. You and your husband will die first, together with your American friends, then we'll pick the rest of you off one by one. We will not tolerate the movement of supplies from here to Tito's bandits on the coast."

Olga answered tactfully that she would probably not be able to do what he asked, no matter how hard she tried. She was sizing him up. He was calm and collected and had none of the assassin's fanaticism in his manner. She told him that she and her husband were both Catholics and asked him whether he really believed that one could be a good Catholic and a Communist at the same time. Artfully, she drew him out, studying him closely, noting every detail of his apparel, his mannerisms, his features. . . .

For his effrontery he would die . . . she had already condemned him to death . . . the important thing was to have a perfect case, a perfect record of his appearance that would allow her people to hunt him down . . . and there was always the faint hope that one of them might walk in and kill him where he stood.

In this way she kept him talking for a little more than half an hour. Before leaving he pleaded, trying to convert her, trying to show that her duty lay in repudiating the Partisans and "being true to the traditions of the educated class" to which she and her husband belonged in Jugoslavia. She made no effort to convert him. The only conversion she had in mind was that which would make a corpse of the officer that kept her looking into the barrel of his Browning automatic—"a pistol just like mine," she later explained.

Finally, he left, backing out of the door after reiterating his threats and giving her forty-eight hours to get her husband and his fellows out of the port with no supplies aboard the ship on which they sailed.

"Why are you prepared to let us go when you know that once we get back to Jugoslavia we will all be fighting for the Partisan movement?" she had asked him.

"General Mihailovic will deal with you over there," he answered her. "That is as it should be. We don't want to fight our battles on soil held by our allies for fear of embarrassing them. That's all. Just get out—but take no supplies beyond what you need in the way of food! We will know what you keep aboard the Bog s Nama. Take her and clear out without fuss or commotion. You have only two days in which to get out. After that you can take the consequences—and you'll be the first to take them."

Then he backed out.

As soon as the latch clicked behind him Olga was on her feet and across the room to the cupboard where her pistol lay in its polished brown holster on the Sam Browne belt, then, like a flash, she was back at the door, had thrown it wide and was peering into the hall; but her guest had vanished into the stairway and dressed as she was in what Tim would have called her "pin-up-girl outfit"—or less—she was unable to follow him.

"Can you imagine," she said, "for once I go to bed without putting my pistol under the pillow, and that's what happens!" It was late in the afternoon before Steve, to whom her message was addressed, received it and hurried over to learn what had happened. He had just returned to the dock when the messenger from Navy House arrived.

Tim and Ivo Radic and I heard his story in the captain's cabin on the Bog s Nama. The "American gangsters" looked at one another without surprise, but meaningfully. So it had come to that! From now on we would be careful to go suitably armed in the port of Bari. Both of us had thought it odd the night before that Steve and Olga had worn their belts and pistols to dinner. Now we knew better.

We were learning about Jugoslavia. Our current business was with a determined race of men—and women.

"You take the matter up with Port Security," I told Tim. (The British secret police.) "I've got to get over to that meeting at Navy House and Steve has to come with me."

"I'll send the best man we have to the Majestic to sit with Olga until we can get back," Steve said. "She has her pistol in her right hand under the covers now. God help the next man that walks in there without knocking; but I'll be more comfortable if she has some friend with her. She won't get much rest as long as she's alone."

"Was she very frightened?" Ivo asked.

"No. She was mad," Steve grinned. "Missed the best shot of the season. But she needs some rest."

About that we were all agreed, then Tim went off to "raise" Security. Dusan sent the skipper of the Mira—a famous marksman—to sit with Olga until the police should arrive, then he and I set out for Navy House to attend the conference, leaving Ivo to help Petrinovic on the dock.

CHAPTER 12

There were several new faces in the group we found waiting when we reached Navy House. NOIC presided at the introductions.

"This is Commander Thompson," he said, as an officer in the uniform of the Royal Navy stepped over to shake hands. The Commander was in his late forties, a quiet and determined looking man. The faded ribbons on his tunic proclaimed him a hero of great exploits. He was accompanied by a slight young man, dressed like a fisherman, who had the look of being just out of public school on his interrupted way to Oxford or Cambridge, and a lieutenant-commander, also of the professional navy, who wore a fiery red beard. The bearded officer was introduced by the commander as his assistant; the young fisherman as a sub-lieutenant of reserves, named Taylor, the skipper of a vessel called the Gull.

"I understand you want to make a trip across to the Dalmatian coast," the Commander said. "We had a message from Admiral Power. I think we can help you."

One other new face in the room was that of s captain in the British army. "Sterns," he said simply, offering his hand, then he identified himself. He was there for a branch of the British secret service. An expert on Jugoslavia, he too was interested in getting across to the opposite shore of the Adriatic. He wished to be one of our party.

Mladineo was the central figure at this gathering. We would be at the mercy of his judgment in approaching the other shore. It would be up to him to keep us out of the minefields and take us safely through waters which (we hoped) were still defended by the Partisans, and into port.

"I should be much surprised if there were any change in the situation in the islands," he told the Commander, "and even if there is it seems most improbable that the Germans could have worked their way out as far as Vis. We should be able to put in there safely; but it is ten days now since we came over."

"If the Germans are in the islands they could just as well be in Vis as at any other point, couldn't they?" Commander Thompson wanted to know.

"They could, of course, if they approached from the sea instead of working their way out along the islands of Hvar and Brac or along the Peljesac," Steve answered, "but we have always supposed they would come the other way, moving west from the coast. On this basis, Vis, as the westernmost island, is the one they would reach last; however, as you suggest, it could also be the first to fall."

A chart of the Adriatic was spread on the table before us and Thompson studied it pensively. Lieutenant Taylor said: "Excuse me, sir: I wonder whether Commander Mladineo knows what patrols the enemy maintains along that shore."

"Yes, what do you know about that?" Thompson asked Mladineo.

"There appear to be no regular patrols as far west as Vis," Steve answered, "but there are some enemy vessels plying between Split and the mouth of the Neretva River which pass there quite often. They are well armed, of course. The waters between the islands are quite well patrolled by the Germans, a peculiar type of power-driven rubber boat carrying twenty men with sub-machine guns and mounting two fairly heavy machine guns being most commonly used in this sheltered water. These boats appear to be based in the mouth of the Neretva."

"That's a lot of fire-power," the red-bearded lieutenant-commander observed, as though talking to himself; then to Steve: "Have they got any speed?"

"They're supposed to be good for about twenty knots," he answered.

I asked Lieutenant Taylor: "Would the Gull be a match for one of those?"

"Lord, no," he replied with an engaging grin. "Hardly!"

Thompson turned to his bearded assistant and said: "Please make out the following orders for the Gull, and include the text of the orders in our signal reporting the operation to the Flag Officer at Taranto:

" 'Being in all respects ready for the sea HMS Gull will clear the Port of Bari at 1600 hours Tuesday October 12 and set course for the Island of Vis. . . .'"

His voice rumbled on, the words following the romantic pattern of Naval Orders. Several times he paused to consult us, verifying the acceptability of the arrangements. We could find no fault with them. Taylor was to take us across to Vis and "such other port or ports in the Jugoslav islands as might be necessary," then bring us back, "returning direcdy to Bari on completion of the mission." The Order authorized Taylor to carry Sterns and Mladineo and me—and no one else.

"It wouldn't be possible for us to get off tonight, would it, sir?" I asked Commander Thompson.

"How about it, Mr. Taylor?" Thompson queried.

"I doubt it, sir," Taylor answered at once. "We have six hours' work for Sparks here ashore, if we are going to have radio contact while we're at sea."

Thompson said: "You will observe radio silence except in an emergency, but you must have the circuit, of course. You must be in a position to deal with an emergency . . ." Then, turning to me, he added: "Don't you agree, Major?"

"It's probably best, sir."

"Very well. Then it's fixed for tomorrow," he said conclusively, pushing back his chair, "and the best of luck to you."

We thanked him and filed out. In the hallway Taylor said: "Wait till you see the Gull, Major! She's a lovely thing. Can you and Commander Mladineo come down now for a drink? We're tied up near you."

We accepted at once and made our way back toward our pier afoot, following the waterfront.

"There she lies," Taylor said, pointing out an innocent little fishing smack lying against the sea wall. "She's not as harmless as she looks. There are guns under those nets and her engines will develop two thousand horse-power."

"Your friend the Admiral beats Aladdin's Jinnee in the Arabian Nights," Steve whispered to me as we went aboard. "What do you think would happen if we asked him for a little battleship—or perhaps a small fleet?"

The Gull was literally built for the task to which she was now assigned—clandestine operations on an unfriendly coast. There was nothing about her decks to pique the curiosity of a prowling reconnaissance plane; from the air she would be just another little fishing boat, broad-beamed and lazy; but her hull was solid aluminum and her big motors had authority to drive her along, in spite of her lack of streamlining, at the very creditable speed of twenty knots. Empty oil drums on the deck could be hinged open to reveal heavy machine guns. Her one little cabin, below, was richly appointed in mahogany and blue leather, with an impressive array of up-to-date navigational instruments gleaming on the forward bulkhead. The Gull was as neat and functional here as she was sedulously sloppy and unkempt on her open decks.

"Here's to the Gulll" I toasted, as we clinked glasses.

"To the Gull!" Steve and Taylor responded, and we drank it down.

"Now we must drink another," Taylor said eagerly. "I'll propose it."

He refilled the glasses and said: "To the success of our mission, the Gull's first operation!"

We joined him in that one. So it was their first operation too!

Steve and I made our way back to the Bog s Nama, looking for Tim, but he was not yet back from his call on the port security officers. We found Petrinovic, very sour.

"We're still waiting for that four hundred tons of coal," he said. "Navy House says it's on the way. I've told the men to get some dinner, that we may have to take it aboard tonight. Some have had a little rest this afternoon, but most of them have worked straight through since six this morning and are pretty tired."

They deserved a rest, all right, but I wanted to consult Tim before dismissing them, so we waited for his return. Soon after eight o'clock he was back.

"I went over to the hotel with one of the officers," he told us. "We had a long talk with Olga and got a very full description of her visitor. She is a most observant girl. The police think they have a good chance of picking him up. They have posted a plain-clothes man in the hotel and are doing a methodical search of the city. How did you get along?"

"We're all set for tomorrow."

"My God, that's wonderful. What time do we leave?"

I had been anticipating that question and Tim's disappointment on hearing the reply, but it was out of the question for both of us to leave the port when there was so much to be done there.

"This is just the first one: there'll be lots more," I told him, after explaining that he would have to stay behind. "Maybe you can go over with the Bog s Noma at the end of the week."

There could be no doubt that this was the proper course. It would have been absurd for us both to leave, but he was very crestfallen and looked at me reproachfully while agreeing that he should stay in Bari.

Petrinovic of the bandaged head came over to ask again about the coal.

"It will be here in half an hour," Tim answered. He had stopped at Navy House on his way back to the pier to find out whether we should still wait for it and had been told that it would be a great help if we could load it all before twelve o'clock next morning. "Do you think we can get started with the job tonight?" he asked Petrinovic.

"We'll keep as many as we can on the job all night," he answered. "That's the only way we can get the tracks clear by twelve o'clock."

CHAPTER 13

IM AND I EXCUSED OURSELVES THAT EVENING AND DINED alone. We needed an hour together to bring each other up-to-date on the day's events and we needed another hour together to plan the next forty-eight hours; we needed a couple of hours together just to relax a little. The pace was hard and we were just beginning. It would become even harder. We sensed that unless we saved our strength by making the odd moments spent with food as restful as possible we might not be able to sustain it.

Tim said, when we were seated in the dining room: "If these Partisans are typical of their kind I don't wonder that Tito wins battles. They work without pay. Their only reward is to get things done. They get so tired they stagger, but they won't quit. All you have to do is expose them to work, like setting a match to powder."

The sky had become overcast during the afternoon and as we waited for our dinner the storm struck. A gusty wind, laden with rain, shook the windows and drummed upon the panes beside us.

"Do you think they'll keep at it, shoveling coal, in this weather?" I asked.

"They'll be there," Tim said. "This won't stop them. Nothing will."

I was more anxious about Olga's visitor than I had been willing to admit at the pier and questioned Tim about the details of his arrangements with the Security section. He had been very thorough, as usual.

"Port Security took a serious view of the case," he said. "They put a lot of men on it; but our safety depends largely on our own defences, it seems to me. No one can protect us

against an assassin hiding in the shadows at the port, or waiting out there in the rain now for us to finish dinner and come through the doorway looking for the car—no one but the intended victim. We'll just have to keep the forty-fives on the half-cock with one in the spout and be ready to go into action fast. . . and walk warily."

We were both armed now, of course, even in the dining room, our pistols slung inside our field jackets under the left arm in the regulation Air Force holster. By drawing the zipper on the front of the jacket only halfway up and leaving the top button undone the gun could be kept ready to hand, and fortunately we were both fairly expert in the use of the weapon, particularly in the dark, commando style.

I told Tim about the conversation with the Admiral in the course of which he had promised to send someone up to see us about the ships. That cheered him up.

"If he should come while I'm away," I told him, "be sure to have everything confirmed in writing. We can't keep on calling Admiral Power every day, so be sure that any arrangements are concluded in such form that they'll stick."

"You bet I will," he answered.

It was eleven o'clock when we left the table and went out in the driving rain to look for Tony, the driver, and his rickety little taxicab. We found him sleeping quietly behind the wheel, cheerful as a sparrow. His overtime was accumulating and no one had ever paid him to snooze before.

"Good weather for your trip—if it holds," Tim grinned.

At the end of the pier we found our bare-footed friends toiling in the darkness and the torrential rain. The coal had arrived at last. Several cars had already been unloaded and Petrinovic was working the men in shifts, resting one weary crew while he used the other. Except for one hurricane lamp in the car the men were unloading there was no violation of blackout.

"How's the rakjia holding out?" Tim joked.

"It's a good thing we had the presence of mind to bring over a small barrel of it," Petrinovic answered. "It's a great help to the men."

When we were below, in the stuffy, dimly-lit cabin of the Bog s Nama, Tim produced two tiny pills from his watch pocket and gave one to Petrinovic. "Take it," he said, "it'll do you good . . ." and he washed his down with a gulp of the fiery white rakjia. Petrinovic grinned and swallowed his without asking any questions. It could have, been cyanide ... or sugar.

"Benzedrine:1" I said to Tim.

"Yeh, we'll need it tonight."

"Are you planning, to stay all night?" I asked.

"Sure. It's the least I can do—spell the old boy off now and then."

I stayed a little while, then returned to the hotel and went to bed. The next day would be a long one, and there would be little or no opportunity to sleep at the end of it as dusk would find us well out to sea on our way to Jugoslavia.

The next day began at seven in the morning when Tim came stumbling in, grey with fatigue, dirty and soaked to the skin. He shivered through a cold bath then went to bed "for half an hour—just to get warm . . ." while Ivo and I were getting dressed.

As we went down to breakfast I warned him: "You mustn't take it too hard. You've got to last until we can get some help here, which probably means until that reconnaissance party arrives from Africa—maybe ten days or more."

"I'll last," he answered, looking as though he would collapse before reaching the dining room. "I'll get some rest tonight."

That day, Tuesday, was much like the one before. There were interminable errands to be run by Tim and me; there was constant pressure on us both—and on everyone else—at the pier. The coal was all stored away a few minutes after eleven o'clock. NOIC, we learned, was duly impressed. I called on the captain of destroyers—Captain Dee—as the Admiral had suggested, but he had little information about the other shore which we could use. His zone of operations lay south of the Neretva River mouth and we were interested in the waters north of that point.

Hurry as we would throughout that day we were always ten minutes late, until three o'clock when Steve and I paused to get some food before going aboard the Gull.

Taylor was worried when we reached his ship, although he said nothing beyond welcoming us aboard and showing us where to stow our guns and musette bags. (Mladineo and I were armed with a Marlin each, in addition to our pistols.) He stamped back and forth along the deck, noting every detail of its disorder with evident bad temper and dissatisfaction. Finally he said: "We're late, waiting for Sparks"—the inevitable name for the radio operator—"who has been ashore for hours trying to get that damned circuit of his set up. I've sent word for him to come down at once."

Just then Radic arrived puffing at the quay. I had promised to see his wife in Vis and he now had a letter for me to take to her—a letter and a bundle. "Dirty clothes," he explained. "She can do them up and send them back to me."

Twenty minutes later Sparks arrived, appearing even more unhappy than his skipper.

"What's the matter?" the latter asked, testily. "You know we were scheduled to leave at 1600 hours."

Sparks had encountered difficulty in erecting a suitable antennae only to discover, when he completed the task, that the ;ne available radio set at Navy House was in need of repairs. He had worked frantically to get them made in time, but he would need at least another half an hour to get the set ticking.

Taylor put the case up to me. "What do you think, Major? Shall we go without radio communication?"

Any delay now would oblige us to enter the port of Vis in broad daylight, which might be very dangerous. Mladineo had explained to me that ships like the Gull are seldom bombed or machine-gunned by German aerial patrols if they lie quietly in port during the daylight hours, but they were almost certain to be shot up and bombed if still at sea when the patrols came over early in the morning.

There was one other angle, too. Mladineo had suggested to me that we approach a lonely house he knew on the south shore of Vis before daybreak and there inquire whether the port, around on the eastern tip of the island, was still in Partisan hands. In this way we would avoid going into a trap from which there would be no escape, if the Germans were now at the town of Vis. We might find Germans at the little house on the south shore too, but they would be few and, armed as we were, we could hope to deal with them; but this plan was without meaning unless we allowed ourselves time to escape back over the horizon before daybreak, should there prove to be Germans there.

"Let's go without it, if you don't mind," I answered. "We won't need it anyway."

Taylor's happy grin was reassuring. He had not been worrying about his radio circuit: his only fear was that we would take an unfriendly view of these troubles at the last minute, consider him a sloppy skipper. . . .

"Right. . . . Cast off!" he shouted, and a few moments later we were moving out through the gate in the boom, headed for the open sea.

The Gull's big engines droned sweetly underfoot and the little ship quartered the long swell with a lazy roll as we set our course one degree west of north. A few white cumulous clouds lay on the horizon before us, but the sky was otherwise clear and bright.

"Looks to me like a clear night with a strong wind out of the northeast," Taylor said, suddenly materializing beside me on the deck. "I never thought we'd conduct our first operation—or any other operation, for that matter—under a full moon."

CHAPTER 14

The second in command aboard the Gull, like his skipper and the rest of the crew, wore nondescript clothing and had a two-days' beard. Except for Sterns and me there was not a uniform aboard—if one excepted Mladineo in his bastard GI and Partisan cap outfit. Had the second in command been dressed in uniform he would have been wearing a blue jacket with a stripe and a half in wavy design about the sleeve, for he was a sub-lieutenant in the Naval Reserve—the "Wavy Navy," as the officers who proudly write "RN" after their names (for Royal Navy) would say. He was a mere wisp of a lad, more than six feet tall but certainly weighing less than a hundred and twenty pounds. As we cruised north in the brilliant moonlight he stood on the deck in front of the little wheel-house with a big pair of night glasses in his hand, peering almost constantly into the vague horizon.

"What do you see with those things, Blake?" I asked.

"Well, you see a lot you would never see without them," he answered with a friendly grin; "but they tear your eyes out after a while. Have a look magnification; the impression is rather what one would expect if he suddenly turned into a cat. You see in the dark.

"If you'll spell me off for a few minutes I'll go below and get a cup of tea," Blake said. "Shout if you see anything at all. If we meet a ship it will be point-blank range by the time we see them, so there won't be much time to waste."

For the next quarter of an hour I searched one hundred and eighty degrees of horizon diligently without seeing anything but low cloud banks. Blake returned and relieved me of the bulky binoculars, sweeping the sea before us in a swift rotary gaze. Abruptly he paused to steady the glass, then he bolted for the wheel-house and shouted down the ladder to Taylor:

"Island, I think, on our starboard bow."

"Okay," Taylor called back. "It checks. I reckoned we'd pick it up within the next minute or two. How much do we clear1?"

"About a mile, I guess," Blake answered.

"Dead on!" Taylor answered. "Thank you."

When Blake returned to his post I borrowed the glass to look at the island I had failed to see.

"Right over there," he said, orienting me into the darkness. With great difficulty I discerned a faint intensification of shadow on the horizon. "There's a bit of low mist over that way," he added kindly. "I don't wonder you failed to see it. One's blinkers have to become accustomed to this job. They were never intended for it."

An hour later the wind began to rise and by midnight it was blowing briskly. Taylor's prophecies were correct to the letter. A faint low mist lay upon the sea, but overhead the moon was clear and the stars sparkled; the wind freshened momentarily and big seas slowed us down.

Blake and I talked and took turns with the glasses. The lad was full of romance and poetry, and the mood of the moment —excitement and adventure—made him talk freely about himself and his ideals. Although he looked scarcely twenty years old he had already taken part in many operations like the present one, mostly along the coast of France. He appeared completely fearless and inspired, like a missionary in a dangerous land. In time we would win the war and all the wrongs of the world would be righted: meanwhile, he was delighted with his duties. His face was as fresh and charming as his ideas as he stood with his feet well apart on the heaving deck, his slender figure swaying in the wind. He swept the horizon from east to north, then from west to north again and noticed out of the corner of the eye as he lowered the glasses that we were leaving a wake shaped like the letter "S."

"That lad at the wheel has got the wind up," he laughed. 'This is his first time out and he's a bit nervous. Instead of watching the compass card he's thinking of home. Look at the course he's steering!"

From where I stood I could hear nothing of what he said to the helmsman through the whistling of the wind, but I could see his face in the moonlight as he leaned against the wheel-house door. A kindly smile failed to mitigate its seriousness as he delivered his admonition. There was much gentleness in this lion-hearted young warrior. I reflected thinking that it's hard to win a war against countries that produce officers like him. ...

At two o'clock I went below for a few winks of sleep in the fossle after visiting Taylor at the navigation table in the cabin and arranging to be called as soon as we made a landfall, which should be a little before daylight. The mounting seas were putting us behind our schedule and it might be day before we could reach the little house on the southern shore where Mladineo had planned our first contact with the island. Mladineo himself had been asleep below, like Sterns, since early in the evening.

When they turned us out the island lay just ahead in the cold white light of dawn and the Gull moved smoothly through the quiet seas in the lee of the island. Steve shivered in the wind as he peered through the glass in search of familiar landmarks.

Turning suddenly and handing the glass to me he said: "Look, right there . . ." pointing with his arm.

The binoculars revealed a steeply rising shore surmounted by big hills, and half way up, on one of them, there appeared to be a little village, a cluster, of stone dwellings surrounded by high walls.

"What is it?" I asked him.

"That's the fort we took," he said. "Remember the story I told you at Catania? That's the fort where we got our arms."

Taylor asked: "How far are we from the cove you mentioned?"

"It's a couple of miles east of here," Steve answered. "Stay on this course—or better, just keep within a thousand yards of shore. There are no rocks here."

A few minutes later we were opposite the entrance to the cove. Taylor and Sterns were on deck and there was evidence of some tension in the atmosphere.

"Had we better man the guns?" Taylor asked me. "And what flag should we fly—if any?"

"Man the guns by all means," I answered, "but be absolutely sure that no one cuts loose without orders to shoot. You can count on them, can't you? The Partisans might fire a few shots, not recognizing us. It wouldn't do to blast back at 'em . . . and hoist your own colors."

"I'll make it clear to them," Taylor answered. "I'll see that they don't load—that they keep the chambers empty—until they're told to shoot."

Suddenly the decks were alive with hurried figures as nets were cast aside and oil-drums split open to reveal the wicked machine guns and their belts of shining brass cartridges. Taylor was giving his orders quietly and the men took up their positions behind the guns, verifying and checking with expert, nervous fingers. The Royal Navy's flag fluttered briskly up the halyards to the mast. We were in close now, virtually at the entrance of the tiny little sheet of sheltered water. A house stood at the back of it and there was no sign of any living thing ashore.

"It's strange," Steve said. "There ought to be a sentry on duty. Keep the house covered and work her in as far as you can. There's plenty of water."

Taylor stood beside the helmsman. He took her in stern first—a wise precaution, and we backed slowly across the little inlet until scarcely fifty yards lay between us and the house. Steve and I stood at the rail in the stern, he armed with a megaphone as well as his pistol and Marlin. Finally a figure appeared cautiously in the doorway. Steve shouted his own name and that of the Bog s Noma and a few interrogative phrases of Serbo-Croat I was unable to undertand, then the man in the doorway stepped out, carrying his rifle in both hands "at the ready" and ran down to the edge of the water to shout replies to the questions. Their conversation lasted only a minute or two.

"It's all right," Steve called, grinning happily. "We're absoluteiy all right. Everything should be normal on the island. This man was at Headquarters in Vis three days ago. . . ."

I relayed the message to Taylor, who had already guessed its content from the look on Mladineo's face, which he had been watching through the window in the back of the

wheel-house. He laughed and waved his hand, then signaled the engine room for quarter-speed, and the Gull crept back through the narrow entrance to the sea. The figures behind the machine guns relaxed as we headed toward the town of Vis, twelve miles away.

But when we were under way Mladineo betrayed some surviving anxiety, first by asking that we keep far enough off shore to be out of gunshot, then by saying he thought it would be best to keep the guns manned as we entered the harbor of Vis.

"The town could change hands in the night," he said. "We may as well take every precaution."

It was broad daylight now and we were doing exactly what we had planned to avoid, cruising up the coast without any cover and with no hope of cover if we should be attacked. There was no way in which the fisherman we had talked to in the cove could get a message to Vis, so we would have to go in under the Partisan guns, knowing that they were all laid on us at point-blank range from the moment we rounded the point and approached the harbor.

"You might as well explain that to them," Steve suggested, after we had talked a bit. "We must be sure that none of these machine guns start clattering under jittery trigger-fingers."

Taylor and Blake were in the wheel-house. I joined them there and relayed the message, one of the gunners stepping over to listen.

"They aren't likely to shoot at us, are they?" Taylor asked.

I called to Mladineo and inquired. He nodded solemnly and shouted back: "They're practically certain to shoot. That's why it's so important that no one cut loose here without orders."

I translated this cheerful message faithfully.

"Good God! What are we supposed to do when they open up?" Taylor wanted to know. The men looked at one another with unhappy faces. There was no place above the waterline on the little Gull that afforded any cover. She was as fragile as an egg-shell.

I discussed this point with Steve.

"When they open up we'll head straight for the battery that fires on us and proceed at reduced speed," he said. 'That way they will probably know we are friendly. They are not likely to fire anything very big—just rifles or machine guns. That's the only way we can hope to get in. . . .

"But they have some big guns," he added, after a moment. "That's one of the reasons it's so important not to open fire-even if someone should be hit aboard. Of course if the Germans hold the coast we're in for it, either way."

Taylor and Blake and the helmsman listened solemnly as I explained the situation. There was no comment, but Taylor stepped over to each of the gunners in turn and gave them their orders.

At eight-fifteen, we rounded the point and approached the narrow entrance of the harbor. Great hills guarded it at either side and a light-house stood on a promontory to the south. We would have to pass quite near it to get in.

At first there was no sign of life ashore, although we were less than half a mile from the light-house. Steve and I stood in the bows, he with his megaphone, I with the binoculars.

"Don't see a soul," I told him. Then a rifle cracked.

"Here it comes," Steve said. "See that they do as I asked."

That first shot was followed by a whole volley from the same point near the light-house. I signaled to Taylor to head straight in toward it and reduce speed. He nodded, his face tense. We were on the course now, but the fire increased. I was still unable to discern any sign of life. Mladineo waved his megaphone above his head. A bullet smacked the wheel-house.

"How about it?" Taylor shouted. "Do we carry on?"

"Straight ahead," I answered. "They'll stop as soon as they see what we're up to."

(I was hoping they would.)

Steve looked at me and grinned. "I wish they'd shut it off," he said. "It's disagreeable, isn't it?"

We were really out of range for accurate rifle fire, particularly in a cross-wind, but it was disagreeable. We would not long be out of range. . . . Suddenly the firing ceased.

"We ought to be all right now," Steve said. There was still no sign of life on shore. It was not until we were in so close we dared advance no farther for fear of piling up that a solitary figure with a rifle slung across its shoulders came down the rocky tip of the headland to speak with us. It cupped its hands and shouted. Steve bellowed back through the megaphone.

"Stevo Mladineo of the Bog s Nama . . ." and the rest was incomprehensible. The little figure on the rocks had lots to say and it took some minutes for him to get his message

shouted up the wind to where we lay, wallowing in the choppy water. Finally Steve had it all and they waved at one another to indicate agreement.

"He wants us to wait here," Steve said. "He's notifying the authorities in town. There's a telephone. We're all right now. They'll let us in in a few minutes."

This message brought a great expression of relief to the faces in the wheel-house and behind our machine guns. We all took a deep breath and looked at one another and laughed. It had been easy, after all!

Soon the little figure reappeared and motioned for us to proceed toward the port, indicating with a sweep of the arm that we were to stay well in against the southern shore. Steve had not yet been recognized. The Partisans were prepared to take a chance on us, but they wanted to keep us well covered all the way.

As we were now in so close that men on shore could see what we were doing I suggested to Taylor that the guns be put away. That would have a reassuring effect on anyone who was watching us through a gun-sight. We reached the entrance to the harbor itself a few minutes later but another figure on the shore stopped us there and indicated that we were to wait for a patrol boat which we could see making its way across the bay.

When it came alongside we noted that its decks fairly bristled with machine guns. There must have been twenty of them pointed at us, most of them on ten-inch tripods and behind them men lying on their bellies. They were an ugly sight, viewed from that angle, but it took Mladineo only a few moments to establish his identity. Then there were happy shouts of greeting and we were ordered to go on to the town, which lay against the hills on the far side of the port.

The Gull's engines thumped and rumbled softly as we pushed across to where a small crowd waited on the sea-wall. Eager hands caught our rat-lines and strong arms warped us in until the dainty Gull came to rest against the timbers.

CHAPTER 15

Eager hands helped us down from the deck of the Gull. The little town before us tumbled from the lower slopes of the hillside to the water's edge; a broad roadway, paved with gravel, lay between the sea-wall and the first buildings. I scuffed my shoes on it—Jugoslavia under foot at last! and the gesture reminded me of my Scotch wife coming off the Clipper at La Guardia Field two years before. She had done that very thing as she came up the gang-plank to set foot on the American continent for the first time.

"We'll call this operation—the movement of supplies across the Adriatic to the Partisans—after her," I thought. " 'Audrey' will be our code name for the show."

And this is the name, unpronounceable for Jugoslavs, by which it came to be known to Tito and his gallant followers.

Steve's friends pressed around. A wild babble of voices overwhelmed us. I shook hands with hundreds of guerrillas, met dozens of drugitzas (comradesses) most of whom kissed Steve, and then we were swept away, in the heart of the little crowd, to Headquarters, a small building overlooking the port not far from where we landed.

Vis, from what I could see in that first glance, was a picture postcard town. It snuggled against the lower slopes of great ambient hills that rose from the harbor on all sides. Its streets were too narrow for vehicles. They were built for pedestrians and donkeys. They were clean and fresh and attractive, like the houses, stacked tier upon tier, one above the other; and beyond were vineyards as far as the eye could see, terraced in the rocky hillside.

Steve's friends thought the Gull would be safer if she moored in the "Baie des Anglais," a little basin around on the eastern side of the harbor. Anchored there, she would attract less attention when the patrols came over, so I hurried back to suggest that the shift be made at once. The first planes would be along at any time. Taylor was just getting tied up but he cast off at once when I told him what had been said and started his engines—just in time, for he had scarcely dropped anchor in the crystal-clear water of the "Baie" when the Germans came over in a Dornier and treated the port to a minute inspection.

We were at Headquarters when it arrived, flying less than a thousand feet above the little town, and stepped out on the balcony overlooking the harbor to watch it sail slowly by. The aircraft circled once to take a second look at the Gull, flying very low. I held my breath. Were they coming back to bomb? But they passed over and swept out to sea, flying south toward Hvar.

Headquarters was a rambling old building. The commander's office was the front room in which we had gathered. A cacophony of voices' shook the walls. New faces arrived constantly and every arrival brought cries of greeting and exuberant demonstrations of joy. Arms clattered—everyone was armed to the teeth—and glasses clinked to cries of Zivijo!" as we breakfasted on rakjia and grapes. Joyful pandemonium! I was ravenous and wished there were some more solid food than the delicious grapes, brandy and coffee to start the day, but we were there at last, in Jugoslavia, and the infectious high spirits of the company carried me along.

These Partisans looked much like those I already knew on the Italian shore. They wore oddly assorted uniforms made up of bits and pieces from those of various invading armies, Italian, German and Bulgarian, and the inevitable blue caps with a red star sewn to the front. Most of the men wore two or three days' beard; some were bare-footed; all had hand grenades hanging from their belts.

From one of them, who spoke a little French, I learned that they were more heavily armed than usual. Our arrival in port aboard an unknown vessel had alerted the community and every man and woman who could bear arms had been turned out with all the martial equipment at their disposal, ready to murder us to the last man.

Even the women wore pistols and grenades. They appeared to live in the back of the building where they doubtless presided over something resembling a kitchen from which they were now able to produce grapes and the fiery white brandy. No doubt they kept their rifles and sub-machine guns in the corner there, behind the stove. . . .

I was still thinking of bacon and eggs and a cup of steaming coffee when, to my amazement, those very dishes were brought in and set before us. Nor was that all: there was good black bread, as well, and a big bowl of fragrant honey. It was a breakfast never to be forgotten.

"They don't do so badly here," I said to Steve.

"It's a feast—in your honor," he answered. "The only people who ever have bread in Jugoslavia are the soldiers, and as for these other items . . . the coffee is the last few ounces of someone's pre-war treasure—and there aren't six hens on the island."

I was ashamed of my comment but I understood the spirit in which he set me right. He wanted me to understand his countrymen. I looked at their animated faces and felt that I was beginning to understand them. There was eagerness and joy in them all. At first glance they might look like pirates: on serious examination they looked more cavalier. There was chivalry and inspiration in the best of them. A stubble of beard may be misleading but it hides nothing from the critical gaze ... it means nothing in itself.

We were only eight at breakfast. The others who filled the room during the rakjia drinking ceremony had melted away or were now busying themselves with the routine work of the headquarters. Slowly, I began to identify those at the table, the commander of the island garrison, Bogdan Nikic, a splendid looking lad of massive stature, his assistant, three company commanders and the commander of the garrison on the adjacent island of Hvar. All had interesting faces and hung on every word Steve spoke as he told them of his adventures in Italy and Africa. I could follow the story in part by recognizing the names of places and persons whose position I knew in the chronology. Steve's words about me must have been very gallant, for when he came to my part in his tale they all looked at me with candid admiration, smiling and exclaiming.

"What fairy tales are you telling them?" I asked Steve, somewhat embarrassed. He translated my question and they all laughed, leaning over to clap me on the back. Steve never answered, but I remember thinking I would do my best to be as good as his word, whatever it was. These were men one could be proud to help.

It was eleven o'clock before we finished coffee and cigarettes and conversation. I was eager to get down to work. A hundred unanswered questions burned on the tip of my tongue. There was no time to be lost if we were to work our way through the list. But Steve protested. First, he said, we must go and rest. A messenger had been sent across the open sea in a launch to Starigrad on the island of Hvar to fetch an officer from the headquarters of Coastal Command on the mainland who happened to be there. He would be qualified to tell me what I wanted to know and we could get to work as soon as he

arrived, probably about two o'clock; meanwhile, we should sleep. We left Headquarters then and set off afoot toward the old section of the town, half a mile west along the waterfront.

It seemed folly to devote any time to sleeping when there was so much to do, but sooner or later we would be driven to it. I had had no more than two hours' sleep during the night, I would probably have no more on the voyage home: we would be in the port of Bari at nine or ten o'clock in the morning and there would certainly be no opportunity to sleep until late that night. . . . Two hours' sleep now was probably a good idea. I remembered my admonition to Tim. I too would have to keep going until some of the others could arrive from Cairo and take over a share of the work.

Our way led along a fine concrete walk beside the harbor after we had passed through the narrow streets of the new section of the town. It linked the old and new sections of Vis to one another. Orchards and vineyards lay on our right, the beautiful little harbor to the left. Fishing boats were beached carefully on the clean shore. It was all dazzlingly beautiful in the morning light.

The house to which Steve took me was a tiny dwelling facing the only street the old town boasts. It stood between the street and the harbor, its back windows looking across the water, the waves lapping gently against its very walls. The occupants, a middle-aged man named Dusan and his wife Marica, met Steve with cries of joy, Marica embracing him as though he were her son. They had given him hospitality before—at the risk of their lives. Both wrung my hand and stared at me with admiration and affection as Steve told them some romantic story of my doings, and we were escorted at once to the living quarters of the house on the second floor to drink the inevitable glass of rakjia. They prepared two rooms for us at once, but it was not until half an hour later that we were able to retire to our beds.

I can't remember sleeping, though I do recall lying down. There was a rap on the door before I could close my eyes and Steve came in to say that it was half past two. Commander Radicic had arrived from Hvar and would be down with Bogdan Nikic to see us in a few minutes. He had sent a messenger ahead, thoughtfully, to give us time to get up. Dusan brought a jar of hot water to each of us and by the time we had finished shaving Marica had two hot cups of tea ready and served. The little house was wonderfully clean and pleasant and as soon as we were ready we wandered across to its main room which was modestly furnished with a central table, six chairs and a small sideboard. The table was set and once more I was struck by the items of our fare. The village had been searched again for that meal. Someone had produced a few pinches of tea. There were sardines from Comisa, ten miles across the island, there was at least an ounce of sugar in a little dish, there was more honey, a peculiar paste made of crushed figs, and fresh bread specially baked for us by the women at headquarters. Both white and red wine were on the table, and, of course, a decanter of rakjia. Marica and Dusan were busy with final details, coming back again and again to be sure that nothing was amiss on this banquet board, wonderfully happy in their hospitality. Their two children arrived and were introduced to me—Steve knew them well. One was a tall girl just

entering adolescence, the other a stripling lad of about the same age, very proud in his Partisan uniform, a gun on his hip and a hand grenade dangling from his belt.

As I watched them all I resolved never to return to the island without two cargoes—one in the hold for the National Army of Liberation, for Tito, and the other in the ship's stores to be used as gifts for our civilian friends. We all kept that resolution in the weeks that followed. The latter category of supplies we called "the Santa Claus cargo" and we never sailed without it.

Dusan and Marica felt honored by Commander Radicic's presence and conferred upon him their unabashed, wide-eyed admiration. He was a tall, broad-shouldered young man with piercing eyes. His voice was hearty. He moved boldly and freely, a man without inhibitions, sure of himself and gay. His manners with them were charming and gentle; with Steve he was direct and boisterous; with me, perfectly at ease. We seated ourselves at the table. Marica took up her position in the kitchen. Dusan unobtrusively functioned as waiter. The two children, after a brief call, disappeared. And the three of us settled down to a very good lunch.

Like Steve, Radicic spoke French. This was a great boon to me. It is difficult to make friends through an interpreter, and I was eager to know this man well and understand his problems; I was eager that we should be friends. We understood one another instinctively; with a common language at our disposal the rest was easy and before lunch was over the three of us were one in purpose and method. We were three with a common goal in a dangerous line of business—and there's nothing better in the world!

"How long would it take you to camouflage the Bog s Noma so that the reconnaissance planes couldn't find her?" I asked him. Steve had already assured me that it could be done in two hours, but I was afraid he had let his enthusiasm—of which he had plenty—carry him away.

Radicic answered: "Not more than thirty minutes—if we were expecting her."

"If we sail her in here in the night how long would it take your men to get two hundred tons of cargo off of her?" I asked. He consulted Nikic briefly before answering.

"About two hours," was the astonishing reply.

"How many men would you use?"

"Two or three hundred."

"And could you get her to sheltered water and camouflaged before daybreak?"

Radicic made a disparaging gesture, looked at Steve and laughed.

"Why not?" he answered simply. "Get her in here by four in the morning and there's nothing to it."

Steve had been astonished by the speed at which we worked in our headquarters. It was my turn to be astonished y the speed and efficiency of Partisan operations. In Cairo had been told that it was impossible to disguise even an HB—a ship exactly like our PT's—from aerial reconnaissance. Apparently the problem had been studied by the camouflage experts but the best methods they devised had proven useless. The boats that had attempted to lay over for a day on the coast of Greece under that camouflage had been blown to bits. I had seen the patrol come over that morning at a thousand feet or less. It seemed inconceivable that a passenger vessel, a steamer, with at least forty feet of freeboard could be hidden so effectively.

"Then you should have no trouble hiding any motor torpedo boats we might send over to raid German shipping along the coast," I suggested.

Radicic turned to Steve for a precise knowledge of the type of craft I had in mind. Steve had seen one of them in the port of Bari and answered in Serbo-Croat.

Radicic laughed, "Of course not, it's the infancy of the art," he answered in good idiomatic French.

"If we brought such boats over would they have anything to fight?" I asked. The question made his eyes shine and caused him to lean forward across the table. "Plenty," was his answer. "Plenty! There is the Rab, a little steamer that carries food to the Germans in the mouth of the Neretva River—an ideal target for a torpedo-carrier, and there are the patrol boats, too small to be sunk by torpedoes but ideal for anything with plenty of automatic weapons aboard." They were "fairly screaming to be sunk," he said, adding that occasionally the Germans moved big ships along the coast, usually between Vis and Hvar. . . . Could we really get the MTB's to come over?

I had a hunch we could and told him so and let it go at that, but I was planning a new campaign against the resources under the command of our infallible admiral at Taranto. . . .

We covered lots of ground before we left the table. I asked a number of questions that were indiscreet about Tito's strength and the disposition of his forces, and some were left unanswered, but all the questions I asked about the enemy's forces were answered punctiliously.

"We were not expecting you," Radicic apologized. "If we had known you were coming we would have gotten a message through to Headquarters and obtained permission to answer all your questions. Next time you come I'll put you in touch with my chief and he'll give you all the information you desire."

"Are you in direct communication with Tito from here?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "We must communicate with him in a roundabout way from the coast, but the service is fast. Runners cross the mountains, passing through the region the Germans think they hold, then telephone from the other side. But it will not be necessary for us to get a message through to him: it will suffice for us to communicate with our own Headquarters in the interior—the Headquarters commanding the entire coastal area."

I had enough from Radicic to facilitate our second trip, enough to warrant clearing the Bog s Noma, enough—I hoped —to warrant the Admiral's ordering well-armed small ships into these waters to attack the Germans. I knew where the mine-fields were and how to get through them without being fired upon by the Partisans that guarded the channels . . . the data was all inscribed on the naval charts I had brought with me.

"On your next trip you must meet Colonel Ilic, our commanding officer," Radicic said. "He will give you all the information you want. When will you be back:1"

That day was Wednesday, October 13, 1943. Eight days had passed since Tim and I left Cairo. I would be back in Bari the next day, Thursday, and we could sail the Bog s Nama that night or the next. If it sailed Friday—allowing twentyfour hours' latitude, just to be sure—it would arrive in the night of Friday to Saturday. I wanted to be back myself to check on the unloading and camouflaging operations.

"I'll be back in the night of Saturday to Sunday," I answered. "Where will I meet your commander, here or on the coast?"

"Probably on the coast," Radicic said. "And you may have to go in to his headquarters. They're a good way from the sea." His smile implied that the trip might prove adventurous. I looked at Steve. "We'll go together, eh?" I said to him. He nodded eagerly. Steve was a big man on his island but he had found few opportunities to meet the chiefs of the Partisan movement. A trip to one of the principal headquarters to meet the officer commanding appealed to him. He was not ambitious, but he had a consuming curiosity about the leaders of the People's Army as well as a great sense of adventure. And there was one other element in the problem: he was still worried about his trip to Algiers and feared it might be misunderstood. Radicic, under whose orders he had gone there, reassured him, but he remained concerned. An opportunity to meet a man who actually knew Tito and even saw him from time to time in the routine discharge of his duties, might help, if anything should go wrong.

In that he had a sure intuition—a perception more accurate than that of the impulsive Radicic. The latter assured him that all he had to do was write an account of his mission, which would be sent on by the next courier. The rest would be up to Commander Ilic, who was in charge of all the Partisan armies on the coast and in the islands. He was a very big man, having been at Tito's headquarters before taking his present command in the field.

"One of our great heroes," Nikic said proudly.

Marica performed another miracle and served us coffee, immensely proud of her resourcefulness. From time to time during the meal she had emerged from the kitchen and fluttered around the table, patting us affectionately on the shoulder and encouraging us to eat heartily or refilling our wine-classes. We insisted upon having her join us now—her and Dusan—to drink a glass of wine. Our work was done for the moment, and we were all in high spirits. Dusan said to me: "Next time—you see—ich spik Inglish . . ." pointing at himself and nodding and laughing. "Can count," he said. "One, two, three, four . . ." and so on, to "tzehn," which he pronounced as though it were the German word.

"Where did you learn?" I asked. Steve interpreted. He left the table and returned with a very frayed old book which purported to teach a conversion of Serbo-Croat into English words. As I examined it he explained to Steve, who translated, that he had learned to count while we were having our lunch, while he was waiting on us—between dishes. He was certainly losing no time!

CHAPTER 16

A LITTLE AFTER FOUR O'CLOCK OUR PARTY BROKE UP. STEVE went to Headquarters to write a report on his adventures in the big world beyond the Adriatic; Radicic and Nikic went with him. Radicic planned to stay for dinner with us at Headquarters, see us off sometime before midnight, then return to Starigrad. I set out alone with Ivo's dirty clothes and the letter which I had promised to take to his wife. The trans-Adriatic laundry company was about to complete its first operation!

I found her in a little house near Headquarters. Donkeys brayed in the narrow street on one side of the dwelling and the sea washed against the other. She was a handsome woman of about thirty-five, fair-haired, and well preserved, living among pillows and knick-knacks and chintzes in over-furnished little rooms. She was ravenous for news of Ivo. After devouring his letter she asked countless questions about his present way of life in Bari, when he was likely to return, what sort of work he did. I had promised Ivo that if conditions were too difficult on Vis or if the Germans were pressing the Partisans too hard in that region I would bring her back aboard the Gull, but I refrained from mentioning that bargain. Everything was normal on the island and it would be better for her to remain there. We talked a while and I promised to send a Partisan for the suitcase he requested in his letter, then I left her to hurry to the newly established hospital. I wanted to see what they needed there and get acquainted with the doctors.

That visit was one of the most moving experiences of my first visit to the land of the Jugoslavs. An old building which must once have been a convent, situated, like most of the buildings in the town, on the edge of the water, had been taken over by three young doctors and converted to their purpose. Their work had been more or less completed only a day or two before and their first patients were already installed.

It is difficult to describe that building and the men who worked in it. It was made of stone and had fallen into a state of mild dilapidation. The three doctors had moved in and mobilized all the manpower they could find—some twenty or thirty Partisans—and rolled

up their sleeves. They were the foremen of the three gangs that cleaned up the building, washed and repaired the windows, whitewashed the walls, scrubbed the floors. Every room in the building fairly gleamed. The three indefatigable doctors were still devoting their spare time to plain sweaty toil, building themselves an operating room. They were gaunt with fatigue and radiant with enthusiasm. Bobin, Zucalo and Biacic! Three symbols of the indomitable spirit of their race.

Bobin spoke shaky French, Zucalo appalling English, Biacic German. There were thirty-five good beds in the hospital and plenty of good linen for all of them.

"From town people who now sleep on floor," said Zucalo. "Plenty beds." He was short and stalwart, wore very thick glasses and had an engaging smile. "Very good, yes?" The rooms were large with three beds on either side. Sunshine poured into them and ricocheted off the white walls, sparkled on the immaculate linen, danced in the dustless air. Very good indeed! Girls in clean white shirts open at the throat, sleeves rolled up, attended the patients in the two little wards that were occupied.

"It is so unfortunate," said Bobin, "that we have no medicine. Our therapy is almost entirely kindness and rest. It is terrible to see suffering and know exactly how to stop it, how to cure the ailment that causes it, and to lack the simple material required. We have nothing, almost nothing."

I inquired about the patients, individually. Several were recovering slowly from bullet wounds; one was dying of a wound in the thigh that grew and spread instead of healing; one, very white and drawn, was recovering from an amputation of his left leg—without anaesthetics.

"He will live, I think," Bobin said, pointing at him, smiling and nodding encouragingly into the wan face. "Shock. It was shock that nearly killed him."

"Amputations without anaesthetics is hard, both for patient and doctor," said Zucalo. "Very hard!" He peered at me through his thick glasses, his eyes enormously magnified, and smiled cheerfully.

The half-built operating room was a marvel of ingenuity. Old window panes had been fitted into a break high in the wall on the north side to admit a flood of white light. Biacic had been working there with plaster and trowel when I arrived. Every crack in the old masonry had been sealed up with plaster so that the room could be kept free of dust. In an anteroom running water had been made available in a kitchen sink from the house of some generous citizen. An oil stove had been installed to boil water.

"Have you any instruments?" I inquired.

"A few," said Bobin. "Enough, perhaps. But we need an autoclave to sterilize them."

They were in business, those three followers of the great profession, caring for the wounded and the sick with love and gentle hands and a passionate will to make them whole again —and virtually nothing else.

They were uncomplaining. They were proud of what they had, of what they had made. Their entire pharmacy and all their instruments and equipment—everything they possessed to care for the wounded and the dying that would presently fill their beds—could have been loaded and carried off along the narrow water-front street on the back of a little donkey.

As they needed everything the request seemed absurd, but I asked: "Write down for me the things you need the most, the things you must have right away, keeping your list short and limited to small quantities. I'll bring those things to you on Saturday. And between now and Saturday make out a full list of everything you need. Everything! It may not be possible to get it all immediately but most of it should be here within a week and the rest will follow as soon as possible."

This proposal struck them dumb. They stared at me in silence for a long moment before breaking into voluble Serbo-Croat among themselves, then they turned to me, too deeply moved to do more than stammer, half incredulous. Bobin, the most demonstrative, embraced me. The others wrung my hands. I found the scene embarrassing and felt unworthy of the honor of their gratitude, pedestrian and small in their presence. My task was so easy compared to theirs. As soon as I could I said good-bye and hurried away toward headquarters.

Everyone on the island was in the town of Vis that day and there was a greeting to exchange with every citizen one met along the street. I was the first Allied officer they had seen in that community, the first foreign friend to set foot on their shore, and an American officer in the bargain. Jugoslavs have a deep love for Americans and our arrival, long awaited, presaged great events for them, liberation at last, food, help and a renewed contact with the outside world from which they had so long been cut off. Everyone on the island was resolved to get a look at the "Mister Major" and at the British sailors dressed like fishermen who had brought him over. "Zdravo!" ("Health to you!") was the greeting. The Partisans offered it with the Communist salute, clenched fist to the temple. "Zdravo!" was the reply I used, with the American army salute; and there were two hundred Zdravos to the block.

Half way to Headquarters I passed a vintner's shop with wide double doors open to the sunshine and a great fragrance of grapes flooding the street. A familiar voice hailed me from its shadowy depths. It was Blake.

"Come on in, Major," he called, "and have a glass of wine."

The owner of the shop rushed to the door, accompanied by his broad-shouldered wife, bowing and smiling and inviting me with gestures to accept their hospitality. I stepped into the cool depths of the shop and discovered a primitive wine press in the back of the

room. It was an integral part of the masonry of the floor and the hewn beams of the ceiling. The good couple, stained purple from the grapes, were toiling with its old wooden machinery; the nectar stood in vats and flowed crimson across the scrubbed stone floor.

With the exception of the captain, the entire crew of the Gull were huddled together in the shadows at the rear of the shop, near the press, every man with a cup in his hand.

"Look out for that new wine," I cautioned them. "It'll make you sick as a dog if you drink much of it. You'd better stick to the stuff that's already fermented and botded."

"Everywhere we go," Blake answered, "we are invited to have a drink of that white fire-water. You can't refuse it either. This is the first place where we have been able to Zhuvjio without taking aboard any more alcohol."

I had a sip of the new wine to please my host, but I drank only a few drops; after tasting it I asked for last year's wine and was given a glass of some noble old vintage.

Blake told me the sailors had all gone swimming from the deck of the Gull soon after the Dornier had passed over and that they had enjoyed the most delightful day ashore. He was bewitched by the beauty and grace of the little town and its old harbor, utterly charmed by its guileless and hospitable citizens.

"I hope it won't be long before you bring us here again," he said. "I'd like to stay a month. When the war is over I'm going to come back here and stay until I know every man and woman and child on the island, and every brick in every house."

A crowd had gathered in the doorway to watch us and listen to our talk. They had edged their way in slowly as others joined their ranks and pressed forward. After a few minutes they filled the shop. Most of them were old peasants, a few were Partisans, a few were young women with children in their arms. All bowed and smiled warmly and said "Zdravo" very politely whenever they would catch the eye of one of us. The shopkeepers were delighted and served wine to them all; even the babies were given a sip.

"It's like this all the time," Blake said delightedly. "I've never seen such people."

Before I left, I cautioned him again about the new wine and reminded him that we were scheduled to clear for Bari after dark. The trip back should prove uneventful, but it would need a sober crew.

"I'll look after them, sir," he assured me. "Don't worry."

Lieutenant Taylor and Captain Sterns were at Headquarters with Steve and Commander Radicic and the island garrison authorities when I got there. Steve had just finished his report. Radicic and Taylor were talking about the weather. It had been perfect all day but there were indications that the wind might blow at hurricane velocity that night.

"How's the Gull in big seas?" I asked.

"She's all right in a long swell but she doesn't like choppy water," Taylor answered. "She's got too shallow a draft to be a good boat for rough water. But if you think we ought to go back I have no doubt we can ride it out, no matter how hard it blows."

Captain Stems took no part in the conversation. He had decided to remain on the island for a while and would not return with us, in any event.

"How bad is it likely to be?" I asked.

Radicic laughed and cocked his head on one side. "As bad as you like," he answered. "We get some awful big seas at this season."

I knew he was eager to get back to Starigrad that night and thought we might get some indication of his feelings about the weather by finding out whether he still intended to make the trip.

"Not me," he answered firmly. "Not unless the skies change. The water between here and Hvar is the roughest in the Adriatic."

I said to Taylor: "If it's not too bad at ten o'clock let's try it anyway."

"Righto!" he answered. "If you want to go, we'll go."

The drone of an aeroplane motor brought that conversation to an end. Taylor and I stepped out on the balcony and watched the speck grow in the sky, coming straight toward us. He was worried about his ship. "They say the Germans never attack fishing boats, but they certainly took a good look at mine this morning," he said. "Maybe they noticed something odd. There's got to be a first time for everything."

The Partisans had talked about the patrols as though they were nothing at all, but I noticed a growing tension in the room behind us as the crescendo of the motors rose. The Dornier was hardly five hundred feet above the water, headed straight for the Gull. Taylor grew tense. But the plane swept by without firing a shot or dropping anything and came on toward us. I stepped into the room. They were low enough to notice my American uniform. Radicic, who was in the window, nodded approval, reading my thoughts. The plane banked, passing within pistol-shot of where we stood, then headed south across the harbor and soon disappeared below the horizon. Everyone in the room relaxed visibly.

There was nothing "dangerous" about these visits—but no one knew when the bombs would fall, when the machine guns would rake the streets. . . . Words have different values in different lands. "Dangerous" is a word a Partisan might use to describe a burst of fire from the muzzle of an enemy's gun—when it's pointed into his face. They understand anxiety, not fear. A Jugoslav with fear in his heart—and I've known several of

them—is not considered a reprehensible character, a coward. They have no opprobrious term for him. He is simply considered absurd and pathetic, a creature to be treated like a child and kept well away from danger. If he should prove cowardly in combat he would be shot out of hand, but not vindictively; simply because he had committed the gross blunder of jeopardizing his fellow soldiers unnecessarily.

The wind came as we sat down to dinner. It sighed and moaned around the corners of the building as the women served the dinner—a great bowl of lamb stew and potatoes, hot bread and superb red wine.

"That's just the beginning," Radicic said, pointing through the roof at the weather and grinning broadly. "How do you like it?"

"I've heard worse," said Taylor, game and smiling.

The "Jugs"—as Tim would have called them—liked his spirit and slapped him on the back.

"If we can get away before the seas are big enough to make the harbor entrance impassable," Steve said, "we'll be all right."

We got away soon after nine o'clock, advancing our departure to get clear of the reefs at the harbor entrance before the weather could confine us. The whole island was at the sea-wall to see us off. My friends from the hospital were there with their first list. The vintner and his wife were there. Marica and Dusan were there with a present for us, a fine cake of pressed figs! They, who had not enough to eat, had sweets to spare to cheer us on our journey back. The whole Partisan army of the island of Vis was there. The wife of Ivo Radic was there with Ivo's suitcase, which weighed a ton. (When we got to Bari he opened it proudly and presented me with two bottles of Scotch and six bottles of rare French Champagne which he had been hoarding carefully to celebrate the end of the war, victory and peace. "I still have six bottles for that," he said. "Now is also a time to celebrate.")

To a great chorus of Zdravos we cast off. The big engines came to life and pushed us gently into the harbor as the wind howled through the rigging and drowned the voices of our friends. For a moment we could see them waving and shouting still, then darkness engulfed the shore and we settled down to the serious business of finding our way out through the narrows into the open sea where mountainous waves, foaming at the crest, waited to welcome us. Driving rain suddenly descended upon us, reducing visibility to a few yards, and the first half hour of our return voyage was filled with imminent disaster.

"Can we make it?" I roared at Steve, as we stood in the gale before the wheel-house, directing the helmsman (I was the translator).

"I think so, if ... A gauche!" he shouted, as the shore loomed up suddenly, scarcely a stone's throw from where we pitched and wallowed.

"Hard aport!" I bellowed at the helmsman.

Taylor, who was leaning out of the window in the wheel-house, just over my ear, said softly to himself: "Jesus Christ!"

"Steady now—on the course," Steve called. I passed the order on and we could feel the Gull answer the helm.

Twice again before we reached open water we found ourselves floundering in the big swells within a few yards of damnation, then we were clear. The seas tossed us higher and higher as we held a course into the east. Steve stayed on deck watchfully. I went below with Taylor for a look at the charts and the electric log to see where we had gotten to. We were safely clear of the island. In his pleasant English voice he called the new course to the helmsman. "Ay ay sir," came the answer as he put the wheel over and headed us for home.

CHAPTER 17

For a time we pitched and tossed in choppy rough water. The seas were building on that side of the Adriatic and had close, craggy peaks. The little Gull hated them and bucked her way along resentfully. She would get her- bows high in the air, roll wearily, then slap them down with a crash that would almost tear the rivets out of her bottom. It was not until we were two hours out that we began to assume an easier motion. The wind was on our starboard quarter and that was bad too.

But long before we were two hours out the crew began to remember my warnings about the new wine. The engineer was the first to hang his head over the rail and most of the others followed soon after. They were deathly seasick. Steve and Taylor and I were the only good sailors aboard that night —and as far as I was concerned that was true by only a narrow margin before the first light of the new day came to illuminate our miseries. By this time the Gull was riding a long precipitous swell very sweetly, rolling through a wide arc and nodding her pretty bows without ever a shock or a bump, but the swells were gigantic. The wind was down, but we dared not try to enter Bari harbor until the seas should have subsided.

It was a little before noon when we finally tied up behind the Bog s Nama. There had been a record gale in the night and streets along the water-front were piled deep with seaweed—a vivid testament of the storm's fury. The Port, as we had rightly supposed, had been closed during the early hours of the morning, such big seas riding in that the boom had been left in position between the piers that marked the harbor mouth. The full moon had been no trouble to us on that crossing! There had been a solid overcast during the early hours of the night when we were in waters patrolled by the enemy; after that we were unconcerned with its brilliance.

Although we had no suspicion of it then, we were to know the fury and violence of the Adriatic still more intimately within the next few days. Strange winds blow there with

great force. Cold air from the mountains on the Jugoslav coast pours down upon the warm and narrow sea, setting up currents that churn and torment its blue waters. There is a famous wind which the fishermen dread that blows from the northeast. It is called the Bora. Even big ships seldom survive its rage unscarred by the contest, yet when it has blown half way across to Italy it dies. The Bora thunders on the eastern coast and sends the big swells on to Italy where they crash and resound against the rocks in sunshine and windless air.

Tim was on the dock when we got in. His face was a little drawn and there were circles under his eyes.

"You haven't been chasing those floosies in the lobby of the hotel?" I ragged him in greeting.

"I haven't had a chance," he complained. "How did it go?"

"Fine. Everything's set over there. We can clear the Bog s Nama whenever she's ready to go. How did you get along?"

"We had a little trouble with NOIC," he answered. "He insisted upon having written authorizations of various kinds from us, so Ivo and I went to Taranto yesterday and got them from the Admiral. We stopped in Brindisi on the way back to look for the S. S. Brittany and stayed the night with NOIC there, who's a great guy."

Tim was full of news as we made our way back to the hotel. Steve was burning to see his wife. My clothes were drenched with sea-water and I needed a shave and some breakfast. We talked while I was getting cleaned up.

HMS Brittany with the four hundred tons of cargo we had been fortunate enough to obtain in Algiers from Jerry Bensom was lost somewhere in the port of Brindisi, Tim had been told in Taranto. She was not sunk—simply misplaced in some way. That was the reason he had been obliged to go there the night before after finishing his business in Taranto. NOIC—not our Bari friend but his opposite number in the port of Brindisi—had been exceedingly helpful, furnishing a launch aboard which Ivo and Tim had set out for a tour of the waterfront. They had hailed every ship they saw until they found the one they were looking for. Her skipper had a message instructing him to turn his cargo over to me and Brindisi's NOIC had kindly issued Naval Orders for her to proceed the next day; she would be in Bari in the course of the afternoon.

"I met General Taylor while I was down there," Tim said. "What a nice guy he is! Ivo and I looked in at the Allied Military Mission's Headquarters to send a message back to Cairo reporting on our movements and ran into him. There was a message there for you, by the way, asking that you arrange to be in Algiers on the fourteenth—tomorrow—for a C-in-C's (Command-in-Chief's) meeting. Apparently the big wheels are still turning down there. I took the liberty of cabling back that you were in Jugoslavia and would not be able to attend."

This, together with the fact that there was still no word from Cairo, was slightly disconcerting news. I found myself hoping that our messages were getting through promptly and that Cairo understood, at least in a general way, what had happened. When you get the ball, in a game like this, you have to run with it.

"Did you tell the General how things were going up here?" I asked Tim.

"Sure. He wanted to know all about our operations. I gave him a full account of what we were doing—and trying to do. He said we should call on him if he could help us."

"How did you get along with the Admiral?" I asked.

"He could not have been nicer," Tim answered enthusiastically. "He had the authorizations and documents we needed drawn for us at once and said the man who will help us fix the legal position of the ships will probably get in here sometime today. He has brought him over from North Africa somewhere. Thank God for the British Navy."

"And how about Olga's putative assassin?"

"Nothing further about him, and no shooting . . . yet. Security is looking for him and doing a good job of covering every likely angle. Olga's room is still being watched by plainclothes men. By the way, I think that poor girl is seriously ill. The doctors want to look at her lungs as soon as she's well enough to get up."

And so it went, our conversation ranging over all the problems of our complicated life in port. Tim said the Bog s Noma would be ready to sail the next afternoon—Friday. I gave him a full account of our arrival at Vis and the day we had spent ashore. He listened with his eyes shining. When I told him of the rendezvous with the commander of the coastal area he jumped up, unable to contain himself any longer.

"This time there's no reason why we shouldn't both go," he pleaded. "That's no trip to make alone."

"Oh, I wouldn't be alone," I teased. "Steve will be there with me. . . ." His reproachful glance made me laugh.

"But I can get everything finished here by Saturday," he argued. "There's no reason why I shouldn't go, is there?"

"Not if we have everything under control at the dock. We'll see how we stand Saturday."

While we were lunching in the dining room, a few minutes later, the Admiral's emissary arrived. He was Ian Campbell, chief representative of the North African Shipping Board, and he was accompanied by a Colonel of the Italian army. We persuaded them to join us for lunch and the ever attentive maestro fluttered up with a menu, impressed by the Colonel's uniform and eager to help us. Lunch consisted of a very primitive antipasto and

an appalling macaroni dish—and nothing else. That's all there was in the kitchen, but the menu-presenting ceremony was carried out faithfully as usual —just as an Englishman might dress for dinner on a desert island, even if he had no dinner to eat.

Mr. Campbell was a tall, fair Scot. He looked the sort of a high-powered British business executive one might have met in London lunching in the Savoy Grill before the war. His clothes were well-made and carelessly worn; his long hands, naked of any rings, were shapely and adroit; an easy, genial air suggested authority. His companion, the Italian Colonel, was immaculate in his much decorated uniform. He was nervous at the table and said very little. An impression that the errand which brought him there was loathsome to him was inescapable. Of this Campbell seemed aware in a slightly amused, indifferent way.

We proceeded to the harbor after lunch and went directly aboard the Bog s Noma, whose colors fluttered at her stern.

"That flag worries me," Campbell confided in my ear as we lowered ourselves down the companionway. "That red star makes it a special emblem; it's no longer—or perhaps I should say not yet—the official Jugoslav device." He grinned engagingly in a way that left me feeling sure it would take more than that to prevent him from completing his mission.

We found Steve and Petrinovic, the latter with his head still bandaged, below in the little cabin we used for an office and introduced our visitors. Steve produced a list of the ships at Bari in Partisan hands—ships already flying the flag that worried Mr. Campbell—and a second list of ships still held by the Italians, ships still under the Italian colors although they had formerly been of Jugoslav registry. There were five of the former and eleven of the latter, two having been discovered down the coast at Monopoli the day before. Those in the first category, we told him, were already being used as floating warehouses for the cargo that had been received by rail from Bari and Taranto; those in the second category had still not been approached. He approved of that and after a while he and I left to call on NOIC, leaving the Colonel to wait for us aboard Bog s Nama, very ill at ease and miserable in its grimy little cabin, a guest of the Partisans his country had tried so long and unsuccessfully to subdue.

The problem was a thorny one and NOIC did nothing to make it any easier. After a little conversation with him Campbell and I withdrew.

"I've got a hunch that I can work it out with a piece of paper and a pencil," he grinned. "Stand by. I'm going to have a try."

The "try" lasted about five minutes and was devoted to furious scribbling. When it was over, Campbell said:

"I'm going to give you this letter authorizing you to seize and operate all the ships that formerly belonged to Jugoslavia. It's an odd transaction, but I think I have gotten around

the legal difficulties by wording the letter carefully. There is also a second letter to the Italian Merchant Marine telling them what has been done and requesting that they co-operate by releasing the vessels now in their hands. How's that?"

"Magnificent," I answered. "Absolutely magnificent."

"I'll leave a copy of both letters with NOIC so that you will have no trouble clearing the ships," Campbell added, "and we'll have him cable the text of both letters back to Admiral Power."

The letter to the Merchant Marine was simply a notification of the transaction. The director was ordered to comply with the arrangements in the name of the Commander-in-Chief. The letter to me was a strange document and read as follows:

The Representative North African Shipping Board Taranto
14th October, 1943
Major Huot, U.S.A.
Imperial Hotel, Bari . .

I enclose herewith a copy of a letter to the Director General of the Italian Merchant Marine which is self-explanatory. Also attached is the entry which must be made in the logbooks of the vessels concerned.

The ships must remain under the control of the Allied Commander-in-Chief.

As masters will require to be appointed on behalf of the Allied Commander-in-Chief this will authorize you to make such appointments on his behalf and continue the vessels' use in their present employment.

Ian Campbell Representative,
N.A.S.B.O.

The entries to be made in the ships' log-books constituted a delegation of authority from me to the skippers, who agreed to accept responsibility for the vessels. I remained free to remove any skipper who failed to acquit himself of his duties properly and replace him by another. The phrase, "continue the vessels' use in their present employment" was vague indeed, but we all knew what it meant, and that was good enough. No ship-owner ever disposed of fuller rights over his sea-going property: the right to appoint the captain and operate the vessel is all that ownership can imply. There was nothing specious in the arrangement.

When Campbell handed me my copies of those letters I knew our last real barrier had been crossed. Before us there lay only the routine difficulties of clandestine maritime operations. We were really in business now and all set to operate on a substantial scale, gun runners de luxe with a fleet of sixteen ships and the blessings of the British Navy! I remembered Tim's words in Algiers when I told him we were going on at once to Italy,

"Tito, here we come!" As I wrung Campbell's hand in gratitude I knew we were really on the way.

We went back then to the Bog s Nama and rescued the unhappy Colonel, then we set off for a tour of the port to have a look at some of our prizes. The ships under Partisan command were all lying together near our berth, but the others were scattered throughout the port, the Italian colors flying from the stern of every one of them.

"Do you think you need our help to take them over?" Campbell wanted to know.

"I doubt it," I answered. "Armed as we are by these letters it should be easy enough. And it would be more charitable to board the vessels and serve notice quietly on their captains. Some of them won't like pulling their colors down and will want to make a ceremony of it."

We boarded one or two ships, nevertheless, and left the rest until the next day. NOIC had a list of the ships we wanted and they would not be able to leave port; but we took the precaution of placing a Partisan guard at the foot of the gang-plank beside those we had boarded to prevent the crew from any further looting aboard, having observed that everything removable had already been carried away from the bridge of one of them. Campbell and the Colonel left then and I went back to the office to report the good news and show the letters to Tim and Mladineo.

Ivo Radic, it will be remembered, was an old ship-owner and a lawyer. Indeed, in Zagreb he was Dr. Radic—doctor of law. I called a little conference in Bog s Noma's smoky cabin, and when we were all there, Steve—and Olga who had just turned up, being tired of lying abed—Petrinovic, "Doctor" Radic, Tim and I, I laid the letters before the assembled company and explained the transaction. Ivo studied them with great care before pronouncing his verdict:

"They're perfect! I am three ways satisfied—as a Partisan, as a lawyer, and as a ship-owner," he said.

Steve and Olga were reassured by his opinion. They were pleased to know we would now be able to seize the eleven Jugoslav ships, some of which were pretty big, but they were not sure this solution which placed effective control of the fleet in my hands would seem ideal to their Partisan commanders back home. On that point Ivo and I reassured them. AH merchant vessels in belligerent waters must be under control of the Commander-in-Chief unless they are owned by a neutral power. That control could only be vested in an Allied officer, the Partisans having as yet no legal status as a belligerent nation—except in Germany.

(A few days later, at Partisan Headquarters deep in the interior of Bosnia, Marshal Tito referred to the fact that only Germany had recognized the Partisans. He was proud that they had, for it showed that he held enough of their prisoners to make them toe the line.)

Once their fears were allayed their spirits soared. What mattered was that we now had sixteen ships! One of Ivo's bottles of Johnny Walker Black Label was brought out for the celebration, and the effect was good on the palate. Rakjia has its place in the world, its function in life, particularly in the Adriatic, but whiskey is the friend of man and the best guest at any banquet.

CHAPTER 18

Bog s Noma still had the barnacles on her hull and could not be relied upon for more than about eight knots, even with her engines in good condition again after a week's attention from the crew "Q" had been kind enough to supply. For this reason we had decided to send her back in two stages, the first to be sailed in daylight, the second, of course, in darkness; the first to take her to Vieste, about sixty miles up the Italian coast, the second to carry her across the eighty miles of Adriatic that would then still separate her from her goal. As far as Vieste she would be safe from all attack; by leaving Vieste at 1600 hours (four o'clock in the afternoon) she would reach Vis under cover of darkness at about two in the morning.

When we had had a drink to the Fleet we had just acquired and to its success against the Hun, Steve said: "When can we sail Bog s Noma?"

I answered: "We can sign her up right now, and how about getting her away tomorrow morning?"

"She's ready," Petrinovic said.

"Then let's send her," said Steve, burning with eagerness to see the first ship set out with a cargo for Jugoslavia.

I had hoped to put aboard the Bog s Noma the list of medical supplies promised the three doctors at the hospital in Vis and reminded Steve of this.

"There are medical supplies aboard," he answered. "We have a good many tons of them stored in the main saloon with the cigarettes and the chocolate. Admiral Power sent them up to us. But we don't know what's in the cases. Why not send the doctors a note telling them to check the contents of those cases and promising to fill their prescription with the next ship?"

The suggestion seemed good and was adopted. We then sent for the ship's log-book and ceremoniously entered in it the contractual phrases Ian Campbell had prescribed. The Captain, as dirty and disheveled and as misanthropic in his manner as usual, then joined us to sign his name, thereby agreeing to take over the vessel "without prejudice." Tim and I then proceeded to Navy House to seek out the Operations Room—a sanctum-sanctorum which we had never entered— and plot her course.

To the men whose business it is to sail ships through belligerent seas in wartime, the clearance of a little vessel like the Bog s Nama is just unimportant routine, but to Tim and me it was an adventure. At "Ops" we looked at the charts on which our own mine-fields were entered, and laid out a course for Bog s Nama, reading it off in terms of degrees with the parallel mechanism of the ruler from the little circle whose "360" was north. There were several changes in her course. With a pair of dividers we measured carefully the distance she would have to go on each leg of her journey. On a chart of our own, which we would give her skipper, we traced her entire course in pencil, then we prepared a message for the Flag Officer at Taranto telling him that Bog s Nama would sail at 0700 hours on the morning of Friday, October fifteenth, and telling him just what course she would follow. It would be up to him to see that if the ship met any of His Majesty's destroyers they would leave her alone, that no British or American aeroplane on patrol should impulsively sink her simply because she had no recognition signals.

When all this was done we inquired from the lads at Ops whether they knew when HMS Brittany would be in.

"She's coming in now," one of them answered. "That ought to be her right there. . . ." He pointed out of the window at a vessel for whom the boom had just been opened and added, "Have a look," pointing at the binoculars on the table in the center of the room. Tim squinted through the glass. "That's her," he said. "Where will she be berthed?"

"She'll be anchoring—near you," the Lieutenant answered.

Tim and I were aboard her a few minutes after she had dropped her hook. He introduced me to Commander Numan, her Captain, whom he had met in Brindisi, and after visiting with him for a few minutes we invited him and his officers to join us for dinner at the Imperial that night. The Commander accepted and we went off to give Bog s Nama her sailing orders and hurry to the hotel to make our arrangements with the maestro.

He did very well for us and dinner passed pleasantly, providing us with an excellent opportunity to make friends with the Commander and his officers. Ivo and Steve attended. Commander Numan was disappointed about being ordered to Bari to unload. He had stowed his cargo with great care, expecting to take it all the way to the Jugoslav coast himself, so that it could be unloaded rapidly from five different positions; he regretted that his mission would be completed so tamely in the port of Bari. Tim discussed arrangements for transferring the cargo in the night of Friday to Saturday, so that prying eyes should not see what was being done—not see what was being shipped aboard our little vessels, and the Commander agreed to have his crew assist in the work.

It was not until after midnight that we managed to get to bed.

We were all on the dock the next morning at six-thirty to see Bog s Noma cast off and start for Vis. There was a group of Partisans with us on the end of the pier as she pulled away and a cheer rose spontaneously as we waved good-bye.

"That's one thing done," Tim said, grinning from ear to ear as we turned away to attend to the ten thousand details that would fill the next thirty hours.

Tim looked after most of them. He was determined to get everything finished and come with me to meet Colonel Ilic or his representative on the coast. It was Friday morning. I would have to leave not later than Sunday afternoon to keep that appointment punctually—and I had yet to find a ship to take us over.

New problems were cropping up, too. We would need many additional Partisan crews for the ships we were about to take over. Steve and I discussed this and other matters as we set off with a Partisan guard of twelve armed men to commandeer some of the vessels on the list.

Throughout most of the morning we were engaged with this not unpleasant work. The captains of most of the ships accepted the news of their dispossession philosophically. We warned them against carrying away any of the ship's property and posted our guards aboard. The guards themselves were probably warning enough. They looked tough as tigers and quite ready—if not eager—to challenge everyone aboard. They watched the Italian colors come down and the Jugoslav flag with the red star in the center go up in its place with broad and happy grins, but the rest of the time they looked their fiercest.

By eleven o'clock our twelve men had all been posted to duty and we headed back to the pier. Six of the eleven ships that had been in Italian hands that morning were now flying the Partisan flag; five still remained to be taken over.

At the root of our pier, moored one behind the other, lay two Royal Air Force "crash boats" which I had noticed before but had never found time to investigate. The crash boats are high-speed launches about sixty feet long, built much like the famous "PT" boats used by the American Navy but without torpedo tubes. As the name suggests, they are used to rescue flyers shot down at sea. They are built to move fast and normally cruise just under twenty knots. They have a top speed of about thirty, and their armament consists of machine guns in power-operated turrets and one or two 20-millimeter automatic cannons.

As we walked by it struck me they would be absolutely ideal sea-going taxis for the errands we had to run across the Adriatic. I suggested to Steve that he go on without me and stopped to see what could be done about enlisting sympathy for our good cause.

The crew of one of the boats had built a small fire on the pier and were frying themselves some eggs. "Is the CO aboard?" I asked. One of the men stepped across to the deck of the launch and called down the companionway: "Mr. Walsh . . . someone to see you, sir."

I stepped aboard just as a stalwart young officer climbed up out of the cabin, a razor in his hand and half of his face covered with lather.

"Jack Walsh—Flight Lieutenant," he said, shaking hands and grinning through the soap. "Sorry about the disguise. I'll get it off right away."

I went below with him while he finished shaving. He had noticed our ships at the end of the pier and had attended one of Bog s Nama's moonlight concerts, so he already knew a little about the Partisans. I told him a little more. One of his men brewed us some tea and I listened to stories of nights at sea in the rough water of the English Channel. Walsh was not very tall but compact and powerfully built. His hair was jet black and he wore a small raffish mustache above his wide and smiling lips. He appeared gay and reckless and was on easy terms with his men, who obviously liked him. He looked like a valuable ally, so I told him about my trip across to "one of the islands."

Before I left, half an hour later, he was begging to be allowed to take us over on our next trip; he was pretty sure it could be arranged, although he would have to talk it over with his CO, Flight Lieutenant Shackery, who was in charge of the other launch. "Shack" was away until one o'clock. I promised to stop by again after lunch.

That was an appointment I kept punctually. "Shack" proved to be the same cavalier type as Walsh and just as enthusiastic about helping us. The pair of them detained me for half an hour, showing me their boats and doing their best to convince us that they were ideal for such missions as we had in mind.

"Do you think you could get permission to take us over tomorrow afternoon?" I asked.

"I'm sure we can," Shack answered. "I'll go straight over to the RAF building and arrange it." The last words were spoken over his shoulder, for he had already leapt to the pier and was on his way.

"Goddamn it," Walsh said. "I wanted that trip."

"Well, this won't be the last one," I assured him.

Shack was not able to get an immediate reply to his request for permission to take us over. It was not until next morning that the authorization was confirmed, so I found myself obliged to see what other facilities were available in the event he should prove unable to go, and I preferred not to use the Gull again. She had to preserve her "cover." That afternoon three MTB's (Motor Torpedo Boats—the equivalent of our PT's) arrived in port. I approached the officer commanding them at once. He, too, responded eagerly. He would be delighted to take us over, but he would have to obtain the permission of the officer commanding the small boat flotilla to which he belonged, Commander Welman, RN, who was aboard the flotilla's mother ship in Brindisi. Did he think the Commander would agree? He was practically sure that he would. The only possible difficulty might be experienced in attempting to reach him . . . the commander might be on his way up to Bari by car. . . .

It seemed pretty sure that one of them would come through all right. If not, I would have to tackle the Admiral again in the morning. So I left him then and went back to the end of the pier where Tim had established temporary headquarters aboard another little passenger steamer, the Zagreb, which we had taken over at ten o'clock.

Tim and Steve were getting on very well. One of the big wooden schooners in the original Partisan fleet had been brought alongside and additional cargo was being loaded into her from one of the depot ships. The schooner would be ready to sail by nightfall and could follow the Bog s Noma out and proceed along the same course the next morning. Our ships now occupied one whole side of the pier and the end of it as well, a big freighter having been brought over and moored end-on, with a shaky gang-plank running out to her stern. The other side of the pier was lined with lighters unloading mountains of five-hundred-pound bombs.

A crew of welders were patching up holes punched by heavy machine-gun fire in the bows of the Zagreb.

"The Partisan fleet!" Steve said proudly, with a wave of his arm.

"Our big problem," Tim said, "is going to be getting enough cargo to keep this shipping-line busy. Do you think they can take it to the coast as fast as we can deliver it at Vis?"

"We'll find out tomorrow," I answered.

"I've got everything ready for tonight," Tim told me. "We have five ships standing by to move over to the Brittany as soon as it gets dark. NOIC has given us permission to use subdued lights tonight. We'll trans-ship right out there in the harbor. By tomorrow afternoon we'll be up-to-date with our work for the first time. . . ."

"I get it," I answered. "Okay. It'll be nice to have you along. We'll probably go on one of the crash boats moored just down the pier, or in one of the MTB's that came in a little while ago." He flashed me a radiant smile and turned back to his stevedoring as I set out in search of the medical supplies promised the doctors of Vis.

Tim was right. We got all our work finished. I obtained the medical supplies and stowed them aboard the Zagreb. Somehow we managed to get all the rations and supplies we needed drawn and signed for. We established priorities for ship and engine repairs. We found quarters for a couple of sick Partisans and sent a doctor to see them. We sent cables, we checked manifests, we argued with the taxi-drivers who charged us too much for overtime . . . We managed to eat, gulping biscuits and bully-beef as we walked up and down the pier. I even managed to get some sleep; but poor Tim worked until five-thirty in the morning aboard the Brittany supervising the trans-shipment of her cargo.

When he came in a little after six I tried to persuade him to lie down for a while, but he still had too much to do and waved the suggestion aside. "I've taken some benzedrine," he said. "That'll keep me going. I'll sleep on the way over tonight."

By eight o'clock we had finished breakfast and were back on the pier. There was still plenty to do before three o'clock when we would have to leave. The five ships Tim had loaded in the night were anchored in a line a hundred yards west of the pier, their decks heaped high with goods and cases all artfully covered over with tarpaulins.

"Who would ever guess what's in 'em?" Tim asked. "There are six light mounted field guns, ten thousand rifles, forty tons of ammunition and a lot more stuff including radio sets, machine guns and mortars stowed away there; and I know where every piece of it is."

Tim's precautions were well warranted. The Allies had only been in Bari a few days and there were still hundreds of fascists about. Any one of them was capable of reporting to the Germans every move we made in the port. A thousand windows looked out across the basin where we worked and at best much too much would be known about "Operation Audrey." We could not afford to overlook any precautions at that time.

At about ten o'clock, Shack strolled up the pier, beaming .with good news. "I'm all set," he said. "Orders just came through. We're fueled and ready. What time do you want to leave?"

"As soon after three as we can make it," I told him.

Later in the morning, Steve and I were summoned to Navy House to meet Commander Welman, who had just arrived. He was eager to know everything he could learn about the situation on the other side of the Adriatic, having in mind possible operations there. I assured him no difficulty would be experienced in concealing his boats among the islands during the day if he wanted to lay over and he decided to go over and have a look, that being the case. Steve then undertook to furnish a Partisan pilot. The Commander accepted at once and asked if we would care to join him. I thanked him and explained that we had already made arrangements to go over in a crash boat. We would make a point of going in ahead of him and arranging for his safe entry to the harbor. These proposals accepted, the necessary signals were sent, notifying the Flag Officer and the operations officers of the air force. The Commander would leave about five o'clock, but as the MTB's are faster than the crash boats we would need to leave at least an hour before them.

When I got back to the pier Shack was waiting with an anxious face. He knew I had been called to NOIC's office in connection with the Commander's arrival and had visions of our going off with the Royal Navy and leaving him tied up at the foot of the pier, very bored because none of our aircraft was kind enough to fall in the sea and give him a job to do. When I told him we would have to beat the Royal Navy across in order to arrange their entry to the harbor his spirits soared.

"We want to leave without any fuss—without attracting any attention, at three o'clock," I told him.

Aboard the Zagreb I gave strict orders that no one was to go near the crash boats and that no one at all was to come down to see us off. The "Santa Claus" cargo of bully-beef and biscuit and cigarettes, butter and cheese and chocolate could be set down onto the pier beside the launches. The crew would pick up the cases themselves a few minutes later.

Promptly at three o'clock, Tim and Steve and I climbed aboard Shack's boat, our machine guns carefully wrapped in duffel-bags, looking as though we were coming aboard for a drink or a cup of tea, and a few moments later we were sliding out between the piers in the afternoon sunshine, the launch tucking her stern into the water as the engineer cracked on extra revolutions to bring us up to twenty knots. Tim and Steve and I were sitting on the cabin roof, swinging our legs to the roll of the sea.

"Not bad," Tim said, smiling happily.

CHAPTER 19

We had no more than settled down to enjoying the sensation of bounding so sweetly over the long gentle rollers than the soft thunder of the engines faltered and changed tempo. At the same time our speed fell off. We looked at one another significantly.

"Oh, oh," said Tim, with rising and falling intonation. "The aeroplane engines in these things are temperamental."

A moment later Shack thrust his way against the wind around the corner of the cabin. "Bearing's heating up," he said cryptically. "It's no good. There's nothing we can do about it out here. We'll have to go back and get the other boat." He looked disappointed and angry. We were forty minutes out. If we raced back we might still get away forty minutes ahead of the MTB's, but it would be a race to beat them across to Vis.

"Awfully sorry," he said. "I'll tell Jack to open her up. We'll still get you across on schedule."

We were headed back for Bari now with the engines roaring again. I walked aft with Shack and listened to him tell the engineer to keep his engines revving to the absolute limit of safety. Soon the familiar silhouette of the harbor began to rise before us and a few minutes later we were flying through the opening in the boom, headed straight for the root of our pier.

Jack had seen us come in and by the time we reached our berth his engines were running and two members of his crew were standing by to cast off. Jack himself was standing on the forward deck, ready to assist in bringing us in, wearing a broad and mischievous grin. It disappeared suddenly when we were close alongside and Shack stepped across to his deck. For a moment I thought Shack was going to hit him.

"Goddamn you, Jack," he said with the low intensity of a man controlling his anger with difficulty. "If you ever curse my boat again I'll shoot you: don't forget it!"

"Sorry, Shack," Jack answered. "I meant nothing by it."

Shack stared at him intently for a moment, then the look of malevolence left his features as he regained control of himself. He slapped Jack on the shoulder. "Righto ... get going," he said pleasantly. "You'll have to push it to beat the Navy across. If they have to stand by and wait for us over there we'll never hear the end of it."

"Will do," Jack answered simply. Our gear had already been shifted across. Shack stepped ashore. Jack shouted: "Cast off. . . . Okay, let her go ..." A wave of his hand sent power coursing down the shafts to port and starboard propellers and we moved gently out into the basin. A few minutes later we were out through the boom again and as soon as we were clear the drone of the engines shifted to a higher key and the launch rose in the water, gathering speed like a hydroplane about to take off.

"What was that all about, back there?" I asked Jack as soon as he had given the helmsman his course and come up on deck.

"Shack's a bit superstitious, I guess," Jack said guiltily.

"Just as you were leaving I said to him: 'When your engines conk I'll be standing by to take over.'. . . I guess it was a rotten sort of a joke."

We succeeded in beating the MTB's to Vis. Just before eleven o'clock we reached the mouth of the harbor and gave the lookout near the darkened light-house a signal with the Aldis lamp that had been agreed upon at our last conference with Radic and Nikic, Wednesday evening. A single shot rang out, indicating that we were recognized and could proceed; and ten minutes later the big launch came gently to rest against the sea-wall. A crowd was waiting for us there full of admiration for our boat, which appeared big and formidable in the darkness. Steve and I jumped down at once and hurried to Headquarters to advise that three more big launches would be in at any moment and request that the lighthouse battery be so notified. We also told Nikic that there would be four boats to camouflage that night and asked that he provide the men required for this work. My first thought was for Jack's boat. That was my responsibility. I had picked out a good place to hide a craft of that size on my previous visit and asked that men be assigned to go aboard and take him there at once. Also, that a launch be sent out with them to bring Jack back to headquarters. As soon as this was done I hurried back to the sea-wall to tell Jack how matters stood and ask him to lay up until we should return from the coast, probably in a day or two. He would have liked to take us on to the mainland, but I was unwilling to let him risk his boat. Six Partisans armed with axes for cutting pine boughs pushed their way through the crowd and climbed aboard. I waved good-bye to Jack who shouted, "Good luck— I wish I were going with you," as he and his boat moved off in the night.

When I turned back Tim and Steve were standing beside me. Nikic was with them. "Here they come now," Steve said. The drone of many big motors suddenly drowned the soft purr from Jack's retreating boat and presently we could discern the bulky shadows of the

three MTB's moving slowly in line-astern formation. This time, as they came up and moored in characteristic manner, one alongside of the other, each tying' up to the one before it, the group in the roadway was really impressed. This was fighting strength! These were nautical wild-cats that could sink a battleship. They look exactly what they are—fast, heavily armed and expendable, a truly romantic assortment of attributes.

These ships, I learned later, were originally known as "Welmans" instead of MTB's, a name that is still often used in the British navy, after their inventor, the first officer who ever thought of building them as a weapon of assault, the officer who commanded the first of them and proved its worth by sinking ships of the line in the enemy's fleet—Welman! The very officer who now stepped ashore and allowed me to introduce him to the local Partisan leaders. The Commander was still a fighting man in spite of his greying locks. He was still looking for an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of his savage little boats from the open bridge of one of them in battle.

Steve and Tim and I went with the Commander to Headquarters. The captains of the three boats accompanied us and were introduced to their new friends. Choruses of Zdravos rained upon us as we passed, and when the introductions had all been completed at headquarters we drank the ceremonial glass of rakjia together. Steve arranged for the three boats to be camouflaged and hidden, then I felt our part was done and inquired carefully about Bog s Nama. She had come in on schedule at 0200 hours, been unloaded punctually at 0400 hours and safely berthed and hidden by 0500 hours!

"Good enough?" Nikic said.

I clapped him on the back as he laughed at me and suggested to Steve that we start for the coast. He agreed, saying we should go first to Starigrad, some twenty miles away in the bottom of a fjord on the adjacent island of Hvar.

As it was already past midnight I thought we might save time by making this part of the journey in one of the MTB's. The Commander fell in with the suggestion at once and assigned one of his officers to take us across. Ten minutes later we were thundering out of the harbor with our bows in the air flanked by a silvery sheet of spray on either side.

"I like this form of travel," Tim said. "It gives you a sense of getting somewhere."

The water between the islands was choppy, as usual, and little hard rain-squalls hacked at us from time to time. One had to hang on to whatever there was to hang on to with everything but his teeth to avoid being beaten to a pulp by bulkheads and stanchions. . . .

Soon after two o'clock we arrived at Starigrad. We were told there was a ship waiting there to take us on to the coast, still thirty-five miles away, so I thanked the skipper of the MTB and watched him rumble away in the darkness, making a noise exactly like a big multi-motored plane.

We found our Vis friend, Radicic, at Headquarters, another stuffy little front room in a building overlooking the harbor. He received us warmly, but there was a troubled expression on his face. Steve's face clouded, too, after they had talked together for a moment. Then Radicic handed him a message in an envelope.

It was obvious that something important was happening to Steve. He opened the envelope with nervous hands and as he read the contents of the message his brows puckered and the color drained slowly from his face. In the cold white light of the gasoline lantern he looked like a man who had just read his death-warrant. Radicic talked to him in a subdued, intense way as Tim and I clinked glasses with the Partisans and drank our rakjia. Some of the Partisans spoke English and we kept up a lively conversation to drown the conference between Steve and Radicic until they broke it up and joined us for a round of the fiery little drinks. It was half-past three by the time we set out afoot through driving rain to find our ship and proceed to the coast.

The "ship" proved to be a tiny launch some twenty-five feet long which the Partisans had baptized The Chetnik. I learned later that it bore this name for two reasons, the first of which was that it had been captured from the Chetniks— or perhaps that was the second reason—and the other was that they had very little confidence in it and thoroughly disliked it into the bargain. I learned, too, that their judgment was quite sound in this matter. The Chetnik performed satisfactorily for us on this occasion, but a week later we were lost at sea in her and escaped being pounded to death on the rocks only after a night-long battle in big seas and finally in the breakers.

As we left Starigrad we were grateful for the bad weather. Ahead of us there lay a difficult course through water patrolled by heavily, armed German boats. All of us, including the mechanic and the pilot, were armed with sub-machine guns, but against the German boats with their heavy-caliber mounted machine guns we might as well be armed with peashooters. Our only chance was to go through unseen.

Again and again during the next five hours we came within a hair's breadth of foundering in the rough water. The pilot explained that in normal times, when the sea was quiet, The Chetnik could safely cruise right over the mine-fields, but with the water as choppy as it was that night he feared we might crash into one of the infernal devices unless he kept to the channels. Having thus explained, he followed an erratic course, now clinging to the northern shore of the expanse between the islands, now crossing two or three miles of open water to hug the shoreline on the southern side; but the weather was too much for him and twice we were carried into the areas he was trying to avoid. Each time he nudged Tim and me, grinning, and, pointing straight down through the bottom of the miserable launch: "Mines," he would say, laconically. He would then steer with his knee on the wheel in order to have his two arms free to make a great circle, indicating how big they were, and his expressive face would register appropriate dismay. Tim and I tried to sleep, but there was no suitable place to lie down. We were drenched to the skin, and, besides, it was much too rough. Even in this foul weather we were challenged from every headland by Partisan sentries who fired one shot to ask for recognition signals. These we gave

them with a flashlight, using that night's code, then passed on unmolested. But when morning came it found us still at sea.

None of us liked this at all. We knew the pin-point on the coast where we expected to meet Colonel Ilic was a tiny village just four miles from an important Ustasha garrison. It was dangerous enough to approach it under cover of darkness. Now we were condemned to cross three miles of open water after leaving the comparative shelter of the channel between the islands in full view of the enemy positions, but there was no shelter on the tip of the islands and no other reasonable course was open to us.

"We'll just have to pray for rain, good, thick, heavy rain," said Steve. He had been very silent throughout the trip from Starigrad, obviously thinking of the message in his pocket, and I had judged the time and place inopportune to question him about it.

Perhaps he prayed. The pilot and the mechanic looked as though they were praying. I doubt if Tim prayed. I searched about in my musette bag and found an extra clip for the Marlin and thrust it in the pocket of my coat.

There was a faint mist on the open reach of water as we came out from between the islands a minute or two after eight o'clock—and no rain. The pilot, grim-faced, laid a course straight for the shore. Tim, resourceful as usual, opened a can of bully-beef and sliced up a loaf of black bread Steve had brought with him from Headquarters. He made open sandwiches with steady hands and passed one to each of us, then found a bottle of Vis wine and opened it. The pilot, an old man—too old to be a Partisan—watched him overtly. He accepted his food with shining eyes and held the feast before him admiringly before biting into it, then he took a gulp of wine from the bottle Tim passed him.

"What a wonderful breakfast!" he said, almost reverently. "It is the finest breakfast I have had since Christmas—not last Christmas but the one before."

"Goddamn it," said Tim aside to me, turning his face away. "These people tear your heart out."

There were rifles cracking up the coast as the stupendous mountain range that rises almost sheer out of the sea loomed suddenly immense and beautiful before us. We were close now. The Ustasha knew, of course, that the Partisans were on the coast where we were landing. It seemed improbable that they would consider it worth a serious battle to come after a prize as trivial as we must have looked to them. They probably assumed that no one of any importance would be fool enough to venture across that open water in the daylight. . . .

Friends rushed down to the water's edge to catch our coiling rope and help us in.

We stepped ashore, this time with the mainland of Jugoslavia underfoot! I thought again of Audrey.

CHAPTER 20

The Dalmatian coast has been a famous playground since Roman times because of its lovely climate and wild, beautiful landscape. This was our first look at it. As we stepped ashore, we found ourselves at the foot of a towering wall of mountains whose jagged crests were wrapped in purple mist. They rose from the sea so steeply that only at the very bottom had human ingenuity contrived to terrace and scrape sites for a few houses. The village before us had been heavily shelled and there appeared to be no single house that had escaped, but there were fragments of houses in which people lived. A great profusion of flowers added a note of tenderness to the roadways and alleys, as though nature, in its most gentle mood, were trying to heal or conceal the rude scars of war.

We learned later that the Italians had tried to take that village from the sea when it was held by fifteen Partisan riflemen who repulsed their first attempts at landing. The Italians had retreated to their ships and shelled the village all day. As it was only as big as a postage stamp, they hit everything in it and next morning their landing party bravely went ashore again; but eleven of the fifteen riflemen were still doing business. They retreated again under fire to their ships, not without casualties, and once more they shelled the village with big naval guns. This time they blasted every house and every copse and bush, every rose-covered arbor and every grapevine. Then, on the following morning they landed once more, but there were still riflemen alive—six of them now— and as the Italians came ashore the rifles cracked again. In disgust the Italians went back to their ships and left the indestructible Partisans in possession of the ruins.

They were still in possession, happily, in spite of the skirmish that had been going on as we came in, and they are probably still in possession now, several months later, as this story is being written. They belong there, like the flowers that lined the paths we followed as we left the sea; they have their roots there and others like them will flourish when they are gone. Shelling rose-bushes and little houses is a waste of powder; it destroys neither of them, as Italy's naval officers discovered; and although it was disagreeable for the Partisans who make their homes there it did not drive them away.

We were taken to a little house smothered in banks of flowers and introduced to its owner and his wife and daughter. They had hidden up on the mountainside during the shelling and done their best to patch up their torn roof and broken walls when it was over. Everything in the house had been wrecked, but they had put some of the furniture together again so that it now teetered and rocked on unequal legs. Their greatest sorrow was that the crockery was all damaged beyond repair and that the kitchen sink—a stone slab some craftsman had hollowed into a big basin many years before —was cracked. Water still came to the house from a spring on the mountainside and ran into the sink, but it no longer flowed out again through the system of stone troughs that had originally been provided; it ran down the sides and onto the floor and out through a hole in the wall. . . .

We were made to feel very welcome by this little family and given rich purple grapes to eat after they had been washed, shaken, and heaped on a scrubbed wooden trencher. Everything in the house was spotlessly clean.

Our host then had a long conversation with Steve and a messenger who arrived from headquarters. Colonel Ilic, it seems, had come in person to meet us. He had just arrived, but he was very tired and asked that we excuse him until one o'clock as he wished to get some rest.

"How did he get so tired?" I asked Steve. Steve asked the messenger. The messenger replied. Steve translated:

"Walking. He has been walking a long way."

"How far?" I asked. Again the interpreter went to work.

"Sixty miles," he answered, after a little dialogue and a few mental calculations.

Tim and I exchanged glances. We were tired. Apparently we didn't have what it takes.

"In how many days?" I persisted.

"In forty-eight hours—since Friday morning," came the reply.

"Our compliments to the Colonel. We shall also be glad to rest," I said.

Steve and the messenger then embarked upon an animated conversation which lasted several minutes before Steve turned to me:

'The officers at Headquarters are sorry they had no suitable facilities ready for us here. They are sending some beds down at once."

I protested that it was not necessary, that we could rest perfectly well on the floor, but my objections were brushed aside. The beds would be right down. '

The messenger left then, after posting two guards in front of the little house among the rose trees. Tim lay down on the bare coiled springs of what had once been a couch, the covering and stuffing of which had all been blown away. Steve, seated on a wooden box beside a limping table, laid his head upon his folded arms and instantly fell asleep. In the kitchen there was a shelf that had survived the holocaust and I claimed that for my bed. We all kept our weapons near at hand, but I removed the heavy service pistol belted to my waist and laid it at my head, where the smooth leather holster served as a pillow.

Black-out!

But there was no sleep for us yet. We had scarcely abandoned ourselves to the delicious sensation of releasing too-urgent reality and floating away when one of the guards entered to announce that there were two British soldiers who wanted to talk with us. Would we see them? All three of us were immediately awake.

We knew there were British officers in Tito's liberated territories, but there were not supposed to be any troopers. There were not even supposed to be any officers in this region. Could they, nevertheless, be two of the lads we had known in Cairo and drunk with on the eve of their departure for the great adventure of parachuting in?

"Show them in," we shouted.

The two young men that entered were clad in battle dress— the British army's field uniform. Both were clean shaven and wore carefully knotted neckties. They looked fresh and healthy and wonderfully happy. One was a private, tall and slim and fair; the other was a black-haired lance-corporal of dark complexion, rather short and spare of build. They introduced themselves as escaped prisoners of war from Stalag-blank-blank in Bavaria, hundreds of miles away. They spoke a familiar-sounding Lancashire dialect— and it seemed improbable that the Germans had any agents who could do that. We wrote down their serial numbers. Both had been captured in Greece in April, 1941. I questioned them closely. Their story was astounding. After escaping from the camp, they had walked the immense distance through German territory in the very clothes they now wore, surviving a hundred close scrapes with patrols and garrisons. The lance-corporal spoke good German and they had begged food from the peasants along the way, passing themselves off for a couple of German soldiers on a holiday. The simple peasants had helped them freely, not recognizing their uniforms. The pair had slept in haystacks and avoided cities, doing much of their marching in the night.

Only once had they been captured, said the lance-corporal, who told most of the story. That happened as they were coming through Slovenia.

"We thought we were for it that time," he said, "and our captor was a nipper ten years old! He had invited us in to give us some food. The little chap was alone in the house. We waited while he went out to the kitchen and when he came back he had a rifle pointed at us."

"He was a Partisan," the private said. "That's when we first heard of the Partisans and learned that we had crossed into Jugoslavia."

"Did you have any trouble convincing them that you were not a couple of German soldiers?" I asked.

"We had plenty," the lance-corporal answered. "For a while we expected to be shot, then one of the Partisans decided to send us down the line to the nearest headquarters. There we were questioned for a long time before it was finally decided that we were authentic Englishmen: our troubles were over then."

"Did they give you any papers?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. They gave us these safe-conducts, and we have had no trouble since. Everyone has been wonderful to us."

The boys showed us the little slips on which words were written in the Cyrillic alphabet. These were the passports that had taken them through several hundred miles of "occupied" territory. They had seen many battles on the way and had had a few close scrapes with German troops, but most of the time they had simply sauntered down the road, making friends with everyone they met. They had been well fed and comfortably housed and treated most hospitably. What they had tried to do was get to the coast and make their way outback to England; and they had finally reached the little village we were in that very morning, just about the time we came in from the sea.

"We passed near that town up the coast," the private said. "There was a little battle going on there when we came through."

'Well, the gods are with you," I said. "The first Allied contact with this coast took place half an hour ago and five hundred yards from here; and when we leave tonight—we'll be glad to take you with us—we'll be the first Allied soldiers to return from Jugoslavia. You'll be home, back in England, in a week."

The conversation was interrupted at that point by our host, who came to say our beds were ready. So we excused ourselves from the lads to follow the old man into adjacent rooms, where we found real beds with mattresses and white sheets. The whole family was engaged in their preparation. They had been most embarrassed by the appearance of their home and their inability to provide for us more handsomely. Now they beamed with pride as they hurried out. We tore off our clothes and plunged into sleep as a diver might hurl himself from a springboard into cool water.

CHAPTER 21

Of the next three hours there is no record whatever. Twelve o'clock and a rap on the door seemed coincident with the delicious abandon of falling asleep, almost a part of the experience rather than something that succeeded it. We dressed hastily and were given food sent down for us from Headquarters. Then we set out with our guard along a narrow foot-path that led to the broken building where the Colonel waited. On our right was the bright blue sea—for the sun had come out while we slept, and on our left were the towering mountains, so close and high as almost to give one claustrophobia. The Colonel had come down to us from somewhere beyond them, in the interior. I wondered if he had lowered himself down the side with a rope, like an alpinist. . . .

A powerful young man—probably in his middle thirties-greeted us at the door and introduced a still younger officer: they were Pavle Ilic and Kukoc Ivo, the Colonel and his Commissar. The five of us proceeded at once to a back room on the second floor, passing, before ascending the stairs, through a hall that was used as a mess and where the remains of a meal were still in evidence. The building was of rugged construction and had been pierced here and there by artillery fire. None of its rooms and chambers appeared intact, but the one in which we came to rest around a small kitchen table was almost weather-proof. The window was broken and patched and the door sagged on its hinges. Blasts had shattered the latch mechanism, but this failed to worry the Colonel

who propped his German sub-machine gun against it at an angle and thus kept it closed. . . . We seated ourselves around the table.

Both Ilic and Ivo wore Partisan uniforms—the first we had ever seen. They were made of heavy grey material and consisted of breeches and tunics with a comfortable turn-down collar fastened up to the neck. Heavy black boots laced only at the instep completed the martial but comfortable-looking attire. Both wore Sam Browne belts and German pistols—no hand grenades. Both carried leather map-cases slung diagonally across the shoulder against the line of the Sam Browne on heavy leather straps.

The Colonel had a big frame and broad shoulders. His fair head was massive and resolute. He moved in a leisurely and deliberate way as he opened his map-case and spread several pages of its contents on the table before us, together with two sticks of charcoal. I watched his steady hands and noted his clear blue eyes and the firm set of his features, thinking that at a glance I would take him for a Dane or a Swede instead of a Slav.

Commissar Ivo appeared a less open character. He was short and broad shouldered, dark, tense. His face was triangular and suggested astuteness. His hands were small. His eyes were less direct than his chief's.

Both officers were Communists and, of the two, the Commissar would be the one to take a doctrinaire, intellectual line. He would be the intransigeant revolutionary, the Trotsky; the other would be the adaptable soldier. But it was the soldier, the Colonel, who wore the hammer and sickle emblem on the red star of his cap. The Commissar wore the red star without adornment. Both men had been school-teachers.

"Where shall we start?" the Colonel said in French, with a charming smile.

"What shall we send you . . . what do you need the most?" I answered. So we began with the problem of priorities. Automatic weapons and mortars, boots and woolen clothes, medical supplies and fats—those were the items most urgently required.

Steve functioned as interpreter, the Colonel and his Commissar speaking Serbo-Croat most of the time. Tim kept a note-book open on his knee and scribbled furiously when I translated Steve's replies, which came to me in French. The process was cumbersome and slow, but thorough.

When we had worked out our priorities and discussed the best ways of handling each item I drew from my despatch case a set of naval charts and spread them over the Colonel's maps. Before us were the familiar contours of the Adriatic. "Where are the mines along your coast?" I asked. The Colonel searched his map-case for charts and records of the coast, its mine-fields and fortifications, then, with his pen, carefully plotted in each danger zone on our maps, marking in the boundaries of the channels through which a ship might pass. The Italians laid most of the mines and the Partisans had

acquired their charts after capitulation, but there were other mines that had been placed by the Partisans themselves.

"Where did you get the mines?" I inquired. "Did you capture them from the Italians?"

"No," Ilic laughed. "We have a technique of our own for making mine-fields which has caused the Italians a good deal of inconvenience at one time and another. It's like this: we find a good swimmer and send him down beside a mine, with a rope in his teeth. He fastens the rope to the cable between the mine and its anchor, then, being careful not to let the line foul the detonators he comes back aboard and we tow the whole business away. When the bottom is flat, we can move them about as we please."

We needed the fullest possible information about German troop movements in Jugoslavia and their positions in the region of the coast. We wanted to know just what divisions were operating there, how they were armed, how strong they were, over what routes they moved their supplies, whether they were well equipped with anti-aircraft batteries, whether they held any important airports and how many planes were based on each, and a great deal more of the same sort, all comprehensively known in the technical language of warfare as the enemy's "order of battle."

Colonel Ilic had infinite patience and answered our questions quietly with absolute precision. He appeared to be making few guesses, to be relying upon accurate and extensive knowledge; but there were some questions about the enemy which he was unable to meet. Tim wrote furiously, recording the unanswered questions as well as those with replies. With a stick of soft charcoal the Colonel inscribed data on the maps before us. We copied off these boundaries of enemy occupying forces and transferred everything he set down for us with pencil to our own maps. This was information that would go to the chiefs of staff in London and Washington, that would be pored over for long hours by the experts in Algiers and Cairo, that the field commanders of sea and air and ground forces in Italy would study and memorize.

When we had seemingly gleaned from the Colonel all the information of this sort that could be drawn from his fine memory or his carefully written note-books we turned to the second order-of-battle problem, the strength and disposition of the forces of Tito's National Army of Liberation—the Partisans. Here progress was not nearly as easy. The Colonel showed a tendency to answer in generalities rather than figures and charcoal drawings. I pressed him sharply, eager to determine just how far he would go, what he would and what he would not tell us. Again the charcoal stick came into play and traced for us the irregular outlines of the liberated territories, indicated concentrations of Partisan strength, recorded the position of battle-fields where the contest was still undecided. ... I gave him no quarter.

"How many in this force? How are they armed? How do they communicate with their headquarters? Where do these troops come from . . . ?"

The Colonel's evasions became conspicuous and I looked up from the map to catch his eye squarely. There was an unhappy expression on his face but when our eyes met, we both leaned back and laughed.

"All right," I said.

"The truth is you embarrass me a little," Ilic observed. "It is not my place to impart such information about the other commands. You must get that from the Chief."

"From Tito?"

"From him ... or from his staff. . . . Would you like to go up and see him?"

"I would indeed! But there is no time to do it now. We will have to hurry back to Bari with the information you have already given us and act to get the supplies you want moving. We must arrange for the naval and air support that will clear out these inter-island waters so that the supplies can move down the second leg of the route, from Vis to the coast."

"Quite right," he said. "That's the first thing to do. But there is a great deal more information that I would like to give you—if I felt free to do so. Perhaps you can return after a few nights and we can meet again. Meanwhile, I'll go up to Jajce and report to Tito—and obtain permission to answer a few more of your questions."

The plan was adopted at once. We agreed to meet again on the coast on the night of Wednesday to Thursday, October twentieth. As it was then Sunday afternoon, we would both have to move fast, but by travelling night and day we could succeed.

Evening had overtaken us while we were talking and the bare little room in which we sat had grown so dark it was difficult to see by the time an orderly came in with a carbide lamp from the top of which there spurted a naked yellow flame. He set it before us in the middle of the table and retired, with a word to the Colonel, leaving the door ajar. A few minutes later two young Partisan women entered with coarse plates, spoons, and a big bowl of steamed buckwheat. A great pitcher of wine and five chipped cups followed, then they retired and the Colonel propped his machine gun against the door again.

"This is a poor country for food," he said. "In the interior we eat better. We regret that there is nothing else to offer to you.

We waved his apologies aside. The food was, in truth, coarse and dull almost beyond belief, but the wine was superb, pale ruby-red and cool, a heavenly vintage.

"I could live on horse-droppings if there were plenty of this to wash it down," Tim said aside in English to me.

"I'm not sure that's not what we're doing," I answered.

It was completely dark before we finished dinner. The stimulus of the wine was wonderfully welcome to both Tim and me. Neither of us felt any mental fatigue, but our bodies ached. My shoulders seemed made of lead and sinking slowly into my thorax. Steve looked utterly exhausted and I encouraged him to drink freely, keeping his cup full. I had not yet found time to learn from him what was in the note Radicic had given him, and I could see his thoughts often returned to it.

Rakjia was served to us when the plates had been carried away and after a round or two all tension suddenly was gone from that little conference room. We felt close to one another and happy, with the bulk of our work, for that day, done. Even the Commissar, who had said little during the afternoon and had appeared increasingly unhappy during the period in which I questioned his chief too closely about the Partisan forces, relaxed and looked content. The moment seemed opportune to investigate Steve's predicament a little, and I began by opening a conversation with Ilic about our work in Bari.

"It is wonderful, what you have done there," he commented. "We have a report from Commander Radicic about Mladineo's work, and it is clear that his mission would have come to little or nothing without you."

That provided the opening and I told him of Steve's indefatigable efforts and how pleasant it had been to work with him. As we spoke French, Steve understood and broke in several times to protest, blushing like a school-girl.

"It's a magnificent record," Ilic said, looking at Steve with admiration and affection. "I am certain the Commander will be very pleased when he has a full report."

So that was it! That was what I thought. Steve was in trouble for having gone to Algiers and had been asked to turn in a full report. He was conscious of having angered Tito himself and hardly dared believe he would be forgiven. Partisan discipline is as hard as flint and its normal technique is the firing squad. What gloomy ideas might the poor tired lad not be harboring behind those worried blue eyes!

In the conversation that followed I managed to indicate that had not Steve been virtually kidnapped by General Mason Mack and Admiral Power and sent down to Algiers where we ran into him in Colonel Mann's office, we would still be in Algiers attending conferences and our sixteen Jugoslav ships instead of being safe in our hands would probably all have been confiscated now by "some other authority."

The Colonel listened very carefully, nodding and approving. I" felt sure the arguments would all be relayed to Tito and that Steve's troubles—except for his anxiety, which survived in diminished form—were over. The Colonel translated it all very carefully for his Commissar, who nodded approbation throughout.

Before leaving we devoted another hour to careful planning of the naval and air attacks against German positions on the coast to safeguard the second leg of our supply route. The German patrols came out from a secret Snell-Boat base in the mouth of the Neretva

River, only a few miles south of the village we were conferring in. The best way to clean them out would be to strafe them to hell from the air.

The only regular source of supplies available to the big German garrisons at Mostar and Metkovic, just up the Neretva River a few miles from the sea, was a steamer called the Rah, which made a trip or two each week from Split. She was well armed and invulnerable to attack by any means the Partisans could devise.

We worked out a detailed plan for her destruction. The Partisans possessed a very powerful searchlight which would be erected on the heights almost above the point on the coast we now occupied. The MTB's would hide between the islands in the narrow water way down which we had chugged in The Chetnik the night before. When the Rah came by, following the channels along the coast, the searchlight would pick her out. Her guns would open fire at long range on the light, and while they were wasting their time in this fashion the MTB's would dash out and sink her with torpedoes. It was perfect!

During the last hour of our conference, dinner was being served to fifty men in the mess below and as soon as they had finished eating they began to sing. Their battle-songs shook the walls of the building, for when the Partisans sing they resemble in no way a polite congregation getting through Sunday morning's hymns. They throw their heads back and pour forth the largest volume of sound they can produce. When we walked out through the mess hall, they were still singing but they paused as we came through and stood up in a body, not stiffly and at attention, but in easy, natural attitudes. Ilic smiled kindly and introduced us. "Zhivio!" they answered, bowing and smiling.

The scene was unforgettable. There were three long tables with two carbide lamps on each. The remains of a supper comparable with our own cluttered the tables. Deep black shadows engulfed the walls and corners of the room, so that it had no boundaries and the naked yellow flames flooded the wild faces theatrically.

"Zhivio Americans!" one of them shouted, and the company repeated it after him in chorus.

"Zhivio Roosevelt!" another led, and again they all joined.

"Zhivio Tito!" was next, and we joined them heartily in that one.

A guard was waiting for us at the door, where we said good-bye to the Colonel and the Commissar after promising again to be back three nights later, then we set off through the darkness and a drizzle of rain to return to the house where we had rested in the morning and collect our things and our two escaped prisoners of war before embarking for the return journey to Vis.

CHAPTER 22

When we reached the water, we discovered with pleasure that our return trip down the Hvarski Channel would not be made aboard the fussy little Chetnik. There in the darkness we discerned the shadowy outline of a small fishing-smack lying against the pier. The sea was very calm as we went aboard and the rain had stopped, but the night remained intensely dark. That was reassuring too. Twice now we had been obliged to approach dangerous coasts in full daylight; it was comforting to be able to leave in proper darkness. We went aboard silently, passing through a group of Partisans who were conferring in whispers. There was a sense of the imminence of the enemy in their movements.

The trip back to Vis was uneventful. Soon after we had crossed the open water and moved into the channel between the islands, the overcast broke suddenly and bright moonlight flooded down upon us. We kept very close to the islands, sailing now next to one, now next to the other, and, as on the previous night, we were hailed by a rifle-shot from every bluff along the way.

Four machine guns on their short tripods guarded our decks, a man lying behind each one in a tiny sand-bag revetment six inches high. Steve stood in the wheel-house with the

Captain. Tim and I sauntered about the deck, enjoying the fine night, and soon a brisk wind blew up from the north.

The Captain, thinking, no doubt, that there was little point in attempting to escape observation in this bright moonlight, should enemy patrols be about, gave orders to hoist sail. The sturdy little vessel steadied then, leaning on the wind, and the pulse of her Diesel engines quickened faintly as the sails added three knots to our speed.

The two British soldiers could hardly believe their luck as they tramped the deck, but they were very tired and soon went below to sleep. Steve followed, but Tim and I wanted to talk a while.

We sat on a hatch-way in front of the mast for a long time, planning our reports, planning our work in Bari and Taranto. If everything was still normal at Vis—and we were practically sure there would be no change there—we could keep our ships sailing from Bari at the rate of one a day. There would be innumerable people to see back there about supplies. We had already arranged to have another hundred Partisans accompany the Bog s Nama back to Vis, some to serve as stevedores and bookkeepers on the dock, others to go aboard our newly-acquired ships as crew. We would need a big passenger vessel of some kind if we were to quarter them all in the port, and this seemed much the best thing to do.

"I wonder how little Olga is getting along," Tim mused, reminded of her by our domestic problem of where and how to live. She was still the hostess in any ship we used for

quarters back there at the base. "Couldn't we send her to Africa for her health for a while?"

"Sure we could—if we could persuade her to go," I answered. "But I don't think she'll leave until everything is set

up and functioning as smoothly as clock-work. I hope there has been no further trouble with the outfit that was going to pick us all off. . . ."

"I suppose Olga could take care of herself as well as any of us," Tim observed. "She's a good shot, I know. We popped away at a tin can one day in the harbor and she hit it every time. But the best shot on earth has only mediocre chances against a determined assassin, who, presumably, is also a good shot and must always be the first on the draw. . . ."

It was difficult to plan the next three days because we had no idea what new situation would confront us when we got back to Bari. But even if everything was normal back there, we would have a hectic time. There would be so much to do. We could not hope to get back until Tuesday morning and it would be necessary to leave again on Wednesday afternoon.

"You'll have to stay at Bari, this time," I told him, "unless some of the lads from Cairo have arrived."

"I'll probably have to stay even if they're there," he answered reasonably. "It will take any newcomer a few days to get his bearings before we can hope to leave him in charge at the dock."

At about midnight, the sea grew fairly rough and sheets of spray began to break across the decks. We went below and stretched ourselves out on the wooden planking beside Steve, who was already fast asleep.

Soon after four o'clock we awoke as the hull bumped softly against a pier. We were tying up in the Port of Vis. When we climbed on deck, the bulky mass of the Zagreb towered above us, a little further along the sea-wall, riding high in the water, her holds empty. The three of us, rubbing our eyes and still drunk with sleep, jumped clumsily ashore.

"What's the Zagreb doing here?" I asked Steve. "She ought to be half-way back to Bari at this hour—or lying up in a cove somewhere under her camouflage."

He stepped away to a group of Partisans near the Zagreb and came back a moment later.

"They have been taking aboard some stretcher cases for hospitalization on the other side," he explained. "She's on the point of leaving now for a bay on the south shore of the island, and she'll get an early start back to Bari tomorrow night."

I should have liked to have gone straight to the crash boat where Jack and his crew were sleeping and set out at once for Bari, thus gaining a day on our schedule, but the plan appeared somewhat reckless. It would take at least half an hour to clear her decks of camouflaging and we would have little opportunity to get away from the coast and the area of German air patrols before daybreak. After a moment of discussion, we decided to return to the house where we had rested before and get some sleep.

Marica and Dusan awoke at once when we threw pebbles at the window of their room and hurried down to welcome us with their usual immense kindness. Marica kissed all three of us and Dusan kept repeating, "How-do-you-do ... I hope you are well . . ." in his newly acquired English. We assured him that we were, as we pumped his big hand up and down, but that failed to help him any as he could not understand the reply. Cakes and rakjia and pressed figs and wine were spread before us while our rooms were being prepared, and we ate greedily, shivering a little from fatigue. Dusan watched us happily, pouring wine and rakjia and counting out loud in English to one hundred. When we patted him on the back and congratulated him, he beamed and glowed with pride.

Finally, at six o'clock, we got to bed, and we slept like the dead until noon.

Big weather was brewing when we got dressed again. Sudden gusts of wind struck the little house violently, shaking the window panes and rattling the doors. This was alarming. We could not afford to remain another night in Vis and it might be very dangerous to set forth in Jack's launch in a really big blow.

Marica arrived to inquire how I wanted my egg cooked! I could not persuade her to keep it for herself so I told her 1 would like it stirred, scrambled, performing the operation on an imaginary egg with my razor. She nodded understandingly and hurried back to the kitchen, but when I reached the table a few minutes later I found a cup of zabaglione waiting for me, pleasantly flavored with rakjia! She watched me share it with Steve and Tim and enjoyed our gestures of approbation.

Steve set off immediately after breakfast for Headquarters to get to work on his full report for the authorities at Jajce. The afternoon passed very quickly for Tim and me. We called at the hospital to see whether the Zagreb's medical supplies had arrived and found the three indomitable doctors ecstatically unpacking their treasures. Anaesthetics, disinfectants, aspirin, sulfa drugs ... it looked like everything in the pharmacopoeia to them. There were instruments too, and splints—some of them of the latest traction type. It was kingdom come! They had only a few of the things that would be standard equipment in any of our first-aid field dressing stations, and they were running a base hospital, but it was affluence to them; and meanwhile they had compiled the master list I had requested. This they handed to me. It was a document ten pages long in which they had written down the exact quantity of each item required, and identified it in their language and in English as well.

From the hospital we went to Headquarters to confer with Nikic and his colleagues and to look for Commander Welman. There had been a celebration on the island the day before

with music and speeches and with dancing in the evening. The charming old sailor had won everyone's affection. He had danced every dance with the Partisan girls and had delivered a most successful speech.

Soon after our arrival he entered.

"Where were you fellows?" he asked. "You should have been here. What a time they would have given you!"

We explained what we had done and outlined the plans we had made with Ilic for sinking the Rah. He responded enthusiastically, but the three MTB's he had with him would need more fuel before they could go a-raiding. We would have to bring that over for him, so the operation would be impossible until a few days later.

"That's all right," he said. "I want to go back with the boats tonight anyway and go down to Taranto tomorrow. We can work out the details of the attack in Bari."

As we left the Commander, we ran into Jack and one of the members of his crew. They both looked a little green from their celebrations the night before and I chaffed Jack about it, telling him we had called aboard his boat the night before but had not been able to wake anyone. . . . He grinned sheepishly.

"They certainly gave us a time here yesterday," he avowed, "but we're all in good form today."

"You don't look it," I persisted.

'We'll be all right," he said.

"What sort of a trip are we going to have tonight?" I asked him. He cocked his eye up at the stringy little grey clouds scurrying overhead and listened to the wind. "The hell of it is," he answered, "that the starboard engine's on the fritz. We've got to go back on one engine."

"When did that happen?"

"As we were coming in Saturday night. I guess we forced them a little hard on the way over. The engineer reported that it was running pretty hot, but I had hoped he would be able to fix it up himself; now he tells me it can't be done and that we can't use it on the way back. He swears it'll stick if we run it half an hour."

"Well, don't worry about it," I told him. "If the weather is too rough for a one-engine crossing, stay here tonight and we'll go back with Welman in one of the MTB's."

Jack received that suggestion without enthusiasm. The thought of being disabled and laying over while his passengers rode back to Italy with the officers of the Royal Navy hurt his Air Force pride.

"If you have to go, I can get you back," he said, "but it's damned nice here. The lads in the crew would like to stay for a month."

Like the crew of the Gull, he and his men as the guests of the town had been overwhelmed with hospitality, people dragging them in from the streets to make them share their humble gastronomic treasures. On Sunday morning he and Commander Welman and several others had gone over to Comisa on horse-back, he told me. They had been received there by a brass band that played "God Save the King" very well but could only get through eight or ten bars of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"You should have been there. You could have whistled it for them," Jack said. "The bandmaster was broken-hearted not to know the rest of the music, and I couldn't give it to him."

Soon after dark the port was filled with the droning of big engines and the three MTB's crept in from their hiding places on the southern shore to moor again three abreast, against the sea wall. The weather was growing worse momentarily and, although its violence was not great in the sheltered bottom of the bay, there was evidence of its fury on the heights above us. We could hear it thundering there. I found Commander Welman and asked if he meant to cross in spite of the weather. Jack was at my side, eager to know the answer, reluctant to make the trip himself but resolved to do so if the Navy was going to face it. The Commander was unable to say. He would wait until nine o'clock and decide then.

Steve and Tim and I got some supper at Headquarters and at nine o'clock we were back on the waterfront in a downpour of rain. The Commander was not yet aboard, but word had gotten back to the ships that they would leave at about ten, when, it was hoped, the violence of the storm would have abated some. Jack was there to hear this verdict.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go."

"I think you ought to stay until tomorrow night, Jack,"I said. "This blow is out of the east, which means we'll have it on our port beam. How's that going to work with the starboard engine dead?"

"It's going to be bad," Jack answered positively, "but we'll make it, Louis— Let's go."

The decision was an awkward one. Jack was impulsive and game, not only willing but eager to take chances, and absolutely resolved not to let the Navy "wipe his eye." If we could have waited over for a day it would have been easy, but we had to get back, so it was a question of letting him take us across or insisting upon his staying and our going aboard the MTB's. His craft had one advantage over the MTB's. Her bows were not

freighted down with five thousand pounds of torpedoes and their launching mechanisms; but the MTB's had three engines each, as compared with two in the crash boat—two engines, one of which was now dead, and the vital one at that. ... If anything went wrong with the one good engine that remained on the port side we were in for it. Either we would pile up on a lee shore among the islands or wallow helplessly in the rough seas until day, when the JU-88's would come out and cut us to pieces. . . .

I could feel the tenseness in Jack as he stood beside me in the darkness waiting for an answer, then without being conscious of having made a decision, I said:

"Okay. Let's go."

Half an hour later we were struggling in the darkness to remove the pine-boughs that smothered the decks of the boat. We had collected our two soldiers on the way over. The wind clawed and tugged at the heavy branches, tearing them out of our hands as we stumbled about on the crowded deck. A young tree stood vertically against the mast to conceal the short yard-arm and the rigging. When we freed it from its lashings, the wind tore it away from us and sent it crashing into the water, carrying away the radio antennae as it fell.

As I strained against a heavy branch that would not come away, the wind tipped me into the open hatchway above the engine room. When I climbed out, rubbing my bruises, I could hear Sparks complaining to Jack that the antennae was gone.

"If we can't make it under our own power we're in for it, anyway, so what the hell difference does it make?" Jack answered. "Come on, lads, hurry it up!"

Jack was a born officer and his men would sail to hell with him, I reflected, but it seemed absurd that we should be about to do that very thing for no particular reason. I found Tim beside me and said to him: "It's nuts, isn't it?" "Yeh, it's nuts but it's fun," Tim answered.

When our decks were clear, our one good engine began to rumble softly. We got our lines free and moved slowly out of the mooring. There was a final blast of Zivios from the Partisans on the shore, then the darkness and the voice of the storm swallowed them up.

Tim and Steve and I joined Jack at once on the open bridge, fastening our oilskins as we peered into the rain—it was coming down in torrents. The minutes immediately before us would be tense and breathless. Getting out of the port into the open sea would be rough work. Steve and I had done it once before with the Gull, but that had been a mild night compared to this one.

As we entered the narrow waters leading to the sea, we took the full blast of the wind and the little launch rose gallantly on the big swells. Sheets of spray as hard as driven sand raked the bridge. There was not a light to be seen in any direction and our efforts to use our own searchlight proved quite futile. All we could see with it was the dazzling

brilliance of the beam it made in the saturated air, a blinding horizontal pillar of light twenty or thirty feet long.

Twice we found the shore within a length or two of our starboard bow, then we were in the sea, in the channel between Vis and Hvar. Steve was pilot throughout that first part of the trip, and he guided us through the rock-strewn waters that guard the approaches of the harbor.

"Are we clear yet?" Jack roared at him in French. Steve shook his head the first time, but the next time the question was asked he nodded, and a few minutes later we came around onto our course.

The seas were mountainous now but the launch rode them better than we had expected. She had much less tendency than the MTB's to bury her bows in them, and she held her course fairly well, albeit not without some pretty fancy steering.

Once a hard squall caught us high on the crest of a wave and yawed us around forty-five degrees. This time the helmsman was unable to bring her back, the wind holding too firmly against her freeboard, so Jack let her come clean around to starboard, then held her into the wind until the gust subsided. This was what we had feared most of all from our dead starboard engine . . . but after a few minutes we were cruising south again and all was well.

It was an anxious night. I shuddered when I thought of the strain the steering mechanism was taking and resolutely refused to think of what would happen if our one good engine should begin to heat. Hour after hour we stood with Jack on the bridge, arms aching from the endless struggle with handrail and bulkhead. He never flagged and remained cheerful and alert all night.

The worst was over by the time we were half way across and the going seemed easier, the water being less choppy. Steve was below, asleep, lashed in the engineer's bunk. Tim went below, also to sleep, I supposed, and I remained another hour on the bridge with Jack before following his example a little before daybreak; but when I got down to Jack's cabin I was astonished to find Tim with one foot braced against the bulkhead painfully writing a report in his cramped, tight scrawl.

"My God, you can't write while you're tossing about like this," I exclaimed, holding on to the doorway.

He looked up at me and grinned. "It's legible," he answered. "We won't have time to write it after we get in and it must get to Taranto today."

CHAPTER 23

"Have the MTB's come in?" Jack shouted across the diminishing reach of open water that still separated us from Shack's boat as we approached our mooring. It was a quarter of seven and Shack's crew were again frying eggs on the edge of the pier.

"Not yet," one of them shouted back.

"We beat them in," Jack yelled. "Hey, Louis, Tim, Steve! We beat them in!"

The night's work Jack had done on that open bridge would have crumpled most strong men, but he was radiant with vitality as we tied up. There was no evidence of fatigue in his movements. I had slept an hour as we approached Bari and felt half-dead now, but Tim appeared to be in good form. He handed me the report on our reconnaissance, a document which, when copied out by one of the stenographers in the Admiral's office that afternoon, covered twelve typewritten pages. He had finished it as we entered the port.

"How in the hell do you do it?" I asked him.

"No secret there," he grinned. "Benzedrine, good old benzedrine."

Our two soldiers from Stalag-blank-blank looked very green as they came ashore. They had had a night which would have made the worst channel crossing on record seem nothing in particular and both had been deathly ill. But they were safe behind their own lines again, behind the British Eighth Army of which they were a part, and it needed more than a bad night at sea to dampen their spirits. We all had a ceremonial drink of rakjia, standing on the deck in the slanting rays of the morning sunshine. Tim and I thanked Jack and his gallant crew, then we took the soldiers over to Brigadier Trollope's 86th Sub-Area Headquarters before going home to the hotel for dry clothes and breakfast.

We had noted, as we came in, that Bog s Nama was back at her berth on the end of the pier. Steve had set out in that direction in search of Olga after saying good-bye to Jack, and we were eager to join them there. We had been away two days and at the pace we kept all sorts of things might happen in that time.

Olga welcomed us when we went aboard. She was wearing grey flannel slacks and a sweater, looking very sweet and sturdy as she stood near the gang-plank with her feet well apart and her head high, giving orders to the barefooted Partisans who somehow managed to be her house-boys and guests simultaneously. We shook hands with her as we went aboard. Ivo Radic appeared a moment later and greeted us warmly. Tim had a letter for him in his pocket from Mrs. Radic, whom he had found time to call on during the previous afternoon.

"My laundry got back," Ivo grinned. "It came in on the Bog s Nama. You can't get service like that in Italy!"

The Partisans had scouted the Italian shores from Taranto to Vieste during our absence and had found several more Jugoslav ships for us to seize. Some were large vessels for which we would probably have no use, but I thought it well to take the lot of them. We could turn in any we did not need to the Mediterranean shipping pool, thereby establishing at least a moral claim for high priority on any cargo we might want to bring across from Africa.

Some of our colleagues from the special services in Cairo were beginning to arrive in Italy. They had apparently "laid on" a big conference of some kind in Taranto and sent word up for me to attend. I noticed it was scheduled for "1430"— half past two—that very afternoon. As it seemed likely I should have to go to Taranto anyway to obtain permission to confiscate the additional ships and turn in our reports this fell into place very well.

All in all, it was evident that nothing untoward had happened during our absence. "Just a few days more is all we need, now," I said to Tim, after we had completed our survey of the Bari situation. "If we can just hold on and keep everything running for another week we'll have this supply line working like a dream."

"Like a dream for us," Tim countered, "like a nightmare for Hitler."

Commander Welman and his MTB's had reached Bari half an hour or so after we came in. He called on us aboard Bog s Nama soon after ten o'clock and I told him of the conference in Taranto, suggesting that he come down and attend with me. The plan seemed sound to him so we agreed to set out together at noon.

The rest of the morning was devoted, as always in Bari, to trying to get ten times as much business done as the racing minutes allowed. I called on NOIC and half a dozen other officials around the port. Tim decided to sail another ship that night and there were some additional items of cargo required. I had a brief conference with Port Security and learned they had picked up several suspicious Jugoslav characters who presumably belonged to the same fraternity as Olga's pistol packing visitor. They had done their best and had been in touch with Olga several times to see whether she could identify their prisoners.

"If we had a few operatives like her on the staff it certainly would be hell for the enemies of the King," the British major I talked to remarked. "Not only is she not afraid: she seems not even to be impressed by the ultimatum she received. I really believe she's looking forward to another meeting with the fellow. When I've had her in to look at the prisoners I've wondered if it wouldn't be a good idea to disarm her first. If she recognized the man who threatened her in the line-up I think she might just shoot him, right there; but I have no idea how to go about disarming her so I just stay close on her right side to intervene if it should be necessary."

"She's a sweet girl and not nearly so blood-thirsty as you make her out," I laughed. "Don't worry. She'll never shoot a prisoner."

Commander Welman and I enjoyed our trip to Taranto together. The weather was fine. We followed the winding road through the olive groves and talked about our adventures on the other side. The Partisans had made a deep impression on him and he was eager to help them. There was a job for his little MTB's waiting over there and he was itching to come to grips with it.

I found many of my old friends from Cairo waiting in the entrance hall of the conference room at Taranto. They brought me up to date on developments in Algiers and inquired eagerly about the work we had done at Bari. Vague reports had filtered back to Algiers, most of them very flattering to us and to the stature of our modest operations. I made a brief verbal report on our work as soon as the meeting was called to order and promised everyone who was interested a copy of the report Tim had written during the night. There were present several officers connected with Brigadier Mac-Lean's mission at Tito's Headquarters. They were planning to go into the country by sea at the earliest opportunity. I was eager to talk with them and co-ordinate the efforts we were making from Bari with those the Anglo-American mission was making in the interior.

The meeting was largely devoted to organizational detail and brought forth little that was new. It was agreed that the Flag Officer would send a permanent representative to Bari to function as co-ordinator of all special operations. That would be a big help to us. We would be able to channel all requests for support and supplies through him thereafter. He would help us in our dealings with the Admiral and the Air Force, too. The sooner we could put our work on some regular organizational basis the better it would be for all concerned. That way, we would be less likely to wear out our welcome in the busy offices we dealt with.

I cleared my throat and pointed out that the situation had been developing very rapidly in recent days.

"We are now moving supplies to the Partisans at the rate of 100 tons a night," I said. "Our goal, from now on, ought to be at least five thousand tons a month."

The conference was followed by a round of visits in the course of which I called on our mentor, the Admiral, to give him an account of our stewardship. He sanctioned our seizure of additional Jugoslav ships. I spent some time, too, in the office of the Flag Officer, another Admiral, whose staff proved wonderfully helpful to us then and later, and it was seven o'clock before the Commander and I were able to go back to our Bari taxi and set out for Brindisi.

That evening is one of happy memory. The Commander and I had many a laugh together on the way up to Brindisi, where his flag-ship was waiting. He had told me about her before and invited me to be his guest aboard, but the proffered hospitality could never have been more welcome than it was that night. It seemed days since I had had a hot bath and slept during the hours of darkness in a proper bed after a pleasant dinner, and all those amenities were available on the twenty-thousand-ton mother-ship of his little fleet, formerly a luxurious passenger vessel. We began with whiskey in the Commander's cabin

and finished in the best tradition, passing the decanter to the left and drinking port after the cheese and coffee. Life, in the Royal Navy, has its amenities!

The Commander had offered to get me back to Bari in the morning aboard one of his MTB's, so I had dismissed the taxi at the dock. That was Tuesday night—the night of October nineteen to twenty—and I made the most of my six hours' sleep, knowing it would be a long time before there was any more of that kind to be had. One of the ratings brought me a cup of strong tea at half past five in the morning, together with one of the Commander's best razors, and at six I was over the side on a rope ladder and aboard the racy-looking little launch that was waiting there. We cast off at once, followed by two more MTB's, line astern, and rumbled out to sea through the rose-tinted port.

I stood on the bridge and watched the sun come up, thinking of the wonderful night's rest my charming friend had provided and wondering when there might be another like it; that night would be spent on the rough Adriatic, crossing again to keep the appointment with Ilic; the next one would probably be spent going through the German lines, likely afoot, over that appalling range of coastal mountains that had already awed us. The next day would be all work and the next night all travelling, and the next day all work again, then a night in the Hvarski Channel on the way to Vis . . . then the next night on the Adriatic on the way back to Bari. . . .

It gave me a sinking feeling to think of it, for my reserves were beginning to wear thin. I felt as though I had been living on stimulants for months and silently thanked God and the powers that be for a rugged nervous system; but had I known what was ahead I would probably have jumped over the side in despair.

My next opportunity to go to bed was ninety benzedrine and rakjia saturated hours away.

We reached Bari at ten o'clock and found everything normal there. Tim had cleared another ship on Tuesday evening and was loading again for a sailing that afternoon. Most of the cargo we had received was already delivered and the problem before us was to find further supplies in some naval or military dump we could raid. The armies seemed short of everything in Italy and it was not easy to round up food and woolen clothes and guns at the rate of better than a hundred tons a day.

"If you can't do any better, ship them fuel," I told Tim. "They can use any amount of Diesel oil and gasoline and kerosene and coal, and there are always the MTB's; we could build up a supply for them. They need three thousand Imperial gallons a night."

"Yeh, that's all right," he answered, "but you can't ship that hundred octane stuff they give us in leaky steel drums in the hold: that's deck cargo. If we put it below we'll blow the ship to bits, just loading it. It's dynamite. All you need in all enclosed space is the spark from bumping two cans together."

He was right about that, but two weeks later, to meet an emergency, we cleared one ship with six hundred tons of the stuff in her hold in spite of the hazards—and delivered it safely.

"Well, you can put the slow stuff in the hold and keep the hundred octane on deck," I answered. "You're still getting all you ask for, aren't you?"

"I'll keep 'em sailing," he grinned, "and there'll be something useful in them when they get there."

Later that day he returned to the pier from some raiding expedition with a happy smile.

"What have you swiped?" I asked.

"I can report two hits," he answered, proudly. "Amgot has seven hundred tons of flour: we'll get that! and I discovered that one of the ships that came in today was loaded with quartermaster stores, including several thousand cases of cigarettes."

"Christ, that's wonderful. Did you manage to draw any?"

"No. The bastard that has control of them says he won't release a damned thing until he's completed an inventory of the shipment—and it'll take him two weeks to do it."

"Well, what the hell good is that to us?"

"I went around to the pier to see him," Tim said solemnly. "I wanted to put it up to him that we really needed some stuff right away, and I was careful to park the cab alongside of a mountain of cigarettes. When he refused to see reason I went back and started loading the cab, but while I was putting the fourth case of cigarettes into it the guard saw me and ran over."

"Jesus, what tough luck!"

"Not as bad as you think," Tim insisted. "I managed to wham the door shut with my tail while I was still hanging on to the other case and when the guard got there I gave him a long argument, but to no avail. So I set the case down looking as forlorn as possible and drove off—with one hundred and fifty cartons of Lucky Strikes that he never saw in the back of the cab!"

We shook hands warmly at that point. Before I set out for Jugoslavia that afternoon at four o'clock we had talked Amgot out of its seven hundred tons of white flour and the use of a four-thousand-ton warehouse on which they had a priority.

"If only Fred were here," Tim said, as he walked with me over to the MTB's berth where Steve would be waiting. We had often talked of Frederick Jensen, a Captain in Cairo with experience on the Burma Road, looking forward to the time when he would be one of us

and share our interminable days at the dock. He had run a shipping company in China and would be more at home in the port than we could hope to be, not only because of his experience with this type of work, but because he was a Dane and came of a line of seagoing adventurers.

I suggested: "Why don't you send another cable to Cairo saying we need help here—that we're going nuts. . . ."

"I'll try," he answered, "but they're probably all tied up with priorities and can't get transportation. We were lucky to get through the way we did. There are thousands of people waiting to get across. You remember the jam there was in Catania . . . ? People waiting for a week or more? And they were already half-way over."

"Give them a jog about it anyway," I insisted, as we said good-bye beside the MTB's. Steve was already aboard and they were waiting to leave.

"Jensen ought to be here any time, now—and take care of yourself!"

"Keep out of mischief yourself," he called.

CHAPTER 24

It would have been reassuring then to know that Captain Fred Jensen would be at the dock in an hour, but I had no inkling of his presence in Italy until I got back a week later and found him using our Partisan friends like a crew of longshoremen—and making them like it. Fred was bland and charming and gay, but as hard as steel. When my work in the Adriatic was finished, he and Tim carried on, increasing the pace with each day that passed until the frantic tempo of the operations made military and naval authorities gasp and brought Admirals and Generals from miles around, just to have a look.

Steve and I sat on the fore-deck and watched the gunners checking their weapons as we roared out of the port, three MTB's in a line, as usual, and breasted the gentle swells of the open sea. As soon as we were clear, they fired a chattering burst from each weapon, just to be sure everything was ready for any prowling enemy aircraft we might run into before darkness set in, then they relaxed in vigilant attitudes, the men in the power turrets swinging themselves from side to side unceasingly and scanning the wide blue skies.

Once they found a speck on the horizon and held it firmly in their sights as it rushed down upon us, twenty-odd heavy machine guns and light automatic cannon on our three little ships covering its rapid approach—but it turned out to be a Spitfire.

Steve still had a worried look and I refrained with difficulty from teasing him about his fears. The report he had turned in after an afternoon's steady writing in Vis on the eighteenth would be far up the line toward Jajce—or it might even be in Tito's hands by now. In a few hours he might know the verdict, he might be quit of his fears—or the worst of them might be realized.

It was simply not imaginable to me that he could be in trouble. I was absolutely certain that good news awaited him when we should see Ilic again, but I was not sufficiently familiar with Partisan discipline to feel free to initiate any discussion of his anxiety: it was up to him to do that, if we were to talk about it at all, and he was not doing it. I gave him marks for his pride in the matter and turned my thoughts to distracting him.

"Now that we have the mine-fields charted and a supply of high octane gas waiting on the island we might use one of the MTB's to go down to the coast tonight," I suggested.

"That's a good idea," he answered, "but I think we should stop at Starigrad on the way. There might be a message there for us, and besides, we should go there to make final arrangements for the sinking of the Rah. That attack could be carried out tomorrow night. They can get a message across from Starigrad to the mainland by telegraph and courier in a matter of hours."

"All right," I agreed. "Just so we don't have to cross in that damned little launch again."

The weather was fine, for a change, as we plunged ahead at twenty knots into the dusk, the sun sinking on our port beam. We were in the leading launch of the three and the two behind us were a pretty sight with the light falling flat across them as they thundered down the white path of our foaming wake. We wandered happily about the little ship, going below to look at the three vibrating thousand-horsepower engines that were hurling us along, going up forward again for a smoke on the open deck, cigarettes being tabu behind the bridge on these vessels, and a few minutes after ten o'clock we cruised into the harbor of Vis at reduced speed and tied up beside the now familiar sea-wall.

Our first duty, as usual, was to call at Headquarters for a glass of rakjia with Nikic and his colleagues, and to see that all our ships had come in and whether there were any messages there for us. It was known at Headquarters that this time the MTB's were out for business, and there was jubilation over their arrival. The officer commanding them, a lad of twenty-one in the uniform of the wavy navy (Royal Naval Reserve) accompanied us and was warmly welcomed.

"This is Lieutenant Edward Tyler, commander of the three launches that came over tonight," I told Nikic. He shook hands with the slim young officer enthusiastically and said: "How old are you?" His directness startled Tyler who blushed as he gave his age.

"How many ships have you torpedoed?" Nikic persisted.

"Only five," Tyler answered with embarrassment. "But I have not been in the service very long."

"Five!" Nikic shouted. "Five! Tell us about them."

"Two were destroyers and three were merchant vessels," Tyler stammered. "The destroyers were in an enemy port and we had to jump over the torpedo boom that closed

the mouth of the harbor, so we just went in at full speed and got over it all right. They were so surprised to see us in the harbor that we got both torpedoes away at point-blank range and were on our way out again before they really started shooting—and we had been lucky; our propellers were undamaged by the boom so we were able to get away. The others, the merchant ships, were just ordinary operations."

All this was translated into Serbo-Croat for the benefit of all who were present, with many loud exclamations and epithets, and all the Partisans surrounded Tyler to thump him on the back and assure him in their language, which he could not understand, that he was a great man, a hero, an absolute tiger. There was panic in his expression and I could see that he was more alarmed by the awful turn this situation had taken than he had ever been on the bridge of his little boat during any of his battles. When I suggested to him a few moments later that he take us over to Starigrad an expression of immense relief came over his features.

"Certainly," he said, "certainly, with great pleasure," beginning to edge his way toward the door. Anything to get out of that crowded little office!

Steve and I were back with him aboard his boat a few minutes later. He sent the other two launches around to their hiding places with orders to report back at the sea-wall the following night at nine o'clock. Then we cruised out through the harbor mouth into the eternally choppy water between Vis and the tip of Hvar, there to slam and bounce our way along at a brisk pace. The Partisans would supply him with a liaison officer who spoke English when we got to Starigrad, and through him he could effect contact with the Partisan command which would be necessary for the operations against the Rab.

There had been no message waiting for Steve at the Vis Headquarters, but Nikic had told him there was a message at Starigrad. He told me that on the way over, and I could see he was consumed with impatience to have a look at it.

We were soon driving down the deep fjord that leads to the old harbor, as usual acknowledging rifle shots from the hillsides with the night's lamp-signals, learned at Vis, and soon after twelve we tied up to a big bollard on the sea-wall near Headquarters. Steve and I jumped ashore at once, but Tyler, no doubt still shaken by his experience at Vis, said he preferred to wait aboard, unless his presence should be specifically required.

The glaring white light of a gasoline lantern suspended from the ceiling blinded us for a moment when we thrust open the door of the small office, and there, to our great surprise, stood Colonel Ilic and his inseparable Commissar. They greeted us with cries of pleasure and announced that they had just arrived a few minutes before.

"We were on our way to the coast," I said. "We thought you were going to be there."

"We were impatient to see you," Ilic answered, smiling warmly, his eyes twinkling. "There was time, so we hurried over." I thought his manifest good spirits augured well for my friend Steve but he said nothing about any message until after we had had a drop

of rakjia together, clinking glasses like old friends, then he nudged my elbow lightly and produced an envelope from his pocket which he delivered casually after checking to see that this was indeed the one marked for "Commander Stevo Mladineo."

Steve glanced at his face and at the Commissar's before breaking the seal, but there was nothing to be read there; they were both absolutely dead-pan. With a quick nervous gesture he opened the envelope and drew the fold of paper from the interior.

The message was brief, but he stared at it for a long minute, reading it over and over again. It was from Tito himself and consisted of generous words of praise for his initiative and an appointment which, in a more orthodox government, would have carried cabinet rank: he had been made Commissar of the Jugoslav Merchant Marine! When we entered the room, he had been white in the face; now the color flushed back into his cheeks as we all shook hands with him, offering our congratulations and good wishes.

"Olga will be happy when she sees this note," he whispered to me.

We stayed until after three at Starigrad, planning and conferring. I told Ilic that our recommendations had gone in and that an air attack would be made shortly against the Snell-Boat base in the mouth of the Neretva River; also that all plans for maintaining a secret MTB base at Vis had been approved and that the boats were already there with orders to remain until all German shipping was safe at the bottom of the sea.

The Germans were aware of our activities and determined to interrupt them at all costs. They had already launched an attack on the western part of the island of Brae, twenty miles north of where we were, and a battle was going on there now. They had also launched an attack in some strength against the Pelejesac Peninsula, just south of Hvar Island, obviously determined to cut us off. All this was alarming news. Reinforcements were being gathered in the islands and rushed to the scenes of action, but the outcome was still anything but clear. What could we do to help? the Colonel wondered. Could we bomb Netkovic and Mostar?

Soon after three, Tyler sent word to us that he would be compelled to leave within the next half hour if he was to make his way safely to the berth where his Partisan camouflage artists were waiting to hide him from the patrols that would be over soon after seven o'clock in the morning. As it was too late for us to make our way to the coast before daybreak, it was suggested we go back to Vis and set out again on the following night, should it be necessary for Steve and me to make that journey. I suspected that the Colonel and the Commissar wanted a ride in one of the MTB's and fell in with the proposal at once.

It was while racing through the choppy seas on our way back to Vis that the Colonel sprang his second surprise on us. Tito was eager to see us at his Headquarters in Jajce and had asked him to bring us up as soon as he could. There was a military escort waiting now on the coast to take us through, if we could manage it on this trip. . . . Tito, it seemed, preferred to talk to us himself and answer our insistent questions; and there were

arrangements to be made for the third leg of the supply route, that section which lay between the coast and the interior. I wanted to see for myself how difficult it was to get through the German lines and what equipment would be needed to keep the cargo moving. ... I would get a chance to see the officers I had sent in to Tito's Headquarters from Cairo—those who had dropped in by parachute—and find out from them what life was like in the interior of the liberated countries . . . and I would meet Tito, the mysterious leader whose name was now beginning to trouble the imagination of statesmen throughout the western world! Steve's eyes were shining. For him it would be a pilgrimage to the shrine.

"How long would it take us to make the trip?" I asked Ilic.

"If we leave Vis tomorrow night early, we can be in Jajce the next afternoon—with luck," he answered.

"And without luck?"

The Colonel shrugged and looked bored. I realized it was a stupid question. Steve looked at Ilic with mounting anxiety. Could it be that I was thinking of putting the trip off until later?

"All right, we'll leave tomorrow night," I agreed.

At Headquarters in Vis we found a conference in progress when we arrived a little before five o'clock. Further reports had come in from the battle in western Brac, and they were all bad. The Germans had gained a foot-hold there and efforts to dislodge them were not prospering. Could the MTB's be used? The answer was that they could not. They are built to hurl torpedoes and virtually useless for every other kind of fighting, being much too vulnerable. The hours passed. Day came, bringing the Dornier over us as usual, and bringing problems of its own. We needed crews for many more ships and additional stevedores at the dock in Bari. I wanted to check the methods that were used for handling supplies once they reached Vis, knowing that sooner or later the military and naval authorities from which we were drawing millions of dollars' worth of war materials in Italy would question us about it. And there were further details to arrange about fueling the MTB's and about the attack on the Rah. Thus the whole day passed. The Dornier pilot droned by overhead on his evening round, found everything normal, and went home to supper, and at nine o'clock we started out again, this time for the coast and the interesting journey overland to Tito's Headquarters.

The MTB's were on the prowl that night and we wanted to leave them to it, unencumbered by the necessity to ferry us about, so the wretched little Chetnik was going to take us across to Starigrad where a proper sea-going fishing boat would take us aboard and carry us on to the coast. We boarded her without enthusiasm and set forth.

The first hour of that journey passed pleasantly enough, although the seas were much too big for a craft of that dimension. We bobbed and wallowed like a cork, but the engine

beat out the knots with a steady throbbing. The old pilot who had guided her on our previous voyage was not with us that night and in his place there stood Joco, a wiry, squirrel-like little man, who talked incessantly to the mechanic in charge of the engine, who said nothing in reply. Finally the mechanic, who had already betrayed some symptoms of seasickness and was turning greener by the moment, leaned over the side in copious offering to the fishes.

When he recovered his place on the bench beside the garrulous Joco, he put his elbows on his knees and held his head in his hands. For him it was the end of the world. Joco tried to put some spirit in him by friendly chaffing, but groans and sighs were his only reward.

For a little while we proceeded silently, except for the steady drone of the engine, then something went wrong: the engine began to knock violently and slow down. Joco screamed at the sick mechanic who roused himself at last and went forward on all fours into the cramped space beside the hot engine to see what he could do, but no sooner had he set out on this expedition than he fell to vomiting again, this time all over the hot machinery. It was more than the little Chetnik's rebellious engine proposed to put up with. It spluttered a noisy mechanical protest and stopped dead.

Joco's remonstrances were comical. He chided the mechanic gently, his voice as tender and persuasive as a woman's when she scolds her child. I could not understand the words, but the intonations were revealing. The mechanic stayed a few moments, stupefied, on all fours, then he retreated from his cubicle and seated himself again, groaning, on the bench and buried his head in his hands. Joco's protests were of no avail. There was nothing he could do about the engine, the mechanic said. If it should be started up again it would catch fire; and he would have nothing further to do with it. Joco cleaned up the mess.

The scene might have been wonderfully comic if it had not been so serious. We could not be more than four or five miles from the western extremity of the island of Hvar. There was little wind, but a big soft swell was slowly carrying us toward the cliffs that constitute that shore-line, where we would be smashed like an egg flung against a wall. The big swells were gentle enough in the open sea; where they met the cliffs it would be another story. I could see, in my mind's eye, the roaring breakers and the white spray ascending sixty or eighty feet into the darkness from the place where they finally washed up against the shore. . . .

Ilic contemplated the sick mechanic with undisguised amusement. "What a type," he exclaimed. "What a poor miserable specimen of a man!" There was pity in his words and no trace of annoyance or resentment. It struck him as absurd that anyone should be so utterly ignoble and craven. "Can't you pull yourself together?" he asked the mechanic. The latter shook his head. Ilic turned to me and explained: "It is not really his fault. He is an automobile mechanic, not a sailor. We took him because there was nothing else, but I'm afraid he will not be much use to us."

To my unforgettable consternation and dismay the Colonel then turned up the collar of his greatcoat and lay down on the bottom of the boat with his cap over his eyes. I presume he went to sleep, for there was no further movement in him.

"For Christ's sake," I said to Steve, "we've got to do something about this. No one is going to come along and pick us up—unless it's the Germans. Are there any oars aboard?"

He answered that there were and began a long incomprehensible conversation with Joco. This lasted so long that I very nearly fell asleep sitting in the stern waiting for it to end, and, when it was over, the oars were at last produced by the pilot from under the planking of the little deck. He and Joco went to work with them, doing the best they could, but there were no oar-locks—only loops of rope over a pin in the gunwale—and the oars themselves were heavy enough to require the strength of three men on each one. I watched them work a while. They were unable to head us into the wind so they settled down to doing their modest best to propel us forward.

Finally I said to Steve: "What's the plan?"

"We'll try to clear the little barren island that ought to be on our lee side and get in behind the tip of Hvar to comparatively sheltered water—if possible," he answered, straining at his task.

I offered to relieve him but got Joco's oar instead, and this agile little sailor then climbed out on the narrow, tilting deck and converted himself into a precarious human mast, using a top coat for a sail. Steve and I toiled silently for a while, becoming drenched with sweat from the exertion. No doubt we did propel the boat forward, some, but it was heavy and our movements, although costly in effort, seemed utterly futile. The Commissar was now apparently sleeping beside the fatalistic colonel. Joco, of the wonderful equilibrium, remained in an upright position with his tiny triangle of wool exposed to the wind, no matter how the launch rolled and tossed, addressing further remonstrances from time to time to the besotted mechanic who never altered his despairing pose or betrayed that he heard any single word of it. The waves were big and black and they slid slowly by beneath us, lifting us very high and lowering us again with infinitely gentle motion. They flowed by hissing slightly, and there was no other sound.

For two hours this silent battle continued, then we began to see the white towers of spray lifting themselves in noiseless rhythm on our starboard side. They were fixed in the middle distance and our position with relation to them seemed unchanged as time passed, but Joco began to shout encouragement to us.

"Harder!" he shouted, "harder! We may still make it past them."

Steve and I said nothing. We had no breath left with which to speak. The oars were taking from us everything we had to give. The Colonel and his Commissar slept soundly. The mechanic never lifted his sea-sick head.

"Shall I relieve one of you at the oars?" Joco shouted. Steve answered negatively, after a glance at me. Neither of us could have maintained our balance where he stood. The surf began to seem nearer, then its voice came to us up the wind. When it filled our ears it proved a better exhortation than anything Joco could shout at us.

We made it past the end of the barren rock reef that lay there in the open sea, clearing it by two hundred yards, but we were unable to clear the next one that turned up on out lee. This time the sea carried us slowly into the danger zone where the crests began to race in their final mad dash against the rocks.

But Joco saved us from the salt-water bath to which Steve and I had long been reconciled—and probably from a good deal worse than that.

When we were close to the shore—not more than a hundred yards from it—he managed to get us anchored. He had found a good anchor and eighty feet of line in the Chetnik, and he got the anchor's flukes into the limestone bottom while we were still outside the breakers. The seas were terrifying. They rushed down on us with express train speed, hissing furiously, only to glide harmlessly by beneath and around us while we rose high in the air. None burst over us, and there we lay until daylight. The Colonel and the Commissar slept like children at our feet. The mechanic never changed his position, even when he vomited, as he did from time to time onto his boots and trousers. Steve and I shivered. We found some rakjia in a musette bag and ate some bully-beef out of a tin, and that helped, but our clothes were wet through from the effort we had made. Joco sat with us and smoked, looking at his mechanic now and then to shake his head sadly and observe: "What a miserable, wretched creature!"

The wind shifted before daybreak and the seas subsided. When we could see clearly we went to work again and after a frantic half-hour managed to get ashore unhurt. Joco manipulated the anchor with great skill, pulling it up hand over hand and throwing it back to what he supposed was the right place in the sea, until we were able to pay ourselves out on the line to a point within only a few feet of the shore. He then waited in the stern for a favorable moment and threw himself across the intervening gulf onto the rocks. He got wet, but once there he ran a line across to the stern and the rest of us were able to go ashore without too much difficulty. That was the last we saw of the Chetnik. We left it, there, anchored in the surf, posting the mechanic on the shore to guard it, and set out over the big hills six or seven miles afoot to Hvar, the nearest village.

CHAPTER 25

AS WE TOPPED THE BIG HILL AFTER CLIMBING FOR HALE AN hour we walked straight into the deliciously warm morning sunlight. Little flowers bloomed along the path we followed— a path the sheep had worn across the hills—and we chatted amiably. It was nice to be ashore in such a lovely place. East lay the mountainous landscape of the island, rocky and wild; the wonderfully blue Adriatic, quiet now, was a vast aquamarine below us to westward. On the horizon, we could see the island of Vis beyond the water we had crossed during the long night.

Suddenly a sentry's voice rang out from a clump of bushes nearby. We could hear the click of the bolt as he loaded the chamber of his rifle. "Halt! Who goes?" The words were different but the rhythm and accent were the same— That phrase must be recognizable in Chinese. . . .

"Partisan," Ilic answered.

"Advance, one, and be recognized." (That too sounded the same.)

Ilic walked over to the bushes and the rest of us waited in silence where we were. The sentry never showed himself to us. He was covering us from behind big rocks that lay beyond the bushes and he remained there until he had talked to the Colonel and satisfied himself that we were really friends. He was alone on that hill-side with his rifle and there were five of us (counting Joco), every one armed with a sub-machine gun and a couple of grenades. . . .

When he did step forth he was a tall, hirsute man in tattered clothes and bare feet who needed only a jug of corn likker to pass for a primitive Kentucky mountaineer. He directed us to a narrow roadway leading into the town of Hvar.

We found the path and sauntered on. It was pleasant to be able to move in such leisurely fashion after hurrying all the time, night and day. None of us regretted our night's misadventure as we laughed aloud, recalling the antics of the poor mechanic.

When we rounded a bend in the road and discovered the town of Hvar below, its extraordinary beauty transfixed us. For a while we stayed up there, resting, above this exquisite village snuggled in against the hills at the back of a natural harbor, white houses and vineyards and pine trees in amphitheatre array, oriented to the clear blue sea, its raison d'etre: then we made our way down the long hill into the terraced gardens to the steep and narrow streets, until we reached the waterfront.

That day began auspiciously, but before it ended it became a nightmare. I had been half-cured of a lingering case of dysentery when I left the Middle East, and at three o'clock that afternoon the hara-kiri belly cramps returned. It was just after we had finished lunching at Headquarters in Starigrad, to which we had driven in a truck over amazing roads that wound among the vineyards on those big rocky hills. The country was a desert of rocks and it seemed incredible that anyone should try to cultivate it, yet the vines were everywhere, sometimes on plots no bigger than a hat. We arrived at Headquarters ravenously hungry and were given an excellent meal of rich stew and potatoes. The cramps set in as we were climbing back into the truck to drive on to Jelsa, another twenty miles along the coast toward the mainland.

I prayed that they might pass, but their intransigence compelled me to stop the truck several times along the way. . . .

It was just before we left Starigrad that we had a look at reinforcements on their way to Brac. Colonel Ilic called our attention to the embarkation as we were finishing lunch. Two hundred Partisans were filing by under our windows and boarding a ship that lay there against the sea wall.

It was my first look at Partisan forces going into battle and I found them an odd spectacle. Almost one third of them were women, but they were not dressed like Olga; they were clad in uniforms as strangely compounded as those of the men, but there was no trace of preoccupation with their appearance in any one of them. I had seen men in the Partisan ranks before, and they all looked more or less alike, although they differed in quality, as men do anywhere, when you look at them closely; but the women were different. The men were males of their species and preserved their aggressive maleness, but the women had been transformed in some way; they had lost their characteristic female pride. They had become fighting units: they were no longer women. All preoccupation with themselves as women was gone. They had become soldiers without sex. As I watched them file by I found them rather terrifying.

"Where do the women come from?" I asked Ilic. "They have a strange look about them."

Ilic had been watching them march past silently at my elbow. "They come from a village in the interior of the island that was burned to the ground by the Ustasha," he said. "Most of them saw their men killed before their eyes—and their male children as well. The younger ones were undoubtedly raped in the presence of their husbands before the husbands were shot. They are killers now. . . ."

We reached Jelsa at dusk and were offered another excellent stew for dinner, but I passed it up. Instead I searched my musette bag and almost whooped with joy on finding the little flat tin of twelve sulfanilamide tablets issued to frontline troops with instructions to take one every quarter of an hour after being wounded. ... I took six at once and the rest at the rate of one each hour, washing them down with rakjia. The treatment was rough, but if it made me feel shaky I could always use benzedrine—the only other drug I carried (except for a bottle of rakjia) to pick me up and keep me in good form—when we reached Tito's Headquarters.

It worked, too. The treatment may not be orthodox therapy, but it worked. The cramps diminished and by the next morning they were practically gone; but there were some long hours in the night when I felt like feeding myself the one other tablet in my pharmacy—the ugly rubber-covered pill that opens the door into the next world in a matter of seconds for men in our line of business when they are captured and there lies nothing before them but the torture chamber, that instrument of interrogation which might lead even a strong man to betray his friends. (That pill was standard equipment for all of us in enemy country.)

A tiny fishing boat was waiting to ferry us over from Jelsa to the point on the mainland where the Colonel's men would be waiting to take us to the interior. There were disconcerting reports on the progress of the German offensive waiting for us in Jelsa, too.

German landings had been attempted and repulsed on the island of Korcula, a few miles south of the eastern part of Hvar Island where we were having dinner, and the Germans had not yet been thrown back from Brac, where they had landed the day before. There was great activity throughout the entire area and we were encouraged to exercise extreme caution in crossing over to the mainland that night. There would be enemy patrols about. Colonel Ilic, it was easy to see, was anxious and worried.

Fortunately, it was an uncommonly dark night. We went aboard the little fishing boat soon after eight o'clock and found it much like others we had seen, machine guns on short tripods guarding the decks, men lying in shallow sandbag revetments behind them. Steve and the Commissar sat on a hatch-cover talking in low tones as we crept out of the harbor with the engine throttled back to make a minimum of noise. The Colonel and I threw away our cigarettes and stood together in the darkness at the starboard rail.

The trip probably required only about an hour, but it seemed longer, for some reason. Ilic and I talked in low tones. I had been wondering whether he was married and now asked him. He paused a moment before answering, "Yes . . . I'm married."

"Where is your wife?" I asked.

"The Chetniks captured her."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Long ago?"

"No. Four months ago, early in June. . . ."

I could not see his face but I could feel how painful was the story, and regretted having blundered into it, but before I could say anything he continued:

"They took her to the Headquarters of Draza Mihailovic and he interrogated her personally without getting anything from her, then he said to her: 'Your husband is one of the men who is ruining Jugoslavia,'—and he had her shot."

"My God!"

There was a long articulate silence, then Ilic added, speaking slowly in the same quiet voice: "The BBC often says there are certain little outstanding points of difference and ill-will between the Partisans and Mihailovic . . . well, this is one of them."

When we reached the mainland, we went ashore silently and walked a long way over a narrow foot-path. At the end of it, we found the command post of the garrison defending that particular point on the coast. There were sentries and guards everywhere. Ilic led the way into a room on the second floor, where we found the Commanding Officer before a small desk cluttered with documents and reports. The officers and men were all happy to see him and pressed forward to wring his hand. He had a few pleasant words for each one and they all turned away beaming broadly. There were further reports here on the

progress of the fighting and Ilic pored over them all, discussing each item with his captains and lieutenants. Decisions were taken and orders issued, and the minutes ran into hours. For a time I slept in a chair. It was half past one when we said good-bye and set out afoot again the thick darkness.

We had learned there, with pleasure, that our supplies were arriving from Vis and that several truck-loads had already gone inland.

This time there was only a short distance to go. We entered what appeared to be an olive grove on the hillside and found two Italian vehicles waiting there, one, a light truck, the other a small staff car. A group of Partisans appeared from nowhere and pressed around us, saluting with clenched fist to the temple and a chorus of "Zdravos." Someone started the engines and turned on the lights and we piled into our vehicles. Every man was armed, like us, with a sub-machine gun and grenades as well as a pistol.

How Steve and the Commissar and I all managed to sit in the back seat of the little staff car, even with pistols twisted around to lie across the groin instead of on the hip, is still a mystery, for the car was very narrow. But we did it. The Colonel, who was much the biggest of the four of us, sat in splendor alone in the front with the driver. We kept our submachine guns handy across our knees.

Ahead of us lay our own "Burma Road"—one of several, all alike—over which our supplies would have to move to the interior. German garrisons lay all about us. The back roads we would use passed within a few miles of some of the largest enemy garrisons in Jugoslavia, and there was one stretch several miles long where we would be obliged to abandon the back roads and make a dash for it over highways that were German held. . . .

In the thick night it was impossible to discern the vast bulk of the mountains but one could feel them there, and we had hardly quit the olive grove before we began to ascend.

At that point on the coast the mountains rise to an altitude of about six thousand feet almost vertically. The peaks are probably not more than half a mile in from the sea. The truck led the way and we followed close behind, grinding along in low and intermediate gear through an endless succession of hair-pin bends, back and forth, back and forth, across the mountainside. It was a road over which no one would have driven a car, except on a bet, in peacetime. Here and there the entire shoulder of the road had crumbled away into the abyss and what remained sloped invitingly toward the fault. We would hug the hillside there, scraping fenders against the bank, tipped up steeply, and creep by.

Big rocks had been stood on the soft shoulder at the outside of some of the worst hair-pin turns, but this was an unusual precaution. The boundaries of the road were usually a cliff rising on one side and a seemingly vertical drop into the sea on the other. Loose rock that had fallen from the heights above encumbered this narrow thoroughfare, often forcing us out perilously close to the wrong side. And occasionally the remains of a half-removed road block did the same, but the drivers went over the boulders and loose stone if they

could, preferring this lurching and pitching to the breathless squeeze past on the outer edge.

After an hour of this slow ascent we reached a point midway up the mountain side where another command post was situated. On that first stretch of the road we had met no sentries and as we got out of the car the Colonel said: "That's one of the worst stretches. There's only one more ahead that is as bad."

We stumbled into this mountain Headquarters, led by Ilic, who again settled down to a long series of conferences with his officers. I found one who spoke English and questioned him closely about the road. The Partisans were constantly being ambushed on the section we had just crossed, he said, and although escape was easy for the men there was always danger of losing their precious vehicles. The terrain was ideal for road blocks and these could be built in an instant simply by dislodging a litde loose rock on the steep hillside above the road. ... It was his opinion that only by driving the enemy out of the immediate area could the road be made safe. Workmen sent down there now were in constant peril from snipers. . . .

I fell asleep again for a while, sitting at the edge of the table where Ilic and his men conferred, and at three o'clock we left to resume our grinding ascent.

The road was the same above that station, winding and turning. We bumped over fallen rock, rubbed against the mountain side, pitched and jolted and twisted along at a snail's pace. As we gained altitude the temperature fell off sharply so that now the cold was added to our other miseries. We entered a cloud-bank moving on a brisk wind, as chill and penetrating as sea-water.

These were the worst hours of the night. Fatigue and the cramps in the belly and the cold reduced me to a semiconscious condition, a kind of shivering nightmare. Steve, who sat next to me, roused me now and then to thrust a lit cigarette into my hand or pass me the rakjia bottle, recommending a gulp. Time stopped. We went on and on, always in the same place, always in the same swirling cold mist. I dreamt I was dying of peritonitis and woke to find that it was true, but that I could make no progress with it.

When we reached the top of the mountain the weather changed again. A dry, cold wind blew down upon us from the interior. The waning moon hung low in the sky and there was bright starlight overhead. We stopped then and got out to stretch while Ilic talked with the sentries who had hailed us in a bend of the road. There were sentries everywhere along the road now and from the manner in which they challenged it was evident that they reckoned with the possibility of any car that came along being German. . . .

When we resumed our journey it was at a lively pace. The road was better and the drivers crashed along at top speed; it was a perpetual race to get through the next danger zone before daylight.

Once we got off the road onto a well-surfaced strip that provided a real dash of speed—until the sentries halted us again and told us we were only three miles from Imotski and headed straight for it. We turned around then. Imotski was in German hands.

The country about us, after we had crossed over the coastal range, was a wild desolation of strewn boulders, ghostly and oppressive in the starlight. No vegetation of any consequence was to be seen.

When the truck stopped again before the solitary figure of a Partisan rifleman asking for the password we had reached a broad plain that appeared to be under cultivation.

We were always hailed in the same way, one man stepping suddenly into the glare of the headlamps with his rifle held in two hands at the hip, pointed into the windshield and ready to shoot. He would be given the password in low tones, then other Partisans would step forth from behind trees and rocks to inquire about the situation down the road and see whether there were any messages from Headquarters.

This time there were thirty or forty men in the party. Our men remained in the truck, in obedience to an order from the driver, but we got out and walked around while Ilic and the Commissar delivered orders and gathered information.

"This is it," Steve said, pointing down the road a little way to an intersection. "We go on along that road there, to the left. It's one of the main roads in the country. The Germans often patrol it in heavy armored cars at night. In the daytime they drive back and forth along it with trucks and supplies— although we shoot at them. The big garrison we nearly called on at Imotski has no other supply route."

Instinctively we checked our weapons as we got back into the car and a moment later we swept into the open road. The engines roared as the drivers "stepped on it." We thundered along at sixty miles an hour.

Ten minutes later the truck slowed and whirled off the road toward the north. We followed. Ilic turned to us, grinning. "The rest is easy, now," he said.

We were entering the "liberated territories."

Throughout the remaining hours of the night we worked our way along from one village to the next. We were in an inhabited world now. The mountains-of-the-moon country with the grey-clad Partisan riflemen like armed ghosts behind the rocks—Jugoslavia's no-man's-land—lay behind us. We were safe among our friends.

In each village we were given the watch-word for the stretch of road ahead between us and the next Partisan garrison. Morning found us driving through a pleasant land with picturesque peasants going out to their fields to work. Romantic Bosniak villages dotted the landscape. Everywhere we were greeted with Zdravos and broad smiles. There was a

sprinkling of Partisan uniforms in every village, but we saw no concentration of troops anywhere.

At eight o'clock in the morning we drove into the big town of Livno and went to Headquarters for a shave and breakfast. I could hardly walk when I got out of the car, but the last of the cramps passed after I had tramped around a while and gulped some hot stew and black bread and wine. As we would be in Tito's Headquarters during the afternoon I decided this was the right time to swallow the remaining benzedrine, then I lay down on a bunk and rested for a little while. When I got up my troubles were over. The drug worked. I felt full of pep and elation in anticipation of the coming meeting.

Ilic introduced Steve and me to a number of his fellow officers, the commanders of various brigades in his sector. We talked at length about improving the "Burma Road" and increasing the garrison on the coast to safeguard the supply-route. Fifty men, with two hundred riflemen to keep them covered, could make the road quite passable for trucks like our standard two-and-a-half-ton Army model, the "six by six," as it is called. This vehicle has ten driving wheels and can manoeuvre very well on difficult terrain. But I was reluctant to consider sending any of them over—if we should succeed in drawing them, which would be difficult—without first having the road repaired and strengthening the patrols on its lower reaches. Ilic and his officers thought this would be easy, but the Colonel was unwilling to make any commitments. "It's something to settle with the Commander," (meaning Tito) he said. "It's a part of the whole problem of our coastal defences."

We remained there until after lunch when we set out again, this time in two staff cars, without the escorting truck and its troops.

"There's no danger now," Ilic said. "We're in our own country. You can drive for miles without any danger at all."

What he meant was that one could drive for miles without encountering a German column on the move. I noticed he kept his machine-gun on his knees, and that the Commissar and Steve did the same. . . .

"Then why don't we leave these guns here?" I asked.

"Oh, there are a few little Chetnik bands that we never bothered to mop up," Ilic answered. "They live in the hills in the wilder parts of the country and occasionally ambush the cars along the road, so it's sometimes nice to have them."

The trip from Livno to Jajce, through southern Bosnia, was a tourist's dream. The country is beautiful and picturesque beyond belief. At times we drove between pleasant fields, all carefully cultivated; sometimes we were in rough country, heavily forested with giant pine trees, cut through by sparkling mountain streams. Smiles and Zdravos greeted us everywhere. Once we found a peasant whose wagon was stuck in the mud and we all piled out to help him and his little mountain horses haul it back onto the road. We saw

many burnt-out villages, but little other evidence of war, then at five o'clock we approached the old Turkish city of Jajce, built on the slopes of a big hill whose summit is crowned by the ruins of a very ancient castle, an old "Kula."

The streets were filled with Partisans as we worked our way through the narrow thoroughfares up the hillside. When we stopped we were near a small cedar grove in the shadow of the crumbling castle walls. Orderlies rushed up to assist us from the cars, relieving us of musette bags and paraphernalia, and to escort us to a gate in the fence surrounding the grove. A stalwart, smiling officer in grey uniform was waiting for us there.

"Comrade Tito," Ilic said. "These are my friends, Major Huot and Commander Mladineo."

He shook hands with us warmly.

CHAPTER 26

Tito was just my height and somewhat heavier. He lacks two inches of being six feet tall and probably weighs about a hundred and seventy pounds. His face is that of a man in the early fifties.

But what was striking was an impression of dynamic power only in part attributable to his figure. Compact, broad-shouldered, deep-chested and flat-bellied, there was strength-plain physical stamina—implicit in every line of him, and there were pride and assurance in the carriage of his rectangular head.

"Welcome," he said, in English—the only English word I heard him speak while I was there. He had a few friendly words for Ilic and the Commissar and a warm greeting for Steve in Serbo-Croat. About Steve and me he was manifestly curious, for he eyed us both with penetrating scrutiny from under his heavy brows before making a gracious gesture for us to accompany him across the garden to a little wooden hut, the door of which stood open.

There were two small, newly-built wooden structures under the cedar trees, made of unpainted boards and each about the size of the dining-room in a comfortable house. We entered one and found ourselves in his office. Opposite the door and across the center of the room—the door was in the long side of the little building—stood his desk, a big table covered with green felt. Behind it was a long bench instead of a chair, a kind of armless sofa that ran the full length of the desk and over which a brightly-colored oriental carpet had been flung. Simple wooden chairs ranged along the wall, completed the furnishings of this cheerful little room, but there was another oriental carpet under foot and there were curtains on the windows.

Tito found chairs and seated us at his table before making his way around behind it and settling comfortably on his sofa, then he peered at us genially for a moment before making a short speech in his own language. Ilic translated:

"It is a great pleasure to receive you here. We have the warmest affection for the United States and are happy to be indebted to you and your countrymen for the help you have given us. You have now seen enough of our country to realize how great is our need of supplies. But tell me, how is it possible for you to do so much for us? Who are you?"

I could see that he was somewhat troubled by my rank, unable to understand how anyone of such modest position in the Army could have enough authority to get the things attributed to me done and done quickly, so I answered that I belonged to a branch specializing in such irregular military problems as getting supplies to him, that most of the men in the organization were officers and that as we commanded practically no troops, rank was not important. My assistant in Bari, who had done quite as much as I had to get his supplies moving, was a First Lieutenant. . . . We disposed of the means, the authority and the funds, to accomplish the tasks to which we were assigned. . . .

I told him, too, that I had been in charge of Balkan operations in Cairo throughout most of the year and that I had personally selected and briefed the American officers that had been sent in to him by parachute, and that all their reports had come to my desk until a fortnight before, so even though I knew little about Jugoslavia I had been watching developments throughout the past six months with close attention. It was a happy privilege and a great honor to be received by him now at his headquarters. . . .

Ilic translated and Tito listened attentively, watching my face rather than the Colonel's. He acknowledged the last words in my little speech with a deep bow and a smile.

"We are very informal here," he said, putting an end to these exchanges. "Let's have a drink."

One of the orderlies entered with a little crystal decanter and a tray of small glasses. Tito poured and passed one to each of us himself.

"Zhivi!"

We emptied them at one gulp. It was not rakjia. We were drinking real slivovitz.

During the next half-hour we sat with Tito there, conversing casually about our journey, about the situation in the Islands and the progress of the German offensive on the coast, about life in the interior of the country in the liberated areas. It was just light, casual conversation to get acquainted.

The man behind the desk was relaxed and pleasant. He smoked constantly, lighting each cigarette from the butt of the one before and using a tiny and somewhat absurd Bosnian pipe overlaid with silver filigree for a cigarette holder. His hands were well kept. He was

clean-shaven. His uniform was well-tailored and immaculate. Like Colonel Ilic, he wore black field boots and breeches. A Sam Browne fitted with heavy German holster and pistol lay on the end of his desk.

I found it difficult in those first minutes to form a clear impression of Tito—the man. His head is superb, great strength of character evident in its firm lines, in the straight, full mouth and broad chin. His blue-grey eyes are wide-set. His forehead, wide as his high cheekbones, retains its fullness all the way to the hair-line, and his brown hair flows back without parting. His nose is finely sculptured and his mouth well shaped, tender, slightly ironical. . . . Here was no simple warrior, no primitive leader of fighting men; he might be that, but he was much more besides. Thinker, statesman, artist. . . . He appeared to be all these, and soldier as well; and there was a light in his face that glowed and flickered and subsided as he talked, but never went away—a light that comes only from long service in the tyranny of dreams.

His manner, like his gaze, was artlessly direct. This man would be a terrifying opponent. He would never be disconcerted or alarmed, seldom elated over his successes; he would give no quarter and ask none. He would always be sure of himself, prepared to countenance his own extinction but certain of the triumph of his ideas, uncompromising. . . .

Whatever this man might be and no matter what he signified, here was a force to reckon with, a leader men would follow through the very gates of hell.

Soon after six o'clock he invited us to go to our quarters to refresh ourselves for dinner after our long journey. Dinner would be served in an hour and we would all be expected to return in time for a glass of slivovitz before it was served. Orderlies took us to rooms nearby where real beds were waiting and brought us warm water with which to wash and shave.

I had inquired whether any of the American officers in Jugoslavia were present in Jajce, during our half-hour's conversation, and had learned that "Slim," the senior American representative was in Mrkonicgrad, near Livno, and that there was one American officer—"Benny"—in the vicinity. He would be advised of my presence and invited to headquarters the next day.

Dinner and the evening that followed were unforgettable. It seems best to identify, among those who were present, only those whose names have appeared from time to time in print. There was one man at the table who had dined at the officers' mess in a big German garrison three nights before, and he may be dining in a German mess-hall now as this story is being written. We were twenty at the table, Tito sitting at the end with me on his right; and most of the guests, Tito explained, were members of his staff. We were introduced to them all when we arrived.

Some of the names were already familiar to me. I recognized Major General Koca Popovic, the most popular officer in the Partisan army, commander of their famous First

or Proletariat Division, a short, vivid fellow with black mustaches and the personality of D'Artagnan. Another whose name I knew was Vladislav Ribnikar, later to be elected vice-president of the National Committee of Liberation, former editor and co-proprietor of Belgrade's leading newspaper, Politika, a graduate of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. There was Rev. Vlado Zecevic, a Greek Orthodox priest who had originally commanded a detachment of Chetniks but abandoned Mihailovic after Uzice. He was a powerful figure in the Partisan movement, not only as one of Tito's close advisers but also as one of his most intrepid field commanders. There was young Ribar, who spoke good English, the son of Dr. Ivan Ribar, now the President of the Presidium of the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation. (This able young man was killed two weeks later by enemy action.)

But the names matter little. What stays fresh in the mind is the atmosphere of that evening and the conversation that kept us all exhilarated until midnight.

I had not reckoned with the possibility of being guest of honor at such a gathering when I left Bari and was dressed in dirty slacks—"pinks" in the army terminology—a flannel shirt (without necktie—that was correct there) and a leather flying jacket. The outfit was suitable enough, but I would have preferred to be clean. The trousers were part of my seagoing uniform and were elaborately stained from climbing about on the greasy little launches. For this I had attempted to apologize to Tito, but he had brushed my words aside, saying, "Wait until you see the rest of my friends: you'll be the best dressed man at the table."

They were, in truth, a strangely clad lot. There was one woman, whose name I cannot give, who dined with us, and she, like Olga, wore her Partisan uniform very carefully, but except for Popovic and two other Generals, Tito and Ilic, and his Commissar, I was quite as presentable as the rest of the company. The others looked like Partisans anywhere—except that they all had boots or shoes to wear. Some wore two or three days' growth of beard. Everyone in the room except the girl needed a hair-cut. No one wore a necktie.

But there was not one dull face among them, not one who lacked a twinkle and a flash and some inner light, like his leader's, to give meaning and color to his personality.

We began by drinking several tiny glasses of slivovitz, then we sat down in the second of the two wooden buildings in the cedar grove, the mess-hall where Tito and his staff normally took their food. The table was well laid with rough china plates. There was good black bread in abundance and hors-d'oeuvres consisting of fish the size of herring pickled in some spicy sauce. This was followed by a rich stew of lamb and potatoes which we consumed with copious draughts of pale rose-colored wine, like the vintages of the coastal area. A sweet consisting of small cakes, a type of petit fours, followed, then we were served coffee, very strong and black, and a liqueur.

I took the liberty of congratulating Tito on his board. He replied: "You are lucky, tonight. We have not been here long. Had you arrived only a short time ago we would have been obliged to feast you in the woods beside a campfire."

He appeared to enjoy his food greatly, eating with zest and savoring the wine.

There was, about that dinner, no formality at all. Tito sat at the head of the table like the pater familias at a week-end house party. He was full of merriment and kept his guests entertained with anecdotes to which he lent a touch of humor by his figures of speech and his talent for caricature. There were ten of us at his table and ten more were seated at a second table parallel to ours, so that much of the time there were two separate conversations going on, but as soon as dinner was over and coffee was served we became one crowded group and from then until midnight there was only one conversation.

Ilic and Steve, who sat on my right—whichever was not involved in the general conversation at any given moment-supplied me with a French translation of everything that was said. If I was addressed by one of the other guests it was usually in French or English, then translations were currently made into Serbo-Croat for Tito, who used only that language throughout the evening. All this may seem awkward, but in reality it was not so. The conversation appeared to move at a perfectly normal pace, encumbered very little or not at all by the fact that several languages were being spoken at once. There were even phrases of German and Italian to be heard around the table from those who spoke neither French nor English.

Every half hour or so, an orderly would enter the room with a sealed envelope for Tito. It would be some urgent operational message from one of the many unstable "fronts" on which the Partisans fight their interminable war with the invader, and it would be presented to the commander with his glasses, which, for some reason, would be carried away as soon as he was through with them and returned to his office.

The glasses gave him a benevolent look as he sat at the head of the table scowling at his telegrams before reading them aloud to us all. Several of them concerned the German landing on the island of Brac, indicating that a pitched battle was going forward very successfully for the Partisans; and there was one, late in the evening, which reported that the Germans had been thrown back into the sea. The island was now safe once more in Partisan hands. That message brought forth a cheer for the defenders, and my thoughts returned to the embarkation we had witnessed at Starigrad. How many of these two hundred would be still alive? How many of these women would now have balanced their baneful accounts?

There was some rivalry throughout the evening to see who could get his questions in first and thus steer or orient the conversation. I was consumed with curiosity about the country and its people and its armies and its politics, and the Partisans were just as avid for information about the outside world. For more than two eventful years—years in which great changes had been going on—these people had been sealed up in their forests and mountains, their only source of information the propaganda-riddled radio and the occasional arrival of someone like me, who had recently been in the great cities and could bring them the gossip of Washington and London. I found them all very politically-minded, burning with eagerness to know what the strikes in England and America really signified, how strong the present governments of Churchill and Roosevelt might be, and

whether they were likely to survive the war. Was Labor likely to assert itself and put its own men in?

What did people in Washington and London think of them, the Partisans? Was the BBC typical of popular British thinking on Jugoslav affairs? Were the short-wave programs from New York which the BBC re-broadcast to them typical of American thinking? Did Americans really believe they were a lot of Communists? The questions rained down on me from all sides. I answered them as best I could.

Tito looked at me and laughed. "Well, what do you think of us?" he asked.

"I'll be able to give you a sounder reply if you'll answer a few questions for me first," I parried.

"Tomorrow," he said. "All the questions you like. But tonight we'll question you."

"If you could designate one of your staff officers," I said, "we could get to work early in the morning. I shall have a great many questions to ask on the strength and location of your forces as well as the enemy's ... on your supply problem —and what we can do to assist in the defense of the coastal areas. . . ."

"Me," he said. 'What's the matter with me? I'll do it. I've kept the whole day clear for you."

"That's excellent, sir. I should not have presumed so heavily on your time."

"I could put it to no better use," he smiled.

But before the evening was over a great many of the questions that were on my mind had been answered, although most of them had never been asked. I began to see what made the Partisans tick. Most of the facts of their story—what had happened and where and when—were already known to me, but as the evening progressed they began to fall into perspective and acquire meaning.

Tito himself, Josip Broz, the Croat metal worker, was the key to much of the story. Long before Belgrade was bombed in April of 1941, even before the war began, Tito's capacity for leadership had been tested and proven. Before Hitler came to power Tito was a force to reckon with in the affairs of Jugoslavia. His character had been formed in years of conflict as bitter and less rewarding than the Partisan armies' contest with the invader. His physical courage had been tempered on the battle-field, where he was wounded as a young conscript in the service of Austria-Hungary; his moral courage had been tested then, too, for he deserted to the Russian side, and soon after, while working in a mill at Omsk, he witnessed the execution of 1,600 railway workers who had gone on strike. This was the Czarist General Kolchak's work, and when the newly-formed Red Army entered Omsk a little later young Broz knew what to do. He joined at once. The triumph of the

revolution found him in Moscow, where he married, and it was not until 1924 that he returned to Jugoslavia.

Those were the early days of labor organization. At the time a veritable reign of terror existed in Jugoslavia for those who believed in labor's right to organize. Broz went to work in a shipyard at Kraljevitsa, near Fiume, and immediately identified himself with the underground labor movement. He never forgot Kolchak's executions nor bothered to concern himself with the risks involved in fighting to put an end to such horrors. In 1926 he moved to Zagreb and was elected secretary of the metal workers' union, and two years later the police arrested him. He was one of many picked up at that time and tortured, but the bestial horrors of the Balkan third degree wrung from him no information about his comrades or their organization. These arrests had been made by General Peter Zhivkovic, then premier in the Government of the late King Alexander, and when torture failed to wring anything from him he was thrown in prison for five crushing years.

It was strange to think, as I sat at this table in Jajce that two weeks before I had dined in Cairo with this same General Zhivkovic, now the Jugoslavic deputy commander-in-chief.

After his release from prison at the end of 1927 Broz spent some of his time outside of the country. He was doubtless closely watched, but the police were looking for a new leader of the illegal workers' movements, a mysterious person of great power alleged to be the secretary of the Communist Party in Jugoslavia—a man named Tito.

After the bombing of Belgrade, while General Zhivkovic was dining at Claridge's in London, the police—now Himmler's Gestapo—were still looking for Tito in Jugoslavia. They knew he was in Belgrade but they had no idea what face he wore, who he really was; and Tito spent his days in the cafes of the ruined city, his mind on the future, planning victories, dreaming to life the National Liberation Army.

Two weeks after the bombing, the Slovenian Liberation Front came into existence. Tito was planning no Communist revolution for his country. He was working out the pattern of a new and democratic popular front movement which would embrace all the elements in his community capable of resisting the invader, and in May he met Dr. Ivan Ribar in Belgrade whose son was at the table with us. Dr. Ribar had been President of the Jugoslav Constituent Assembly and Vice President of the Democratic Party. These two leaders had a common conception of the task before them.

The Gestapo and Prince Paul's political police were still looking for Tito in June when he slipped out of Belgrade. Then the first Partisan actions flared. The Zagreb telephone exchange was blown up; eighty truckloads of oil and ammunition were dynamited in Serbia; Germans were killed at Valjevo; hostages were taken by the Germans and shot, but resistance grew instead of diminishing.

"Was Mihailovic active at that time?" I asked.

His name galvanized the company.

"Yes, but he has killed no Germans since—only Partisans." Tito replied with a sardonic smile.

"Did you ever meet him?"

"Yes, at Ravna Gora, in October of 'forty-one. . . ."

The full story of those meetings will be told only after the war, but it may be indicated now that Tito's purpose in going to those meetings was to establish a joint headquarters with Mihailovic. Agreement was reached at the first meeting, then violated almost immediately by the Chetniks, according to the Partisans, but Tito was prepared to make great concessions rather than countenance civil war. By this time the Partisan irregulars had captured important quantities of war material and he offered Mihailovic 5,000 rifles, 500,000 rounds of ammunition and 25,000,000 dinars to help his inadequately armed followers if only the joint headquarters could be established at once. This offer was accepted and an agreement concluded in writing, but before the ink was dry Tito said the Germans began to bombard Partisan headquarters at Uzice. At the same time five German divisions closed on the town. Tito appealed at once for support from the Chetnik forces in the area, but the Partisans claim that instead of impeding the German advance the Chetniks opened fire on the Partisan defenders.

This is the incident to which the Partisans always refer as "the treachery of Uzice." It was after this incident that the priest, Rev. Zecevic, left the Chetniks and joined Tito's swelling ranks. The Partisan forces were scattered in the ensuing battles, and Tito himself very nearly lost his life. He was talking with a British Captain attached to General Mihailovic's headquarters in Uzice when German tanks entered the town. He and the Captain fled, but suddenly a tank appeared two hundred yards away as they left the town and they were only just able to throw themselves into a ditch together.

"Mihailovic never knew whom he was talking to," Tito laughed. "When he learned that it was me and not some Russian General, as he thought, he swore that had he recognized me I would have had my throat cut."

The Uzice headquarters were gone, and with them all hope of an understanding with the Chetniks, but Tito went to Foca in Bosnia with what was left of his forces and remained there until late spring of 1942, rebuilding and reorganizing. Small underground groups had been left behind in Serbia to continue the Partisan effort, and the Bosnian forces had grown to five brigades, two from Serbia, two from Montenegro and one from the Sanjak. This was the "army" with which he defended himself against a Nazi attack in the early p>summer—a force equal to about one division of ten thousand men; and by the end of the year large areas in Slovenia, Croatia, western Bosnia and Dalmatia had been freed of occupying troops.

"That was the beginning," Tito said. "In November the first Anti-Fascist Assembly for the People's Liberation in Jugoslavia—the Avnoj'—met in Bihac and created the People's Army of Liberation. Our worst days were still ahead, but we were established."

All the delegates to the Anti-Fascist Assembly had been freely elected in the liberated territories or chosen by the underground organizations in the occupied regions. They provided for the People's Army as a regular force, not a guerrilla organization, and there promulgated the idea of uniting all the different elements in their community into a new national unit through the Avnoj, but their work was suddenly interrupted by a new and more resolute German offensive that scattered them once more.

"Our story is like yours, in many ways," one of the Generals smiled. "What followed in the winter of 1942-43 was our 'Valley Forge.'"

Tito at that time disposed of thirteen divisions. He left eight to defend the liberated territories and moved south with five of his best, hotly pursued by four crack German divisions supported by five or six Italian and Ustashi divisions and various Chetnik units. With him he brought almost five thousand wounded, fearing they might be captured if left behind.

The tale of this retreat is the great epic of the Partisan movement. They fought their way south as far as the Neretva River, then in flood, some five hundred of their wounded dying on the way, but their position there was untenable and their plan to drive on into Herzegovina and Bosnia proved impracticable, so they adopted the only course left to them: they abandoned their vehicles, forced the swollen Neretva's icy floods, left two divisions behind to fight a covering action and proceeded afoot with 1,500 wounded lashed to the backs of mountain horses and some hundreds more on stretchers, making their way into the desolate black mountains of Montenegro. Typhus ravaged their ranks. The Germans, fearing their escape, rushed new divisions into action against them. They were constantly strafed and had no weapons for defense against the aircraft except their rifles, but even the wounded, if they were strong enough, kept rifles beside them on their stretchers and fired at the planes as they came over.

Tito led them all the way, afoot, exhorting them to sing as they marched, seeing that the wounded received such care as could be provided. They slept in the snow in the withering cold without blankets, dying like flies from fever and with typhus, grass and bark and occasional bits of raw meat their only food.

"That was the Fourth Offensive," Tito said with a wry smile. "It was not the last."

Tito and what remained of his forces had reached momentary safety in a desolate area high in the mountains of Montenegro in May. He immediately gave his attention to strengthening and regrouping his forces while the Germans mounted the Fifth Offensive.

"How many of the wounded survived that march?" I asked.

The question brought no direct reply, although it led to a brief conversation and some calculations in Serbo-Croat, then Tito said: "Only forty-five were ever captured by the enemy: the others we buried or kept with us to the end."

The Germans were resolved that their Fifth Offensive should complete the destruction of Tito's forces and they prepared it with care. More than twelve divisions were used to surround the Partisans completely, then, on May 15, they launched what they were sure would be the final attack.

"Our only chance was to counter-attack and fight our way out," Tito said, "but we were expecting the first British liaison officers at that time and we waited for them until the night of the 27th, when they finally arrived. During the next forty days we fought our way north and west through almost fifty miles of prepared German positions, and the British officers who travelled with us got their first look at the Chetniks— through their gun-sights. The Chetniks were with the Germans

Finally, on June 9, the remains of Tito's army fought its way out of the German ring near Milan Klada mountain on the Bosnian border. They exacted 12,000 German casualties for their own loss of 4,000 and made their way toward the interior and comparative safety, reaching Jajce after a great swing around through the north.

"As you can see," Tito smiled, "we are quite comfortable here—for the moment. Here we have had an opportunity to complete our organization. We are converting our guerrilla units into regular military forces, and, as we had not enough professional officers we have established a staff college here. Several Army Corps have already been converted and are now commanded by officers whose names are published in the Official Gazette."

"Where is the Gazette published?" I asked. "Right here," he answered. "I'll give you copies to take back with you. All appointments and promotions are provisional until confirmed by official publications."

There were two of what Tito called Quisling governments in Jugoslavia, one at Zagreb headed by Ante Pavelic, the terrorist responsible for King Alexander's assassination in Marseilles in 1934, the other at Belgrade under General Nedic. After the assassination of Alexander, Pavelic found sanctuary in Italy until 1941 when the Italians installed him in Zagreb as the fascist dictator of a Croat puppet state. Nedic was a pro-German Serbian General who shared Prince Paul's defeatist views in 1940 and 1941 and survived the holocaust of coup d'etat and invasion to remain on as a typical Quisling commander. Tito spoke of both Pavelic and Nedic that evenings The Pavelic forces consist of about 50,000 Ustasha, he said. These are Italianate Croat fascists and the real terrorists of Jugoslavia. They are the only troops in the country to which no quarter is given. They and the Partisans fight a war of extermination and take no prisoners from one another. It is the Ustasha they blame for ninety per cent of the atrocities committed in the land.

"Has Pavelic no other real strength?" I asked.

"He has the Domobransi," Tito answered. Every one at the table smiled at the mention of these troops. "They are conscripts who have no heart for their soldiering. They number perhaps 200,000, but they are useless except for garrison duty. Many have already deserted and joined our ranks."

A comical idea crossed Tito's mind and he laughed abruptly. "The Domobransi are part of our procurement service," he said. "They are easy to capture. We catch them and take all their clothes and weapons, then send them home naked to be re-outfitted and captured again. It is one of our best sources of uniforms."

About Nedic Tito had little to say. Since he was considered to be an open German collaborator, like Lavol, his fate is linked to that of the Germans. There is nothing controversial about him. He is quite openly and simply of the enemy's ranks.

"It's amusing to note that he defends Mihailovic consistently over the Belgrade radio," Tito said.

The conversation veered back to political issues and the Partisan plans for the future of Jugoslavia. The fusion of all the elements of the Jugoslav community, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Catholics, Orthodox, Mohammedans . . . into a homogeneous democracy was their avowed goal. I asked: "What do you tell the people of Jugoslavia? What do you tell them they will have when all this is over and there is peace again?"

"We don't tell them," Tito answered. 'We ask them. What they are fighting for is the right to decide for themselves what they shall have."

"But you must have a manifesto of some kind," I insisted. "It is very simple," he answered. "Smrt Fascismu!"—death to fascism!—"and freedom to live together in peace and equality among ourselves. Everyone who holds office in this country has been elected to it, but there are districts where it is difficult to hold proper elections so we make as few decisions of policy as possible and wait until a more representative Anti-Fascist Council can speak with authority for all the people." I inquired then about the machinery of these elections and was surprised to learn that the first of them is always organized by the underground before the territories are liberated. As soon as the Germans are driven out another election takes place, each community choosing its own local administration and representatives to a central council of The National Liberation Movement.

"Next month there will be a meeting of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Jugoslavia, here in Jajce," Tito said. "There will be delegates present from every part of Jugoslavia. It will be more representative than any gathering we have yet been able to hold."

Ilic said, "We are organizing ourselves as you, in your early days, organized the thirteen original colonies."

General Popovic observed: "For you too it was, at first, difficult to get together; then when you finally succeeded you were very strong."

Tito said: "I wish the facts were known to your countrymen and the British. They are obviously without accurate knowledge about us—or they could not put out programs like

those we hear from the United States and England over the BBC. We are fighting for democracy, and there is no other nation that has paid so high a price to defeat fascism and live in peace under laws of its own making.

"What should we do to make ourselves known, as we are, to the American public?" Tito asked. "We have been thinking of sending some of our poets and sculptors and writers to the United States to lecture on the Partisan movement. Do you think that's a good idea?"

"No, I don't," I answered. "There are many European writers and artists in America doing propaganda tours of the country, and the effect is not just what you are after. They are well received everywhere, of course, but people tend to ask themselves what they are doing in the United States while their countrymen are fighting desperately against the occupation. They tend, quite reasonably, to question the ability of the lecturer to speak for his beleaguered countrymen. It would be much better for you to let the American public know that your poets and musicians have stayed here with you and are writing the stirring songs your men sing when they go into battle, that your best sculptors and painters are still here, working on themes suggested by your struggle."

Tito nodded thoughtfully. "That's right," he said. "I can see that this might be. We must have some of the great newspapers of America and England send us their correspondents." There were many bold political thinkers at Tito's table who had watched the Germans overwhelm great nations in the west of Europe almost without a struggle and had tried to infer a lesson from it. Something was wrong with Europe's old way of life. That, they maintained, was clear from the fact that it had had nothing to offer as an antidote for fascism. They believed it was political factionalism; they attributed their strength to their movement's freedom from this sickness. "We have shed rivers of blood in this land in atonement I for the errors of the past," one of them said.

"But we have found a common purpose and the strength to resist effectively," said another.

"Who knows," said Tito, "exactly what kind of government there will be in any country ten years from now? All we claim is that ours will be what the united people of the I south Slav countries want."

It was a night to remember. We parted reluctantly a little after midnight.

"Come for breakfast when you wake up," Tito said, as we'll shook hands. "Bring all your questions. Remember, we have no secrets here."

CHAPTER 27

We slept like the dead and awoke soon after seven, greatly refreshed and eager for the new day. It was Sunday, October twenty-fourth. The sun was shining and a near-by church bell rang sweetly, calling the Catholics to early mass.

Steve was aglow with happiness. He looked five years younger now that the anxiety which had clouded his face for days had been replaced by his normal air of self-assurance. He sang and splashed about, giving himself a sponge-bath from head to foot before climbing into his clothes.

When we set out for headquarters the streets were full of picturesque peasants, most of them on their way to church, dressed in their finest clothes. Most of the women wore the typical Bosniak dress of red and white flannels, but a few wore costumes of silk. This puzzled us, until we saw one little girl whose pretty two-piece outfit explained the fashion: both skirt and blouse were of silk, the former white, the latter a mottled green and brown—parachutes! That was it. I remembered hearing that the peasants were always ready to exchange a horse for a parachute and that they used the fine material to dress their women and children.

We found hot coffee waiting for us at the mess and Tito already busy in his office. He waved to us gaily through the open door, inviting us to bring our cups to his desk.

Thus auspiciously the day began. We settled down to work at once, Ilic and the commissar joining us after a little while, and I regretted that Tim was not there, for his sake and because I missed his note-book.

Most of the ground we covered in the next eight hours is irrelevant to the purposes of this record. Tito was as good as his promise. He answered all questions and supplied as much information as I wanted on every subject we touched. From time to time he sent for one of his staff officers if the desired data was not immediately available on the maps he spread before us and could not be supplied from memory, but most of the time he knew the answers and produced them without hesitation. His patience was inexhaustible.

We began with order-of-battle, the organization and position and strength of his armies, the strength and disposition of the German forces with unit identifications. This took two hours. From there we proceeded to questions about the organization of his own forces. I learned much more about conversion of regular Partisan Brigades to regular military units under professional officers. His new armies were being constituted roughly on the Russian pattern with commissars attached to every command, jointly responsible, with the CO, for the well-being and morale of the troops.

This subject brought us to the problems of coastal defense and the measures that would be necessary to safeguard the Adriatic supply routes. Here we planned our tactics in some detail, Tito asking support and assistance of various kinds from the Allies, I promising to bring his needs to the attention of the proper authorities and expressing the belief that we could meet most of his requests. (We met them all.) He wanted certain cities bombed, certain positions strafed, air support from time to time at key points for his own forces.

I took some trouble to explain very fully the reasons why I had taken over the Jugoslav ships we found on the Italian coast. Steve looked worried during this part of the interview and watched Tito's face intently, but the soundness of the procedure was never

questioned. There were still a few big ships hidden by the Partisans in the deep fjords among the islands, and I asked that they be sent across to us to be incorporated in our fleet, or, if they were too big to be useful to us, to be turned in to the Mediterranean shipping pool.

We devoted several long hours to the problem of priorities and supplies, compiling a detailed list of his armies' needs in the order of their importance, and when this was finished the urgent work was done. It was already the middle of the afternoon and after another hour devoted to questions about the political organization and objectives of the National Liberation Movement the conference was over. I had writer's cramp and we were all tense and tired from so many hours of smoking and talking. Although our lack of a common language had troubled us little on the previous evening, it had been a serious difficulty throughout the day, absolutely precise answers having been necessary. Steve and the Colonel and Tito had been endlessly patient and would, no doubt, have allowed me to continue with them for hours more, but this was enough for one session—as much as I was able to assimilate.

Our work had been interrupted very pleasantly by lunch, which was much like dinner the previous evening, except that it had the atmosphere of an interlude in the middle of a busy day rather than the relaxed pause that comes rewardingly at the end of it.

Word had been sent to Benny (an officer it seems best to identify no further) during the morning, summoning him to headquarters for lunch. He had no idea why until he walked into the garden and found me there, taking a bit of air in the quarter hour before going in to table. It was a joyful reunion and we strolled away down the hill-side to take a look at the waterfall that made Jajce a famous beauty spot and a Mecca for tourists in the pre-war days. He gave me an interesting account of his months with the Partisans. He had joined them when they lived a fugitive existence in the forests. I remembered well the first message he sent back after landing by parachute, a message in which he told of being Tito's guest of honor at a dinner served under the pine-trees around a camp-fire.

After lunch Benny sat with us in Tito's office throughout the afternoon.

There was one interesting interruption during that afternoon session. It came at about three o'clock and constituted a further sidelight on the peculiar value assigned by Partisans to the word "danger." I had, at one point, inquired where the nearest Germans were and been told that they were at Travnik, about twenty miles away, but that there was no "danger" from them in Jajce. It was a few minutes later that we heard the crack of a rifle below us in the town.

One rifle shot is nothing, but there was a brief pause in the conversation while everyone strained his ears waiting for the next one, and when it came it was a volley—forty or fifty shots. This caused our host to assume a slightly anxious look, but he remained at his desk.

A moment later a fresh volley clattered below. Tito called one of his orderlies in and told him to find out what was going on, but this time the firing continued, growing in volume. The conversation stopped and we all listened, then Tito got to his feet and we followed him out into the cedar grove and across to the parapet which looked down into the town. There was nothing alarming to be seen, but the firing continued, and a moment later a German plane passed over us at low altitude.

Tito called a sharp command to his orderly who dashed back into the office and returned a moment later on the double, carrying a bulky parcel which he unwrapped as he ran. It was an American Tommy-gun, Tito's personal weapon. The commander took it from his orderly and snapped the magazine into place then cradled the heavy gun under his arm. His features relaxed. The half-dozen other officers and the orderlies in the cedar grove were all moving briskly now, everyone arming himself with a sub-machine gun. Our Marlins were brought to us by the orderlies.

"What is it?" I asked Ilia "What's going on?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's probably nothing at all, but of course you never can be sure."

When the firing had subsided a few minutes later we returned to the office and resumed our conversation where it had left off. Tito dispatched an officer to find out exactly what had happened and was annoyed with the report he received when his messenger returned. The incident was dismissed as a false alarm. I thought it indiscreet to persist in my inquiries, but it seemed to me those riflemen must have been shooting at something. The best carbine in Jugoslavia will not shoot twenty miles! And although there was absolutely no "danger" in Jajce it was evident that there was comfort to be derived at Headquarters from the weight of a sub-machine gun in the hands.

Later, when I had the opportunity, I said to Benny: 'Where did the Old Man get the Tommy-Gun?"

"I gave it to him," Benny said. "He lost his German submachine gun in a raid and was miserable without it, but the only way you can get one here is by killing a German, so he would not allow anyone to give him his. He loves that Tommy-Gun with its big slugs and wouldn't part with it for anything."

"What do you do for a weapon when you travel?" I asked.

"I've got a German Schmeiser," Benny grinned.

When the conference broke up it had been agreed that Benny would move down to the coast to take charge of shipping operations at Vis. He would stop for a few days along the way and familiarize himself with the command to fit himself for the liaison duties his new post would involve.

Tito was also eager that the senior American liaison officer in Jugoslavia should meet me on my way out, presumably at Livno, to report on his experiences. I suggested that it might be a good idea to take him out with me temporarily in order that he might make a comprehensive report, and the commander agreed at once, but there was one circumstance that made these arrangements a little awkward: Fitzroy MacLean, the Brigadier in charge of the combined British and American mission in Jugoslavia, was absent from Jajce. Ordinary military courtesy would require that he be consulted before these officers, who were under his orders, should be moved. The only justification for proceeding without first taking this step was expediency and the necessity to gain time and for a while I debated in my mind what to do, then I decided to go ahead. I would see the Brigadier in a few days on the coast and explain the circumstances. He would, I felt sure, accept my apologies.

Before leaving Jajce I called on the members of MacLean's staff who were at their villa, across the little river from Tito's headquarters on the hill. Colonel Bill Deakin, who has since come out, was there. He was the first to go in by parachute and was probably closer to Tito himself than any of those who came in later. On one occasion, early in the days of the Partisan struggle, he and Tito were wounded by the same bomb while lying together in a shell-hole. Tito's dog was with them at the time and the explosion that wounded them killed the animal.

Deakin had heard of our operations on the coast and was full of enthusiasm. I told him of my plans for Benny and said I hoped soon to see the Brigadier.

"He'll be in Bari in ten days or so," Deakin said. "You'll see him there."

We had a cup of tea, then I went back to Headquarters, for it was already late and we wanted to get to the coast that night if possible.

Our leave-taking was a pleasant ceremony. Tito put his hand on Steve's shoulder as he said good-bye, and I was unable to follow what he said to him but it made my friend blush with pleasure. Colonel Ilic had noticed that I was full of admiration for the German Walther pistols worn by most of the ranking officers of the Partisan Armies and presented me with one of them as a souvenir of my first trip to Jajce. And just before we left his office Tito asked me for my card. Unfortunately I had none with me.

Perhaps it embarrassed him to inquire about the orthography of my name at that late date. ... I perceived with regret a moment later that he had wanted my card to autograph his picture for me. Instead, he simply signed the photograph in his own characteristic way, diagonally across the lower right-hand corner, as he signs all his papers.

He walked with us to where our cars were waiting just outside the gate and shook hands with us all again, then we drove away down the hill followed by the usual chorus of Zdravos.

CHAPTER 28

Thirty miles down the road we were halted suddenly by an Italian who was too breathless and too excited to tell us what was the matter, but something was seriously wrong. He had been coming up the road at a fast run when we rounded a bend and discovered him. A swig of rakjia steadied the fellow and as soon as he was able to talk he explained that he had been ambushed by a Chetnik band as he came up the road in a truck a few minutes before, just around on the other side of the next hill. He had escaped into the bushes, but the bandits were even now looting his truck and loading the booty onto their horses. . . .

"You see," Ilic said, turning to me. "Sometimes it's nice to have these things with you." He slapped the stock of his machine gun affectionately.

We got out then and prepared a plan of action. Ilic sent one of the cars back to the nearest town for a truckload of soldiers but before they arrived we heard the clatter of machine gun fire down the road, punctuated by a few rifle shots, and almost immediately afterward a little Opal car came up from the direction of the hold-up and stopped beside us. Two cheerful-looking young Partisan officers got out and came laughing over to where we stood.

They had come upon the Chetniks quite unexpectedly, they said, and had tumbled out of their little car immediately and opened fire at what was fairly long range for their nine millimeter sub-machine guns, but their fire had scattered the Chetniks who vanished into the bushes without even taking their horses with them. A few shots had been fired in return by the Chetniks—there were bullet holes in the Opal—but none of them had scored.

They drank a swig of rakjia with us while we waited five minutes for the truck to arrive, then we said good-bye and proceeded down the road again, the soldiers in the truck leading the way.

Except for this little fiasco our trip to Livno was uneventful. We reached Headquarters soon after ten o'clock and clumped up the stairs to the office.

"I hope there's some dinner waiting for us here," Ilic said. "I'm famished."

A smoky kerosene lamp on the table in the middle of the bare little room cast a dim effulgence over the figures of four officers talking together. They broke up at once when we entered and came across to greet us. Among them I recognized Slim, the senior American liaison officer in Partisan Jugoslavia. He finished what he was saying in Serbo-Croat as he came toward us.

"You're getting pretty handy with that language," I said to him.

"No," he answered. "I have a hard time with it, even though I've studied it for a thousand hours."

"Well, it's a good try," I said.

We were near the table now and suddenly he recognized me. "Louis!" he shouted. "For heaven's sake! When did you get in?"

These exclamations were accompanied by thunderous thumpings on my back and the mutilation of my right hand in his powerful paw. It was wonderful to see him again and find him in such good health. Tito's message had simply instructed him to come to headquarters for "important conferences," mischievously refraining from indicating who would be there

I found Slim unchanged, except for a great black Mongolian-looking mustache which he had cultivated since coming into the country. He looked bigger than ever in the dim light, dressed in British battle dress with an American flag embroidered on his right shoulder, a heavy service pistol slung across his right hip; and for a long time he continued to pound me on the back and shake me by the shoulders and subject me to other forms of affectionate abuse.

"By God, it's wonderful to see you," he said again and again. I shared his feelings. For days I had been looking forward to meeting him and getting his account of all that he had seen since last we were together at the Cairo airport, the night he left to go in.

Ilic broke in upon us to say that there was no truck available to take us to the coast that night and propose that we start out early the next afternoon. He thought it unwise for us to try to get through without an escort. This would give us a chance to talk and make our plans, so I agreed, although by this time I was anxious about the situation at Bari, where I supposed Tim was still alone, and eager to get back there.

Dinner was served to us after a little while; then Slim and I settled down for a long conversation, but we were both too tired to go very far with it. After an hour we decided to turn in. We would have hours to talk together in the morning.

The next morning after breakfast I drove out with Slim to the village twenty miles away where he had been living for the past ten days. As we talked on the way it became apparent that the only possible course would be for him to come out, at least to Bari, and prepare a comprehensive report on his observations. They were too important to be handled any other way.

I had missed Brigadier MacLean again in Livno, he having driven through a couple of hours before we got in, but Slim confirmed that it was the Brigadier's intention to be in Bari within the next few days. Slim himself was very eager to have a few days in Italy. He was deeply impressed by the Partisan movement and felt that immediate steps should be taken to explain it to our Government.

"How would you like to make a flying trip back to Washington and deliver your reports orally to the White House and the State Department?" I asked him.

(Slim made the trip to Washington before going back to Jajce in a parachute.)

Late that afternoon I was killing time in the square in front of Headquarters. A group of peasants with their carts were clustered together on the far side and I sauntered over to look at their horses. As usual, they pressed around, politely offering their Zdravos and staring with undisguised curiosity. But there was one tall man of sixty who came forward and spoke to me in English.

"I lived in Chicago once for five years," he said. "How are you? It's a great pleasure to see an American officer here."

As we shook hands something strange and almost terrifying about his personality chilled me. I peered closely at him. He was dressed like the rest of the peasants in old working clothes and home-make sandals. It was his face that was strange, the expression in his long lean face. . . . Then I realized that he was aware of my scrutiny and lowered my eyes.

There was a kind of bright animation about him which was in terrible contrast with the tragic expression in his eyes.

"Things are going very well for us, now, at last," he said. "Have you traveled about the country much? Large areas of it have been liberated, and it can't be much longer now before the whole country will be freed by the Partisans. We are sure to win now. But of course it will be too late for me."

"How is that?" I queried. "Why will it be too late for you?"

"I'm dead," he said, peering at me closely with his terrible eyes. "Can't you see that I'm dead? You noticed it when I came up! Everybody in my village is dead."

"How did it happen?"

'The Ustasha did it," he answered. "Oh, it was just one of many villages they destroyed, but it happened to be mine. I lived there with my wife and my six children, the youngest only four—a little girl. The Ustasha came. They killed us all, everybody in the village, all of us including my wife and the children and me. They burned down all the houses, too, and they buried us all in one big trench."

"But you are here," I said.

"Me too," he insisted. "They killed me too and they buried me too, but the Partisans say that when they came they found me only half covered with earth sitting up in the trench, and they lifted me out... so in a kind of way I'm still here.

"Oh, it won't be long now before we win . . . but it will be too late for me, much too late for me. Don't you see?"

I could see.

The old man was very proud to be able to talk to me and introduced all the peasants. They came over and shook hands and bowed and smiled.

"They are good people," the old man said. "I live in their village now and they are very kind to me."

At five o'clock the truck arrived with a dozen Partisan riflemen aboard. Ilic wanted us to wait until later when a second truck would be available. There had been some action in the area through which we would have to pass and he thought we should have a strong guard, but Slim and Steve and I talked it over and decided not to wait. Trucks were scarce in Livno and there was plenty for them to do. Going off with two of them would embarrass the garrison.

We said good-bye to Ilic and the Commissar and Benny, who would be down within the next few days, and set out in a little Italian car behind the truck.

The trip was easy and uneventful, except that at one time we found ourselves confronted by a whole series of road blocks. Steve and I were the only two who had been over that road in recent days, and we knew that there had been no road blocks on it when we passed, but in the darkness— we did not come to that part of the road until after nine o'clock—it was impossible to say definitely whether it was or was not the road we had been over. . . .

The first road block was a barrier five feet high made of big stones, without mortar. The officer in charge of the truck stopped opposite it and climbed out in the full glare of his headlamps to go over and investigate. For a moment he waited there lighting a cigarette, then, as no one fired at him, he ordered his men out of the truck and put them to work heaving the rocks over the edge of the road. We, in the staff car, thought there was something unhealthy about this procedure, but said nothing; and we all drove on.

But scarcely had we started up again when we came to another, just as solidly built. Again the young officer in the truck walked out in the glare of his headlamps and when no shots were fired ordered his men to work.

When we came to the third wall across the road I pointed out to Steve that we must be on the wrong road and suggested that we turn back. We were travelling too much to the south anyway—toward Imotski again. Steve thought that might be, but did nothing about it, and we drove on to the fourth road-block.

While this one was being cleared away I got Steve to point out to the officer on the truck that if this was indeed the right road—the one we had come over three nights before—there were only two ways of explaining the presence of these barriers, which in this case, were freshly erected. Either the Germans were nearby and had just put them in to prevent the Partisans from coming through, or the Germans were nearby and the Partisans had just put them in to prevent the Germans from coming through; and in either case it was

foolish to go on through them without getting some advice on how they happened to be there.

This argument impressed the Partisan officer and he reluctantly agreed to turn back to the nearest village, some ten miles up the road.

When we got there we discovered that we had, in fact, been on the wrong road, and that once more we had come within a few miles of the garrison at Imotski.

Once, in the hours that followed, we overtook a Partisan regiment on the march. They moved in single file along the road, men and women together, each carrying a weapon and nothing else—not even a blanket or a canteen. They had no transport whatever with them. Their food supply, sheep and a few steers, trotted along beside them in the darkness, bleating and keeping close to the column for protection in this unfamiliar world.

It was eleven o'clock when we reached the coast. Word had been sent ahead that we would be down and there was a ship waiting for us, ready to leave. We paused only long enough to greet friends at the little command post and check on the continued arrival of supplies, then went aboard and moved silently out to sea with muffled engines.

This was a good start. We had not left the coast so early in the night before and it seemed reasonable to suppose that if we had the luck to find one of the MTB's in Vis harbor we could make it across to Bari that night, but we were due to be disappointed. When we got there all three of the launches were away and it was too late to set out in a slow ship like the schooner that had brought us over, so we turned in again with Dusan and Marica after rousing them once more by throwing pebbles at their bedroom windows.

That stop-over proved profitable, for it enabled us to make a variety of useful arrangements with Nikic the next day. From him we learned that all was apparently going well at Bari. Ships were continuing to arrive regularly and unload their cargo at his docks. We learned, too, that the Rah had been sunk, not by the MTB's, who had missed her when she came out from her hiding place in the Neretva River, but by aerial attack.

That was good news. So our planes were beginning to come over now! The Partisans were delighted.

"They shot up the Snell-Boat base in the mouth of the Neretva, too," Nikic said. "We don't know how much damage they did, but they may have wiped out the whole lot of them. There have been none about since the attack."

The schooner that had brought us over from the coast proved to be a beautiful vessel with a cargo capacity of nearly two hundred tons. I thought she might be a valuable addition to our fleet so I asked Nikic to let us have her, and he agreed at once.

The day passed quickly and at nine o'clock, after I had signed up the skipper, we cleared for Bari. There was a gentle wind and we moved due south away from Vis, sails set and Diesel engine chugging softly. It was Tuesday evening. Wednesday, soon after one o'clock, we arrived in the port of Bari and found Fred (Captain Jensen) standing on the pier.

CHAPTER 29

Many changes had taken place in the port of Bari. As I talked with Tim and Fred in the cabin of the Bog s Noma I felt as though I had been away for weeks. Fred, I learned, had been there almost since the moment of my departure, and other Special Service officers from the Middle East had also arrived.

Our fleet had grown. Ships had been coming over from the other side and anchoring north of the pier. There was a considerable line of them there now, including the one we had brought back, which was, we learned with pleasure, our twenty-seventh vessel; and others were on the way.

Steve had rushed off to find Olga, who was well and safe, and the pair emerged a moment later, Olga looking wonderfully happy after receiving the big news of Steve's success at Jajce. She rushed up to wring my hand and thank me for my part in it. There could be little doubt now that our supply lines were firmly established and we abandoned ourselves to the luxury of congratulating one another on the prosperity of our work over the clinking rakjia glasses. It was a memorable reunion. Slim was there too, in high spirits. All these people looked good to him. We had a community of purpose—a purpose which he shared—and he therefore felt at home among us and a member of our small fraternity.

But these moments of elation were short-lived. Presently we settled down to dealing with the routine difficulties of our work—and certain others which were not routine—and although the wonderful fellowship remained the atmosphere was clouded by problems some of which should never have existed at all. There were situations that had to be faced at once, some of which were very difficult.

It is, of course, a fact that nothing can be done on this earth without crossing up someone or other, so there was nothing strange or revolutionary in this state of things. It hurt Tim, however. His purposes were so candid that he found it difficult to understand any point of view at variance with his own. Our modest show had reached dimensions where political considerations of all sorts had become a factor, and like all fundamentally honest men Tim hated politics, loathed the studied and oblique method which is sometimes the only technique that can accomplish a desired end in the time there is to reach it. Fred, who was less emotional, viewed our troubles with more equanimity.

"Don't worry," I told Tim. "Everything is under control now. We've got the hard part of the job done. We'll have difficulties galore, but nothing will stop us now. That's all that matters."

On the way over I had succeeded in persuading Slim to get to work at once on a full report. He went to our room in the Imperial Hotel and began, almost immediately, to write his report on the Partisan Movement. Once he was installed Tim, Fred, and I went off to find a quiet place where we could talk for an hour or two without interruption. I gave them an account of the visit at Jajce and showed them my notes, which I would have to take time to write out in the form of a report as soon as I could; but meanwhile we made use of much of the information in planning our work for the next few days.

Tim and Fred brought me up to date on events in Bari, where life had been lively in the extreme. They had experienced countless difficulties in getting cargo and keeping the ships moving. Then, on Sunday afternoon, they had received a message from Jugoslavia stating that I had been captured by the Germans.

Exactly where that report came from we never learned, but they had immediately applied for permission to go to the rescue. If I had been captured they proposed to find out how and where and what could be done about "springing" me. This had been complicated and the forthcoming permission had not been granted until Tuesday afternoon, and then only on a provisional basis: if I was not back within forty-eight hours they would be allowed to go over and investigate. I had returned some twenty hours after this authority was granted.

There had been some minor difficulties with Port Security, some coordination problems with the Air Force, which feared it might sink some of our ships because they had no ship-to-aircraft recognition signals, and there had been some trouble with our own people who had received only half of our telegrams. As both Steve and I had been away there had been questions raised about who controlled the shipping operations. Were they Jugoslav or American? Were we helping the Jugoslavs or were they helping us?—Tim's did question.

Before nightfall all these problems were straightened out and life in Bari was normal—hectic but normal. Tim and Fred were happy. Our British colleagues, who were now on the scene in strength, congratulated us all on the establishment of the supply lines. We arranged to have regular morning meetings with them to work out the day's schedules. MacLean's men were there and we were able to coordinate our plans with theirs in the fullest manner. Their chief, a Major General, was expected in the city the next day.

We lived for a week in that atmosphere, the days interminably long. The Major General arrived on the second day and called on us in Bog s Noma's smoky little cabin quite unexpectedly. He was extravagant in his praise of the initiative we had shown in organizing the supply line and congratulated the three of us warmly. We introduced him to our Partisan friends and the visit turned into a modest little party, well sprinkled with rakjia. The General told us he had just been talking with the officer in charge of supplies to the Eighth Army and had obtained from him a considerable quantity of guns and ammunition for the Partisans. They would be down, he said, within the next few days.

As we were running low on these items, this was big news. I showed him my notes on Tito's needs and we discussed the methods that might best be used to meet them. He (the General) would be going on to Cairo in a few days, he said. He would act immediately to draw any supplies that might be available there and get them shipped across to us. I volunteered to go down to Algiers to see whether there was anything that could be spared for us in the dumps in North Africa, and this program was tentatively agreed upon. I had promised Tito to do my best to get him fifty big American Army trucks. Algiers was the only place in which they could be obtained—if, indeed, they could be obtained at all; but they were vitally needed for the "Burma Road" over the mountains from the coast. What was the use of sending supplies to the coast unless we equipped the Partisans to carry them away once we landed them? And there were other items on the supply list that could only be obtained in Algiers in the quantities required—fifty thousand rifles, for example . . . tanks . . . five thousand machine guns. . . .

"Transport across from Cairo or Algiers is going to be one of the toughest problems," the General said. "Even with a high priority it takes a long time to bring things over from the other side."

'We could split the fleet in two," Tim suggested. "Some of the ships are too big to be used on the cross-Adriatic run anyway. They're too difficult to camouflage effectively for the lay-over during the daylight hours. Those ships could be sent to Cairo and Algiers."

Throughout the week there were new problems every hour. The Partisans were fighting like tigers on the coast and in the islands. There were SOS messages from them every day and we rushed strategic materials like heavy machine guns and mortars across to them in the night, wherever they were most hotly besieged. We were able to give them air support, at times, too.

It was in this period when the Germans were trying to cross the narrow strip of water between the tip of the Pelejesac Peninsula, which they controlled, and the island of Korcula, which the Partisans still held, that one of the American fighters was shot down into this reach of water. He landed between the Germans and the Jugoslavs, and found shelter from the German machine guns behind a jagged rock that stuck out of the water.

No sooner was he down than the Partisan commander called for volunteers to go out in a boat and get him. The whole brigade volunteered, so ten men were chosen for the task.

German machine guns raked the several hundred yards of open water across which they moved, but without preventing them from carrying out their mission. The flier was brought safely to shore—but when the boat landed nine of the Partisans were dead and the tenth was wounded.

We sent human reinforcements over too, in those days. And we brought back the badly wounded for hospitalization in Italy.

Our armies, driving north, were freeing Jugoslavs that had been held in Italian prison camps. They tramped south afoot, stopping at the big refugee center on the outskirts of Bari, and it was here that Steve recruited one full Partisan Brigade of two thousand men whom we equipped and sent across to fight.

When Brigadier MacLean arrived, our plans were well-defined. As soon as the conferences with him were over—as soon as the work we were organizing on our side of the Adriatic had been fully coordinated with his plans and operations in the interior of the country—he and the Major General would leave for Cairo and I would go down to AFHQ in Algiers.

We met on the morning of his second day in Bari. By this time all the interested services were present in the port. The conference lasted throughout the morning and covered every phase of our plans and operations. A score of officers attended.

It was the end of the month. Twenty days had passed since Tim and I had arrived in Bari and the first part of our task was done.

We were able to report that day that more than a thousand tons of cargo had already been safely delivered on the coast of Jugoslavia and that ships were continuing to sail at the rate of one a day.

The Rah lay out of harm's way now on the bottom in the deep water off the coast of Brae. The Snell-Boat base had been strafed out of existence. Permanent secret bases for the MTB's had been established among the islands on the far shore of the Adriatic and an adequate supply of fuel had been accumulated for their operations.

(A few days later they sank, in the thirty-six hours of one week-end, one German cruiser, the old Dalmatia, a siebel Ferry, a German guntboat, three E-Boats and two armed schooners.)

We had established secret fuel dumps for all the little inter-island craft that carried our supplies from Vis (and other points) where we unloaded them, to the coast, and maintained liaison among the various garrisons on the coast and in the islands.

We had evacuated several hundred wounded Partisans for hospitalization in Italy, in addition to fitting up one base hospital at Vis.

We had a clear understanding with the Partisans, all of which was confirmed by Tito himself, regarding our control of their ships and the operation of the supply lines—a route that reached not only to the coast but would continue into the interior as soon as trucks would be available for our "Burma Road."

That morning, as we planned a much fuller program of aid for the Partisan forces, Tim and Fred and Steve and I were proud of the contribution we were able to make to the collective effort of the weeks to come.

The next few days passed according to plan. When the last details of our program had been fixed, I went to Algiers to AFHQ where, after some difficulty, I was able to talk with Major General Rooks, the officer in charge of G-3, the division of General Eisenhower's staff which had to do with plans and operations. General Rooks listened with sympathy to an account of the Partisans' needs and agreed not only to supply the fifty "six-by-sixes" needed for the haul across the mountains on the coast but gave us all the captured enemy materials in Sicily as well. (We found Tito's fifty thousand rifles and much other precious booty, including light tanks, in these dumps.) I agreed that we would call for these supplies—the captured enemy materials, mostly guns and ammunition, as well as the fifty trucks—with our own ships, as Tim had suggested, then I thanked the General and left. As I walked out of his office I knew that the third and last leg of the supply route—the Burma Road stretch—was now safe and that nothing would prevent our delivery of the materials so desperately needed by "Marshal Tito and his gallant hands."

EPILOGUE

There had been no time to compile my reports on the trip to Jajce until the day I spent flying from Bari to Algiers. All that day I scribbled furiously, and an expert calligraphist at AFHQ was able to decipher what I wrote and type it out.

When the interview with General Rooks was over I decided to return to Bari via Cairo. This would involve no more than a day's delay and give me an opportunity to deliver the report in person instead of confiding it to the military pouch, so the next day I set out by air, travelling luxuriously in one of the Air Transport Command's big C-54's.

A rude shock was in store for me. There were orders waiting at headquarters for me to proceed at once to London, and from there return to the United States.

Good duty lay ahead in other fields, but it would have been sweet to go back to Bari and report Algiers' successes to my friends; it would have been sweet to return to Jajce and tell Tito that we had the trucks for him and the rifles and light tanks and machine guns. . . .

A soldier goes where he's told, not where his fancy leads him, and that's one of the advantages as well as one of the inconveniences of the trade, but it was hard to take leave of "Operation Audrey" in my mind without even going back to say good-bye.

I had been, I knew, immensely privileged in those October days. They had been spent in the best of company, devoted to a cordial task that prospered in our care. Good luck attended us throughout and we had hurt the Germans. Tim and Fred and I had had a chance to hit the enemy hard, and that's what we had joined the army in the hope of doing. . . .

But it would have been nice to go back!

I knew that the tempo of the work would be maintained, that Tim and Fred were perfectly able to carry on and manage our growing fleet. . . .

There would soon be hundreds of officers and men where we had been so few . . . but it would have been great to be one of them!

What I regretted most was not being able to say good-bye. I wrote a dozen letters before going off to London but the best letter says less than a grip of the hand and the level meeting of the eyes.

Someday I'll meet most of them . . . Steve and Olga and Ivo and Ilic and Dusan and Marica and a hundred others, but some of them I shall not see again. Some have already died in action. One of the ships blew up in the minefields, another was sunk by enemy aircraft and there has been no pause in the fighting in the islands and along the coast, so there are some I shall not see again. But most of them will survive. The end of it all cannot be so far off and though it will, in truth, be too late for the old Zombie in the square at Livno, the rest of us will toast each other in rakjia again.

"Zivio!"

I feel less separation from Tim and Fred, whose work I have been able to follow. My thoughts have been so much with them. Perhaps the three of us will have a common task again before the war is over. In any case, we'll meet again when it is done.

And in a happy moment I'll meet Commander Welman somewhere, and Admiral Power too, I hope, and forty other British officers I can't name here.

Sometime, if my good fortune holds, I'll see Tito, too. It will be a great moment for me when I shake hands with him again.

This story has been written largely from memory "after hours" during the past six weeks. For all its faults—and they are many—I humbly crave indulgence.

Major Louis Huot London, England May 1944