While this is a story of G.I.'s, it is more than a war story, it is more than an adventure story. It is living with and knowing a bunch of real guys.

940.938 E47g
Ellsworth
Guys on ice.

cop 1

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

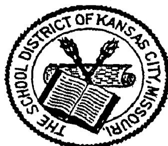
Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for two weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



Public Library
Kansas City, Mo.

TENSION ENVELOPE CORP.

KANSAS CITY, MO PUBLIC LIBRARY

0 0001 0339799 8

DEC 17

DEC 27 '62

Guys on Ice

LYMAN R. ELLSWORTH

GUYS ON ICE

DAVID McKAY COMPANY, INC.

NEW YORK

Copyright, 1952, by

Lyman R. Ellsworth

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO REPRODUCE THIS BOOK, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, IN ANY FORM, EXCEPT FOR THE INCLUSION OF BRIEF QUOTATIONS IN A REVIEW.

SECOND PRINTING

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VAN REES PRESS • NEW YORK

Dedicated to Pat—the finest girl I have ever known

HERE is the story of one of the most dramatic human episodes of World War II. It is the unvarnished account of how a handful of G.I.'s, under the command of the author, then an Army sergeant, was sent to St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs on the eve of the polar winter night to give warning of an expected Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor, to blow up the famous seal rookeries, and then to sell their lives dearly. How these G.I.'s entirely on their own survived the polar winter, madness in their own ranks, Japanese attacks, mysterious Russian reconnoiters, and the bizarre radioed orders of our own high brass will stir the imagination of every reader.

Guys on Ice

Chapter One

THE old four-piper poked her nose out of the inner bay, and Dutch Harbor dissolved behind us in a gray smudge. The noisy chaos of assembling gear, saying so long to the outfit, shoving off, had died down. Sobered by knowing we were cutting loose from civilization, we stood around on deck by ourselves, a little off to one side. On a destroyer an Army detachment such as ours would have no duty, stand no watches. Talking was at a minimum. Every man seemed sort of shut up with his own thoughts. I know I was.

One minute we'd been in the General's office back at Alaska Command, being told our job. The next minute, so it seemed, nine of us volunteers were on this ship, selected out of two hundred for a mission in the Pribilof Islands. They'd looked us through and through, picked each man to make the pattern of peculiar qualities. Considering where we were going, I sure hoped they knew what they were about.

Of course there was a background. The two-day Jap bombing attack on Dutch Harbor had been received with all the antiaircraft fire power available. The guns of the pathetically small garrison were just too few. The U.S. Navy had a few Kingfishers and PBY's based there; the first day's battle wiped them out. To assist, a few P-40's flew in from Cold Bay, Alaska. At least they served good psychological purpose. They scared the enemy off swarming ashore to overrun the place, which, if they'd known it, they could have done easily; only a few days later this same Jap task force put ten thousand troops ashore on Kiska.

So this whole disagreeable incident was the root of the

plan laid at Fort Richardson by the Alaska Defense Command, to send a small detachment of specialists—that was us—to the Pribilofs, to evacuate all civilian personnel from the largest island in the group, St. Paul; to mine the island then; and—sit there and wait. In case of new attack we were to give Dutch Harbor the warning and keep the enemy from getting the island by blowing it up.

"You'll be on your own," the General informed us curtly. "If you get in trouble we won't be able to give you any help." Though I hoped to God they understood the conditions enough to be right about the way we were to handle the situation, our chances didn't look good.

I thought, Japs don't scare you; it's not knowing where to look for danger, plus the isolation, hardship, lack of all the ordinary safety valves, and all the niggling human irritations that may knock us down. The way Dutch Harbor was pushing us out here was like pushing children out in a dark night to find shelter in a strange place. I looked at the sea, cutting away from the keel. It makes a pleasant, soothing sound—if you're taking your girl for a moonlight ride on the excursion boat! In this case you could almost see words written in watery code on the waves—*Big uncertainties up ahead—will you ever see Dutch Harbor again?* Nobody loved Dutch Harbor. But she was a known place, and where we were headed was the end of the world. Some of the detachment had never heard of the Pribilof Islands.

The ship edged along into Unimak Pass, her engines barely turning over. Fog coiled along the deck. There was a double lookout in the bow.

I'd volunteered along with the rest, all right. Back a while I'd thought, Well, now I'm in the Army I'd like it if they gave me some responsibility, be a good leader, make a good group efficient. I hadn't expected or wanted to be put "in full authority of all military personnel, permanent and tempo-

rary," in the Pribilof Islands, though when the General picked me to lead the detachment I had felt a flicker of normal private satisfaction. Here was a tough assignment. The brass thought they could entrust the responsibility to me. You could take it as a compliment. Then you could get to thinking about the orders, what they could involve. *Get there, do the job, come back alive if possible.* Now, I hate the idea of getting killed, for men with me, for myself. All of a sudden I hated the Bering Sea. I thought, I wish I was back in Alabama where I came from in the first place.

For about ten years, up to Pearl Harbor, I'd liked the Alaskan area. I pretty well hunted over the territory, trapped, prospected, in general got to know its pleasant guises and its fierce ones too; I liked the simple, agreeable, sturdy people, the varied scenery, the odd and beautiful flowers; I liked the challenge of the snows and winds, all the other unique conditions of climate and living.

Now I didn't kid myself. This thing was full of angles. Environment, strategy of procedure, personnel, the problems of each and all would be squarely on my shoulders every minute of every day. If, for instance, as they seemed to be doing at the moment, the sections—radio and G-2 men—chose to huddle off by themselves separately, it couldn't do much harm now. Make a note to look out for cliques later though, when all the petty aggravations piled up to rasp the nerves. Some personnel would inevitably turn inefficient, insubordinate, lazy, quarrelsome. What would be needed was not a bunch of walking Army Regs., but a detachment of realists who would get the idea of what we were up against—unknown as well as known!—and like me enough as a leader to want to pull their own weight.

I walked off along the deck, around to starboard, running the personnel over in my mind. In the radio section there were a sergeant and three p.f.c.'s. Five of us in the Intelli-

gence, or G-2 group: me the sergeant, one corporal (Regular Army), three p.f.c.'s.

Sergeant Steichen, in radio, husky, about five feet ten, seemed steady and good-natured. One of his men, Bill Beach, was part Alaskan native, Indian. We think Indians are impassive. Beach wasn't like that. The thought came to me that he grinned a lot, looked a little excitable, flighty. However, the whole detachment represented such a stiff cull that he must be O.K. And you take Godfrey now; dark-eyed, dark-haired, he seemed tense, moody. Stevens was a jitterbug-type individual. A couple of times I'd caught sight of him doing a little buck and wing, quite intently. You had the feeling that he was strung on wires, some kind of music singing along his veins. Stevens reassured me though, in a way. When monotony and frustration started throwing punches—which they dead sure would—maybe Stevens could be in there with the laughs.

In the G-2 group there were some contrasts. Ullrichsen and Dave Berkeley, for instance. Ullrichsen was Alaskan, too, with mining experience, a real sourdough. Already everybody called him just Swede. I'd observed him slouching at the rail, the wind ruffling his mop of unruly yellow hair. At present Swede was quiet too; yet I got the impression that he was completely unconcerned about where we were going.

Berkeley was something else. The academic, Harvard-graduate type. He had quite an Oxford manner, borrowed maybe from some exchange professor. I thought, There're a lot of things I can't figure in advance. How would Berkeley take a rough setup?

Just looking at P.F.C. Evans, though, you could tell that there was an affinity between him and liquor. He had that mulled look. Could be bad. On the other hand it could be good. It might make him a hard fighter in tight corners.

Now this Regular Army corporal, Mike Van Meter; he

was a great big guy, six feet two, skinny as a poplar tree. He had big long arms, a Jimmy Durante nose pasted on a hatchet face. I sized him up as experienced in taking things as they came—if nobody interfered with his right to bitch about 'em. There was bound to be plenty to bitch about, where we were going. Army life would qualify in very few places as desirable and glamorous. But usually there'd be some compensations at least—sufficiently assorted companionship to keep any from getting on your nerves; week-end passes; U.S.O. troupes; the P.X., where you have a few beers when you feel like it. Brother! What a backward area ours was going to be!

As for my own part in the pattern, probably the brass figured on the fact that if things start getting rugged with me I can get tough with them, but that ordinarily I'm good-natured, easygoing.

The plans for blowing up the island came back into my mind. I thought, Where the hell is the attacking Japanese fleet now? Shortly after the second foray at Dutch Harbor the American scout planes had lost it in the fog-shrouded expanse. A while back I'd noticed that we were picking up speed, also that this destroyer's complement was at battle stations. Just for luck.

How can you blow up an island surrounded by enemy sea and still get out alive, I wondered. All of a sudden a crawl of fear went through my insides.

I tried to use some common sense. *Quit looking under the bed.* I might as well get back to the detachment. We must be making about twenty knots. At that rate another ten hours ought to do it.

We had chow. Between times we sat around drinking coffee. The first of the snapshots came out. "My kid's just beginning to talk." "My wife's got a job with Douglas Aircraft." When we were beginning to feel fidgety from being

cooped up, we ran abreast our first stop, St. George, one of the two inhabited islands in the Pribilof group. St. Paul, farther up, was where we were going to base. Each island had a native village, school, and hospital. Being the headquarters island, St. Paul had the largest village, also the largest of the seal herds. The thought occurred to me that as far as the world is concerned, the Pribilofs' claim to fame is seals, as in fur coats.

The detachment lined up together at the rail. A skin umiak came dancing out from shore as the destroyer slowed to a stop. Everyone took an interest, scrutinizing the boat and its short, thickset, powerful rowers. Someone observed, "Strangers must have been through here a while back." There was a general laugh. White blood indeed seemed to be mixed with Aleut; some of the rowers looked like full-blooded Russians.

The umiak came alive with each stroke of sixteen-foot oars. Lightly loaded, the craft seemed just to skim along the surface, pushing no water at all. The floor was sheathed with heavy planking, for ferrying cargo. Walrus hide was stretched tight over wooden ribs and gunwales.

The dock was jumping; the whole village was down to see what we wanted, who we were. The skipper, a lieutenant commander, bellowed through his megaphone. Everybody get ready to leave the island in the next twelve hours. Only absolutely essential possessions to be taken.

I thought what a hell of a note for the poor devils. Their faces showed bewilderment, anxiety, fear. But they reacted like obedient children, trotting off toward their homes.

The destroyer started up again, full steam for St. Paul, thirty-five miles away. The stop at St. George gave us something new to talk about during the run. I noticed how the

fog seemed to be thicker up here. The ice pack could be a protection; fog could be an ambush.

After a while we made St. Paul and anchored off Village Cove.

Another motley crew of Aleuts clamored on the dock here. More were scattered behind boulders on the beach. They were armed, all kinds of weapons: .22 rifles, shotguns, the 30-60's I knew Aleuts kept to drive poachers off their beaches.

We hadn't been sighted. Instead, onshore they'd heard the engines thumping. Undoubtedly Japs monitored all frequencies so our arrival couldn't be radioed.

These Aleuts looked scared. Any sound of engines nearby meant one thing to them—Jap vessels. I felt my scalp wriggle. Could be.

The skipper ordered a whaleboat over the side. I filed away a peculiarity of the harbor for future reference. Across its mouth breakers made a solid wall. We were going to be in for a rough ride.

The whaleboat hit the wall, shot skyward by the bow. If you never prayed as a rule, you prayed now, hanging on. Up—down in the trough—up—water gushing out of your ears, pasting down your eyelids—I swallowed my Adam's apple. It wouldn't stay down, I swallowed some more. Down went the boat into a steep valley of water—up—down. The bluejackets knew their stuff, and we slewed through the inner fringe of surf, clear of the breakers. . . .

The landing was a small concrete dock, big enough, I noted, for tying up a barge or small motorboat. A native read my mind. "No leave boat tied to dock. Heavy swells, this harbor. Grind up boat little pieces." I thought of all the things on the island I needed warning about. There wasn't much time.

The natives and the white employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stood around, looking bewildered,

anxious, scared, the way it had been on St. George. I was in charge of this evacuation.

"You'll have to get ready to leave as soon as possible. Bring only essential possessions. Quarters on the destroyer are limited," I instructed. They stared at me doubtfully. But they talked among themselves and began hustling off to get ready. Ordering people off their island was a big thing. The afterthought came to me, what would I do if they refused?

Well, this was it. Home, Sweet Home, I thought, looking around me. For how long? Would we stay alive to leave it? I happened to look down at my right hand. I saw that it was knotted into a fist, the knuckles whitened as for action. In some way I felt better. Any fear passed off.

"Steichen," I said, "I suggest you and your men check the radio shack and powerhouse." I sent three of the G-2 section on reconnaissance in one of the Fish and Wildlife trucks. It seemed to me that before I turned around they were back, whooping with news. That warehouse right near the dock, they'd discovered, was newly stocked with a year's supply of food and miscellaneous necessities.

Excitement and confusion stepped up. The inhabitants collected back at the landing with their goods. In one way it was comical. An old Aleut lady hobbled rheumatically to the dock, stumbling and weaving all over the road, carrying a big cardboard carton. She lowered it gingerly to a sailor in the whaleboat. I craned my neck to see what was so precious—an old, chipped, but rather beautiful set of chinaware. Taking one disgusted look, the sailor exploded, "Not this trip, granny!" and heaved the carton overside into the water. But the mingled horror and misery on the old woman's face frightened and disconcerted him, putting him on the defensive. "Got no room, lady," he complained. "Anyway they'd prob'ly all bust before they got to Dutch Harbor, the way our tub rolls!" She only stared at him dumbly. Then

she turned and hobbled off toward the village again. If her china couldn't go, she wouldn't go. A young man jumped out of the whaleboat and ran after her. He took her by the arm as if she were his mother, and persuaded her back into the boat. She collapsed limply, dangling her hands between her old knees. She stared straight ahead, her sunken lips moving a little, the sound a faint moan. You felt sorry for her.

My eye caught sight of an Aleut boy, about six years old, marching stoutly down to the dock. He had his dearest possessions with him all right. A fine old-fashioned chamber pot. A sailor hollered, "Son, you'll have to leave that thing behind." He guffawed. "When we get aboard we'll find you a big ol' number-ten can—how'll that suit you?"

"Can no good!" said the boy loudly, his lower lip sticking out. "Sit on can—hurt my behind!" Everyone yawped appreciatively. When the whaleboat pulled away I noticed the chamber pot had been slyly left behind.

I made several trips, checking all supplies, making sure that we had all the essentials we were supposed to before the destroyer left. On the last trip I took over the island's motor launch, bringing it back to the dock. Remembering the native's warning, I had it hauled out of the water. There was a small marine railway with a cradle at one end to run the boat into and a gasoline powered winch for hauling it out.

We stood on the dock watching the destroyer up-anchor in the distance. Through the woolly fog we could only half see her make her turn. You sure got the idea why from ancient times the Aleuts called these Pribilofs the "Mist Islands." Her outlines blurred and blended into the mists' gray blue.

Like a sudden, instantaneous chill of malaria the fear grabbed hold of me again, shaking me by the throat. Anxiously I told myself, We'll get by. Things happened to other

people, they never happened to you. Only—my job was to expect that things would happen to us and be ready to meet them, toe to toe. For the umpteenth time I counted up our armament. Each man had a rifle, likewise a revolver. There were two light .30-caliber machine guns, one Browning automatic, a 37-mm. antitank gun—considering the size of the detachment we were heavily armed. Considering the size of the island—roughly seven miles by ten—were we, though? One truck, two jeeps, a caterpillar tractor would arrive in a day or two, having left Dutch Harbor in tow of a tug the day before we did; about halfway to the islands we passed them.

I sneaked a look around at the men again. As detachments went, it wasn't a big one to be responsible for. Even so, if you didn't recognize that from now on we could run into many kinds of trouble, you were a fool. Trouble from the outside, the kind you wouldn't be able to figure before it was on top of you. Trouble from within; cooped up on this small piece of nowhere, we were a cinch one time or another to get some screwy ideas in our heads.

The destroyer was gone now as if it had never been there. Someone muttered, "That's that." I thought, It sure is. One or two of the men were being overcasual. A few looked out of the corners of their eyes, watching the others for cues. I said matter-of-factly, "Well, we'll get our gear up to the village." Going along I checked over our situation again to myself. One fact was like an awl, boring into my brain.

A small landing party could wipe us out overnight.

Chapter Two

THERE was something strange—for a minute I couldn't figure what it was, but then I realized—it was the way our footfalls echoed as we walked along the hard roadway from the dock up to the village. There was no past experience for us yet in this place. Yesterday the village had its fixed life, it was a living place; people, neighbors, a church and parish priest, work, civil order, play. Today that life was stopped, like a heart muscle shut off. A whole different life would start up with us. We were walking across a bridge of emptiness.

"I'm practically starved," Berkeley remarked with suddenness. A hungry man is something familiar. We laughed. It relaxed you, felt good. "Who's doing the cooking for this outfit?" Berkeley wanted to know.

I said, "Since you've brought the subject up, you can do it." Up to now I hadn't even thought about it. There was a lot I had to get used to, finding out where to begin to plan.

There were smiles on most of the faces now. Drawing the cook detail was a good joke on Berkeley. I looked around. "Unless someone else likes it enough to take over permanently," I said, "we'll all take turns." No volunteers—yet.

"I would open my trap!" Berkeley snorted. The sound of our boots as we tramped along was like stones rattling in a washtub. "The officer who swore me into the Army gave me some free advice, three good simple rules—said he'd followed them all his life—he was a major—" Berkeley spat eloquently. "He said, 'Keep your eyes open, your mouth shut, never volunteer for anything.' Too bad I didn't have the sense

to take his advice." So, having volunteered, on this job we were all fools together.

I said, "Anyway, Berkeley, you're stuck for cooking tonight's meal. I'll give you one possible out, though. If anyone gripes about what you give us to eat—automatically he gets to be cook in your place. Just hand the guy the pot holder and you're relieved. So—keep your ears open—you may hear a howl. . . ." Everyone looked smug. You could see their minds make a mental note, *No griping.*

I pointed. "The Fish and Wildlife people said that building is the hotel. The white employees of the fur company that has the government contract for processing the seal furs and hides lived there. It'll be our barracks." There were a few whistles. We could use a break, and this was it. We clattered inside, and it developed pretty soon that nine of us had twenty-four bedrooms and five bathrooms to choose from. On the ground floor a huge kitchen, not one but two dining rooms, and a library—with books!

I picked a room on the front of the building, with windows on two sides. I could do my paper work there, and it gave me a good view of the village and the dock and cove. While I was stowing my gear, I ran over some of the things needed to establish routine. The sooner the detachment was operative, the better. I heard Swede Ullrichsen hollering downstairs about the hotel heating system, a big coal-burning furnace and boiler, in the cellar. That would mean that when it got cold we could be sure of warm living quarters, also hot water for the bathrooms. Not bad. In fact, a lot better than I anticipated.

Going downstairs, you could hear Berkeley purposefully banging pots and pans. I figured on some time before we ate, and took a fast run back to the warehouse near the dock.

The radiomen had reported correctly—every kind of canned

stuff there, a big supply of white flour, all the staples you could reasonably want. I remembered what one of the natives had told me about a big herd of reindeer being on the island. As soon as I could, I'd look into that. Fresh meat fairly often would be good for morale as well as stomachs.

Berkeley's scared-up meal was surprisingly good, much better than I feared, because he didn't look like any cook. He didn't quite get away with the idea that the bread and rolls were his—as the native baker was leaving he had mentioned his last fresh batch.

"When everyone's through feeding and the dining room and kitchen are policed," I announced, getting up from the table, "come into the library. We'll get squared away on where to begin."

I pulled our detailed instructions from my pocket, though I knew them already by heart.

"I'll outline the instructions for our initial task," I said when the men assembled. "As soon as the barge arrives, we'll unload and get on this. We are to wrap TNT in a bundle around barrels of gasoline to be placed in each house in the village. We stick in a blasting cap connected with wire run to a point out of town. The blasting wire will be connected up to a central switchboard. If trouble comes, one throw of the plunger blows the works." Nervously I licked my lips. The men looked at each other, there was a slight scraping of feet. Someone cleared his throat, someone else lit a cigarette and exhaled heavily.

Mining the island would still leave a lot of other routine. "By the way, Swede," I said, "you and Evans find anything interesting this afternoon out at the north end of the island?"

"Seals, Sarge," exclaimed Swede; "millions of 'em, all roarin' and a-fightin'—damnedest sight you ever saw. Wait till you get a look."

If we had to blow the island, the U.S. Government stood

to lose a valuable business. But there was nothing we could do about that. I said, "I noticed a few of the seals, swimming around, when we came in from the destroyer."

"That was nothing—wait till you see this whole herd. Everywhere you look—seals! Packed and piled together in one great big mess—" Swede remembered some pertinent information. "Oh, yes; there's an old house out there too—got a telephone—could use the place for an outpost. On the way back I checked; the phone line runs right back to town here."

Fine. I figured we were going to need at least a couple of outposts outside the village.

Next I took up the matter of the village water system, which I understood from the inhabitants was a complicated setup. It had been reported to me that three tanks were located in a large frame building on the hilltop overlooking the village. All water for village use was pumped into the tanks from a pumping station in a small building by a fresh-water pond about a mile out of town. Before leaving, the village supervisor explained to me that the building housing the tanks was kept heated in winter so the water supply didn't freeze.

"At first," I explained to the men, "I thought we might be able to drain the tanks and haul the relatively small amount of water needed for our use. The Fish and Wildlife people left a truck. I noticed some steel tanks lying around the dock. I thought we could fit one of those on the truck body. But that won't work. It seems that the rheostats in the powerhouse are water-cooled, so as long as we live in the village and operate the radio station we'll have to maintain the water system as it is." I said to Steichen, "How'd you find the radio situation?"

"O.K., if you take care of it. I had a talk with the village operator. As long as you maintain the power at par the

equipment works fine. There are a couple of heavy-duty Diesels; you run them one at a time, keeping the other for stand-by power in case of a breakdown. The Diesels have to be oiled and greased every hour, and you have to watch the gauges for power oscillations. So there has to be a man on duty in the powerhouse at all times."

"That's not so good," I remarked. Out of a nine-man detachment three to operate the powerhouse alone was too big a percentage, even if by detailing a detachment of nine Dutch Harbor had handed down its decision that the job could be done with that number. Our instructions were to maintain a continual outpost system too until fall, when the ice pack would come down from the north, affording us its own grim kind of protection. I thought bitterly, Anyone ought to know that six men to mine the town and all the other work of establishing and keeping ourselves in running order won't be enough. I hated to start out by radioing Dutch Harbor for more personnel, but there was nothing else to do. I wondered how they'd show how little they appreciated it.

I encoded the request for eight additional men, specifying that they were a minimum additional requirement to maintain the powerhouse and outpost setup. Also, though it might not be absolutely essential to leave a man on guard all night at the radio station, I decided we'd do that too.

I ordered the station shut down for the night when Steichen got my mesage out, and assigned one guard. I put myself down for the 2:00 to 4:00 A.M. guard trick. Tomorrow was going to be a tough day, but two-hour guard duty wouldn't be too bad on anybody. "I suggest we hit the sack now," I said. I noticed someone had left an alarm clock behind and took possession of it. If the rest were anything like me they were a lot more bushed than they acted. The long run up in the ship—over twelve hours—the confusion and nervous tension of getting the natives evacuated, all the last-

minute checks on a hundred and one things before the destroyer left, then the feeling of letdown in the realization that here we were at last, here we were going to stay in barren strangeness until— Until what?

Anyway, at the moment, we could use some rest.

I was just beginning to do a real job of sleeping when the alarm clock banged away. I slapped my palm down on the bell before it waked up anyone else. In the dark I stuffed myself into my clothes, carried my shoes downstairs, put them on at the door.

The clear, moonless night was pitch black even though stars sugared the sky. You could hear those relentless breakers in the cove.

In the immense stillness my footfalls sounded to me like Frankenstein, going up the road to the radio station. The general direction was fixed in my mind, yet I felt my way along. It would take us a few days to figure out how much and where on the island we could safely use flashlights. Meanwhile, in case of doubt, *don't.*

My foot suddenly went up against something in the road—soft, yielding . . . I hollered, "Now what the ———," and pitched in a somersault, landing with a big grunt and a thud on my face on the hard surface. I heard something jump-jump-jump away, clattering off in the darkness. I'd have said it galloped like a horse, but I hadn't heard of any horses on St. Paul. Anyway this sounded rather light for a horse.

Clawing the road, I scrambled to my feet. One knee felt skinned. A drop of blood hung to the end of my nose. My scalp itched. I was scared. I ran like hell the rest of the way to the radio shack. . . .

Evans laughed. "Take it easy," he said. "There's a tame reindeer in the village, name of Mac. I noticed him hanging around when we got here. They said his mother died and

he'd been raised on a bottle. They named him after some agent in charge of the island—"

"From the way he took off I don't know if Mac was scared or just coy," I said. "The way I ran onto him I must've given him a good kick."

"Scared you anyway, didn't it?" Evans grinned. "Don't blame you, though. If it'd been me I'd have waked up the whole island, yelling—"

"Well, I did repent some of my sins in a hurry, at that. First thing I thought of was a Jap scout. But those hoofs—I haven't heard of any Japs with hoofs yet—and those were dead-sure hoofs!"

"Man," said Evans, "you sure need coffee to stay awake out here. Well, I'll shove off. Coffeepot's on the back of the stove there."

"Thanks. See you in the morning."

At nine in the morning the tug and barge bringing our equipment were sighted entering the outer harbor of Village Cove. Berkeley, Evans, and I launched the motorboat and went out to tow in the shallow-draft barge. The wall of breakers wasn't quite so tough today. The tugboat didn't have any armament, and the skipper was in a sweat to steam for Dutch Harbor again, so our equipment was unloaded fast. Berkeley wanted to know why the tug was allowed to come up without even a machine gun for protection. The skipper explained that there just weren't enough guns to go around; anyway his craft was so slow it couldn't put up much of a fight in any case, though if they had a few guns on board at least it would make them feel a lot better.

The two jeeps on board were a godsend. We needed them for reconnaissance and to haul supplies to the outposts. I breathed a lot easier too when I checked over the ammunition, a plentiful supply for all the guns including the 37-mm.

antitank gun. I was relying on the versatility of this gun. Its range was three and a half miles. Loaded with a canister it was useful for antipersonnel work. Armor-piercing shells made it an antitank gun. With shrapnel it would knock out machine-gun and mortar positions. If Japs came down on us, we might get lucky and find use for everything.

None too tactfully the tug skipper opined, "Yeh, without any guns we're in about the same fix as you guys—sitting ducks. Only difference is, in a couple of days we'll be back under the Army and Navy guns at Dutch, an' you guys'll still be having to sit here. Well, we better get going. Best o' luck to you all. . . ." Ruefully we watched him cast off and start his run back to comparative safety.

Checking over the cargo, I noticed a lot of things we didn't need, in view of the fact that the island was exceptionally well stocked. For instance, a hundred cases of C rations, plus drums of gasoline and fuel oil, were just so much surplus. We already had large stocks.

The D-8 caterpillar tractor was something else. I was instructed to hack out a small landing strip on the island somewhere if possible. It's entirely possible with this cat, I thought. The jeeps and trucks were vital. The 37-mm. antitank gun couldn't be improved on as a morale booster, either. Morale boosters interested me.

The entire detachment was busy the next day, wiring the village for obliteration. G-2 had laid down a pretty convincing method for this. When you touched off a necklace of TNT around a barrel of gasoline with a blasting cap, what the explosion didn't destroy fire would finish.

By the end of the day most of the houses in town had been fixed up with these land mines. As the hotel was a fairly large building we mined it with a double charge.

At 1600, when I was planning a thorough reconnaissance of

the island and a system for outposts, a radio message came from the Commanding General at Dutch Harbor:

> DESIRE RADIO CONTACT WITH ST. PAUL EVERY HOUR ON THE HOUR STARTING IMMEDIATELY STOP ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL YOUR STATION SOON AS TRANSPORTATION AVAILABLE STOP

The last part of the message impressed me first. I expected the request for more men to be turned down, or at least an argument about it. Instead they were sending them along. Then— Yey, wait a minute! An hourly radio contact schedule with about a third the number of men needed for it? And all they wanted to do was start immediately!

Oh, well, we could give it a try. I hated to get into it though. There were other things we needed to do first. We needed this thorough reconnaissance—right this minute there might be a hundred of the enemy in our backyard without our knowing it!

"I think we'd better take time to check if everybody's gun shoots where it points," I said when we were all together after unloading the barge. "I know mine does—but I bet some of you aren't any too sure about yours."

The radiomen agreed that none of them were. Their guns had been handed to them practically as they stepped on the ship.

"O.K. Bright and early tomorrow morning we set up a small rifle range and zero-in all guns. A rifle isn't much use till you know where it's going to shoot."

We set the range against the side of a rock bluff at East Landing.

The scores made by Swede were almost unbelievable. I was curious as to how he learned to shoot like that. "Good training, Sarge," he said coyly.

I persisted. The amazing part of it was the way he could

shoot offhand as well as in the prone position. I decided he was easily the best shot in the detachment.

A twinkle took over the depths of Swede's eyes, bright blue like Indian turquoise. "Where'd I learn? My ol' man," he said. "He was a rugged character; thought all us kids ought to be rugged too." Swede proceeded to tell us a tale of how the old man gave him his first single-shot .22 and one cartridge for his birthday, and told him to find his own breakfast on the other end of a rabbit track in the snow. "If you want to eat," the old man advised him, "don't waste your cartridge."

We hadn't been on the island a week, but already Mike Van Meter had sensed that Swede was a tall-story artist. "Did you eat?" he baited him now.

"Sure did. Rabbits were thick as fleas that year. I waited till I spied him, sitting under a bush, and bang! Winged him. The hell of it was I had to chase him a ways because I didn't kill him, and had to club him to death with the butt. Did my ol' man raise hell with me when I got home for gut-shootin' a rabbit!"

"When's your birthday?" drawled Van Meter casually.

"August," said Swede, falling into the trap.

"I thought so!" gloated Van Meter, giving a guffaw. "Boy, are you the biggest liar up here! And you from Nome! They get enough snow in Nome in August, do they, to track rabbits?" Everybody roared. Swede joined in unconcernedly. "Well, my old man was a rugged character anyhow." Unembarrassed, he launched into another tale. "The old man was a big-game guide for awhile, down Kenai Peninsula way. When he took hunting parties out, he always seemed to bring back better bear hides than any other guide. One spring I remember he came back with a reg'lar monster—in prime condition too. An Anchorage newspaper reporter happened to get a look at it—asked the ol' man how he always brought back such good hides. Know what my ol' man told him?" He

stuck out his chest—you could see that storytelling light leaping in his eye.

"I oughtn't to do this," said Van Meter, "but I'll bite. What did he tell him?"

Swede beamed like a kid with a faceful of ice cream. "Well, he explained it this way. In the fall he made it his business always to find a few bear dens. During the winter then he'd make the rounds—to roll the bears over every once in a while. That way they wouldn't rub the hide all off, sleepin' on one side, you see." Swede gazed happily about him, adding, "Kept the condition of the hides even, and incidentally kept my ol' man from gettin' winter-soft too!"

Howling with helpless laughter Van Meter roared, "And he still had time to train you to be as good a liar as you are a shot!"

Swede took that as a nice compliment.

Pretty soon we'd been on the island a week, and we looked up one morning through pearly light to see a Navy PBY, circling the island. It circled twice. Twice we got the prearranged recognition signal. Watching them land on the water, outside the breakers near Village Cove, we ran down to the dock. We shot the motor launch out into the water and went to meet them.

This was a windfall. The eight requested men were on board. "Dutch Harbor's counting heavily on your outfit here," the ensign pilot reminded me. "They figure if any funny business materializes you'll give them the word all right."

It was a pleasant surprise to find that the newcomers included a Regular Army cook, P.F.C. Dunn. We had to laugh at the way this was especially appreciated by Berkeley, for a quite practical reason. It seems that in his life there were two passions, books and food. He was rapidly achieving stature as a chowhound. I began to think that danger would

be a small matter to him so long as he could keep on eating.

Dunn was happy too. He liked being a cook. I felt relieved. This took care of the problem of constant griping about cook detail.

We had men enough now, too, to set up the outposts. At supper I said, "I suggest that we all go out together first thing tomorrow morning and take a systematic look at this island. We ought to get thoroughly acquainted with it, know it like the palm of our hand. It'll show us how to set up the outpost routine for maximum efficiency. Besides, St. Paul is one of the most interesting places anywhere, on account of the seals."

Berkeley chomped his meat and potatoes with gusto. He commented genially, "A Cook's tour—sounds goods." Did I only imagine that his elegant accent was modifying a bit?

I decided we might as well begin checking the island by a trip to the Polovina rookery, four or five miles out from the village.

Chapter Three

EVEN without seeing them we'd been well aware of the Polovina. When the wind was right on that section of the beach to the north, it brought the seal racket clearly to the hotel, a sustained, roaring clamor, like some great Wagnerian production.

Swede's report was no exaggeration. The Fish and Wildlife people had constructed an arrangement of safety stations—catwalks running from far up the beach in the rear of the rookeries right down to the water's edge—because it is dangerous to get near the seals. The catwalks bowed out into wide platforms located directly over the main congregating places. On these platforms we had our first comprehensive sight of a drama of nature that defies description. Superficially the seals were comical in appearance and behavior. But you could see that by nature they were wary, nervous, fierce at even a hint of anything unfamiliar.

There were all sizes and shapes, young, old, gay and foolish, hoary with age and dignity. Swede pointed out a mountain of seal flesh. "Must be one o' them beach masters." I had seen him in conversation with some of the Fish and Wildlife people.

Obviously this huge animal was a leader. His body, tapering from a comically neat and seemingly wholly inadequate rear-end arrangement to a vast torso, was topped by a neck that seemed never to cease its watchful swiveling. At intervals his beady gaze raked the harem assemblage. He would open his terrifying maw—drooping mustaches made him look like some ancient Chinese sage, sitting for a scroll

portrait—and roar out orders of conduct or caution. He must weigh at least seven hundred pounds. And his teeth!

Suddenly we had a chance to see those in action. An intruder came stepping too far over some imaginary boundary, catching the beach master's eye. With unbelievable speed and a hideous roar he flung his great bulk around in a half circle and dove on the interloper, snatching with his teeth at the neck. Instantly the chestnut-colored pelt was brushed with a thin streak of blood.

The victim, howling with fear and the sting of the bite, took off rapidly, stumbling over prone seal babies. Their bustling mammas barked insultingly at him, like women over the Monday-morning wash making rude personal remarks, as he staggered away in his disorderly retreat, crying and complaining about his injuries.

All over the beach rocks and boulders had been sanded down by the flippers of generations of seals to glistening smoothness, a dark obsidian polish. The majority were black or gray, a few were orange. Berkeley pointed. "How can they sleep in all that racket?" Knots of seal pups snoozed curled up in perfect comfort like dogs, seemingly unaware of the vast noise, the constant coming and going of mothers and young fry, tramping and sliding and tripping over them.

I thought, The whole point of this mysterious annual migration is the birth of the year's crop of infants, the conception of the next generation.

I watched a pup that had spotted us. He had waked up and happened to catch sight of two-legged somethings directly over his head. He started to cry piteously, weaving his supple little neck this way and that, hunting anxiously for his mother. Not picking her out of the restless mass he scrambled up and away in search of her, whimpering and fussing like any lost human child. I noticed the beach master

throw back his massive head, roar out some random instruction.

Swede's eye picked out something else—a giant bull, just emerging from the water. Shaking his head arrogantly he was headed for one of the harems, fifty yards away.

The beach master of that particular harem sensed the impending affront instantaneously. His huge body flexed. Reared to his full height he was gigantic, awesome. Shaking his head angrily, his mouth opened up with a bellow of thunderous warning.

Pandemonium seized the rookery—females crying out hysterically, pups squealing and blubbering, the vast mass of seals milling furiously...

"It's goin' to be a fight, sure as hell!" yelled Swede, with the relish of a fan at a heavyweight prize fight. "Once at Wainright I saw a pair of walruses in a fight. If this is anything like that, boy, we're gonna see something!"

We stood there speechless, hardly moving. The battle built up. The invader introduced a sudden note of comicality by averting his head coyly, in a manner that reminded me of some of Jimmy Durante's antics, and sidled toward the harem's master as if to remind him of his irresistibility to the ladies. "He's feintin'!" refereed Swede. "Thinks by lookin' a little innocent—embarrassed to be doin' what he's doin'—he'll get close enough to get the jump on the boss."

You could see it wasn't going to work. Firmly stanced on a small knoll, legs wide apart, angry head and neck aimed ramrod straight at the approaching adversary, the beach master was a fearsome protector of his rights. In a sort of nightmarish cadence he was roaring steadily now. The noise was deafening.

A large female, flip-flopping her way anxiously to the side of her master, reached up to press herself confidingly against him. Nipping at his neck with her teeth, she seemed to be

wheedling him to give up the fight, pay attention to her. He wasted no time on such nonsense. Seizing her by the scruff of her neck with wicked-looking jaws, with one steel-smooth motion he tossed her over his shoulders into the harem's collective lap.

The intruder came on steadily, never looking straight ahead at the bull with whom he had decided to do battle for the harem, always with fake innocence glancing sidewise. It might have been convincing—except for a bristling ridge of hair along his spine and the back of his neck, telegraphing his true intentions with every lurch of his body.

At a point just out of reach of the harem defender he halted, pointed his muzzle at the sky, and let out a series of roars.

Nearer the two edged toward each other, jockeying for position, sparring for an advantage, like boxers in an early round. The two heads darted back and forth in lightning passes. Suddenly the intruder made one terrific lunge and got a hold on the flesh of the defender's neck—

But the hold wasn't good enough. His quarry gave an adroit jerk, tearing loose the hold. It had been strong enough, though, to lay the flesh open—a great crimson spangle gushed out.

Infuriated by such *lèse majesté* the harem master made a ferocious lunge, hitting squarely on the base of the neck at the jugular vein.

Now the invader must break that hold instantly or die. He struggled titanically. So unleashed were his strength and passion that twice—three times—he had the defender off his feet, dragging him along the ground.

But in the end the beach master's hold couldn't be shaken. At last—though it took only seconds, actually—the harem master, digging his flippers into the ground, gave one final vicious twist of the head, slicing with horrible neatness

straight through the jugular. The interloper fell back a few feet, with his morsel of dying strength. He collapsed with a despairing groan, dead.

Wearily the victorious harem master hauled himself back to the very top of his knoll. He flung his head upward, giving out with a series of roars—more like detonations. . . .

It acted like roll call. From all the adjacent harems the bulls checked in. As far along the beach as the eye could see stretched long, snaky necks, the heads of harem masters pointing skyward, sounding for one the victory cry, for the other a dirge, to all a warning of the wages of meddling.

The catwalk timbers creaked as we walked back to the rear of the rookery. You couldn't make yourself heard in the din. Anyway, we had to catch our breath after witnessing a spectacle as elemental as that one.

Maybe all rookeries looked alike, but I decided we might as well go out to North East Point and look over the one there—the Fish and Wildlife people said it was the largest anywhere in the world. While we were at it we could figure out our outpost problem there.

North East Point had been built up out of sand dunes by the sea over a long period. Before we got there we heard the same old clamor and bellowing of the harem masters, the females gossiping among themselves and disciplining their young, the plaintive gabble of their pups.

Within sight of the rookery we could hardly believe our eyes. This whole section seemed to swing and sway, packed tight with a vast conglomeration of seals. It was Swede who noticed some aliens—foxes, scores of them, all sizes, whites and blues, old and young. The surprising thing was that the foxes had no fear of the seals, walking around or lying down where they pleased, looking at the herd with only the most casual interest.

It must be that they fed on the seal dead. At Polovina the stench of seal excrement and carcasses had been bad enough; here at the Point it was incredible, overpowering.

Immediately the beach masters noticed us, the intruders. Curling back their lips in titanic snarls, they opened their immense mouths and bellowed angrily.

On the way up here Berkeley had remarked that he certainly wished he had a movie of the fight we'd watched. I wished I had had a camera along to photograph this spectacle.

There were quite a lot of dead seals, many of them just pups, flattened out like pancakes, trampled to death in the ceaseless movement. "I wonder what the death rate is among the young ones?" I said.

"I bet killer whales have a lot to do with it," said Swede. Van Meter was on him like a shot. "Don't go trying to tell me they have amphibious whales in this neck o' the woods!" he exclaimed. "Seal pups stay on dry land—killer whales sure as hell wouldn't be up on shore after 'em!"

"There's other ways for whales to kill the pups," declared Swede heatedly.

We all laughed. Now we were going to be involved with another of Swede's tall tales. Van Meter gave a mocking groan. "I knew it! I knew it! All right, Mr. Naturalist, tell us—"

"Seals are funny," stated Swede loftily. "A mother won't suckle any pup but her own. So what happens? Mamma goes out in the water to feed, the killer whale steals up and gets her—and her youngster dies of starvation on the beach."

We had the grace to be impressed, Van Meter included. "I still don't see, though," he said, "once they leave their young for even a minute, how they ever find them again in all this mass."

"Sense of smell," said Swede positively. "Wild animals always tell their young by their smell. I've seen a female

reindeer wander through a whole herd, and even when she finds her baby, make a double check, smelling him over one end to the other, to be dead sure he's hers."

I mentioned my plans for fresh meat for us. "We'll kill a prime animal now and then—none of those in poor condition, tough and stringy—and process the meat carefully," I said. "We'll have some good eating—chops, steaks, roasts, now and then a reindeer stew."

Someone wanted to know what reindeer meat tastes like.

"Something like veal," Swede and I said at the same time.

"Man, oh, man!" breathed Berkeley happily.

"Don't drool!" laughed someone.

Remembering the fight back at Polovina, we got to talking about whether the female seals, too, ever got in fights. Swede didn't think so. It seems his brother-in-law had worked for a couple of years for the Fish and Wildlife people here on St. Paul.

Seal life seemed to be a well-ordered society. Once the harem master located his harem, he couldn't turn his back on it for a minute—even to eat—or he might find another bull in possession. Talk about full-time jobs!

Van Meter wanted to know how any animal could live all summer without eating. "He'd starve to death," he said flatly.

"Nature fixed that," Swede informed him, looking a bit smug with knowledge. "When the bulls get here in the spring, they're hog-fat—rolls of lard all over them. When they leave in the fall—skinny as fence rails! Why? They've lived off that stored-up fat all summer—didn't have to do any eating."

Berkeley pointed out that the largest harems seemed to belong to the biggest bulls. Medium-sized bulls had only small harems, and some small bulls loitered on the fringe of the harems, apparently not having a female to their names! Swede had an explanation. "My brother-in-law told

me the bulls have to be six years old before they're big enough to fight for a harem. Until then the others kick them around, bully them, give 'em a helluva bad time. I guess the Seal Code too is 'Only the brave deserve the fair.' "

"Speaking of the fair," I said, pointing to the surf frothing on the beach, "how's that for a graceful sight?" A group of females were cavorting in the water, diving up and down, their surf-laden bodies arching and glancing. They reminded me of a chorus line in a revue.

"My God!" Two fins, dark and cruel, were cutting with torpedolike speed through the water. A seal leaped happily into the air and came down—right in the path of the whale.

Berkeley yelled, "That devil caught her right in mid-air!"

The fins vanished, leaving a trail of bloodstained water. The other seals, which a moment earlier had been so carefree, leaped and twisted now in frantic fear to get away before this monster should come back, killing for sheer love of killing.

"He's coming back!" I yelled. "Let's give him a barrage—let him get in close. I'll give the word. . . ."

Craftily the vicious-looking giant slid toward the beach. His interest now was a dead seal, rolling back and forth in the surf. At this point the beach was a plane of fine white sand. The whale came on. Half of his circumference showed out of water— "Fire!" I hollered, squeezing the trigger of my rifle. Every other rifle spoke. We couldn't miss, at such close range, and life was torn out of the whale in a second. Swinging the body around, the surf rolled it far along the beach, each wave seizing it, carrying it a little farther. "Well," said Swede cheerfully, "there's one that won't kill any more seals!"

Meantime the beach masters had given us their angry attention. Someone said, "I've seen enough for one time. They give me the creeps. What those teeth could do to you!"

It sure did look as if the bulls were serving notice on us to get going. . . .

Anyway we knew what the seal factor on the island was. Now to plan the outposts.

Chapter Four

THE shack out north had two rooms fitted with three bunks, stove, table, and the telephone. We figured the natives must have used it to watch for poachers; it commanded a view of the entire easterly section of the island, a nice setup, which we could use to advantage. I told Berkeley I was putting him in charge of setting up and maintaining all outposts. "Good enough," he said briefly.

I thought ordinarily it wouldn't be healthy for a p.f.c. to remark, "Good enough," on receiving a directive. But on the ship coming up I'd done some thinking about this technical authority of mine to command. Our job here had to be carried on under unusual conditions. Experience in handling crews of men in mining, logging, and surveying convinced me you got better results by suggesting than by commanding. I wasn't going to stand for anyone running wild here; but I decided the less we worried about the letter of G.I. regulations, the better we'd do the important things.

Berkeley and I agreed that this was a good time to check up on any needed supplies; we could come back and drop them off tonight, with a couple of men.

Next we headed for English Bay, about ten miles straight across the island, then up to Zapadni Point. North East Point being on the eastern rim, and Zapadni on the western, this gave us pretty good coverage in a way. We still had to reckon on the area to the north. It was the largest, contained the highest elevations, and there was no road out there. I was turning this over in my mind while we looked over the small hut at Zapadni Point.

Having observed that St. Paul, being of volcanic origin, contained no muskeg or swamp, it ought to be possible to build a road. Volcanic ash packed well, wouldn't settle too much.

Swede knew how to handle bulldozers. Did he think he would be able to take a bulldozer and hack out trails to Rush and North Hills, on that north side of the island? He could dead-sure try! I'd noticed one thing about the detachment, newcomers included. Everybody felt like getting to work, doing something. Swede mentioned a possible complication. If the bulldozer should happen to get stuck, there wasn't another one this side of Dutch Harbor to pull him loose.

Getting stuck was a chance we had to take. Right now that north area was our blind spot; we had to set up outposts there. With our small detachment we couldn't count on keeping them supplied on foot. I'd be satisfied to be able to get a jeep in there. We could do that if the biggest bumps were smoothed out. We didn't need a speedway, only a trail that would be passable. If there were soft spots you could get around them by zigzagging. We decided that Swede, and Appleton working with him, would go at it the first thing in the morning. They could take a good lunch along with them, and at suppertime I would go out and bring them back.

Swede's appetite could keep Berkeley's very respectable company, and he hollered across at Dunn to make sure he was listening, about the good lunch. Though officially assigned to the cookstoves, Dunn had come out with the rest to get an idea of the island layout. In any emergency all hands might be needed, with no time for geography lessons.

Dunn was reminded that there were some objections to general K.P. Did I have any ideas?

I took occasion to say that in about three days now I was going to set up a K.P. roster. There would be no room for objections or hard feelings; everybody would take their turn.

Still, the way I figured, we were probably going to be here a hell of a long time. In such a place cabin fever was easily contracted, hard to shake off. So if anybody wanted to do any bitching, for God's sake do it—get it out of their system. Don't bottle anything up; spit it out; we'd all be better off.

I switched to another subject. Anybody have any ideas about improved methods in any section?

Berkeley did. In one of the basements he had noticed a ping-pong table. As long as we only used one of the two dining rooms, how about putting the table up in the other one. A little built-in amusement would be all right on St. Paul.

A good idea. I suggested that he take care of it. Special Services had sent up a mess of new ping-pong balls and some paddles, along with a few cartons of cigarettes and a case of playing cards.

Now about Telegraph Hill—

That was about midway between the Polovina rookery and English Bay, on one point of a triangle. There was a small building used by the natives, so I understood, to store dynamite. To carry out the defense plan we were going to need a switchboard and detonating box; they could be put at Telegraph Hill. It wouldn't take much longer to hook wiring up to all the mines, then run the line out to the switchboard.

I decided it would be advisable to keep the same crew on duty at all times at the powerhouse. Someone not used to the setup could make a costly mistake. I made up my mind as far as possible to make the various jobs elective; a man was apt to take more interest in a job he chose.

I called for volunteers for a beach reconnaissance in the morning. We would need two parties, two men each. The hands showed, more than were needed.

We headed back for the village. Everyone seemed satisfied with the assignments, glad a routine was under way. I told myself luck was with me. For all practical purposes we were

operating in frontier country. If we expected to keep alive, do the job, our senses had to be attuned to that fact. These men were giving every indication of being willing and able.

I didn't want to make the mistake of expecting too much at first from anyone. Godfrey and Towne handed me a surprise.

Throwing down some empty tin cans with Jap markings, and a dozen or so empty cartridge cases, probably .303 caliber and without markings, they announced that they had found them at least a hundred yards above the high-water mark on the beach they were patrolling. As all American-made cartridges had the caliber stamped on them these must be something else. Godfrey disclosed the clincher. About three hundred yards down the beach from where these had been found, they had come on at least a hundred fur-seal carcasses.

I felt my flesh creep. My God! There must have been a landing party ashore. The Japs had been poaching here for years—that we already knew—but what kind of a ship this time had put them ashore? A submarine?

We talked about how long ago the seals had been killed. They thought from the looks of the carcasses not more than four or five days, or anyhow a week. Of course it was hard to tell in this climate. But they certainly weren't too old.

I decided that this changed our picture; our whole setup would have to be revamped pronto. It was a wonder the bums hadn't come right into the village, tried chopping us to pieces in our sleep. . . .

The men reported that there had been a fire at the spot where they found the cartridge cases. They hadn't been there very long—you could tell by the labels.

At supper I announced my decision. "Starting immediately we use a rotating outpost system." When the wind was

from the north, and gale force, all outposts would be pulled off the north side for use on other jobs. Same would go for the south side. They had undoubtedly noticed how in a heavy wind the waves rolled up on the beach a hundred yards or more. The Bering was so shallow around here that it made the waves abnormally high, apt to be choppy too. So a landing would be impossible with any onshore breeze. As we didn't have enough men anyway to keep the whole area adequately covered at all times, we would hereafter spot our patrols where landings would be possible, never at any time where conditions made them impossible.

Someone raised the question, Was there any chance that Dutch Harbor would jar loose with a few more men if they were told about this?

I didn't think so. Dutch Harbor never planned a garrison here. All they wanted from us was warning if an attack should materialize in this area. What North East Point outpost was to us in the village, we on St. Paul were to Dutch Harbor—providing we stayed on our toes and a radio message got through!

Someone put a finger on a crucial point. In case of an attack, if we had to blow the mined areas, what did the personnel do?

"We scatter inland and we fight or hide, either or both," I said. I didn't feel offhand but tried to make it sound so. My imagination is about average, and it sure didn't take any more than that to figure that we'd be in one hell of a fix.

One man said that it didn't look as though we'd be able to put up much of a scrap against a party strong enough to force a landing.

My idea was to use guerrilla warfare. We would prepare for it by dispersing some of our ammunition right away to strategic points; and we would include some of those C rations Dutch Harbor had sent us; then we could both shoot

and eat. One thing we could make damned sure of: if an enemy landed on us, we could see to it that they found it a very costly operation.

I noticed that evening that nobody played any ping-pong. Everybody cleaned guns and sharpened knives.

While Swede and Appleton were chewing out the road from Polovina Point to the northwestern edge of the island, they made another find. As Swede was driving the tractor, he spotted what looked to be a small cave-in. They got out to have a look.

There was a fifty-foot-deep hole. Far down in it they spotted a collection of enormous bones. Backing up the tractor, they slung down a cable. When the drum had squealed off enough rope to reach bottom, Appleton slid down to take a look. Holy jeekus! It was the skeleton of a huge elephant. Swede disputed this; he thought it was a mastodon. Around Nome men dredging for gold came up with mastodon bones all the time.

They looped cable around the tusks; Swede said that if they weren't cracked too much they would carve up fine for souvenirs.

When they came in at the end of the day and showed off their find, I was as excited as they were. Every fresh topic to chew over, any new spare-time activity, could have big morale value.

Everybody wondered how a huge animal got way out here in the middle of Bering Sea. Swede told how a few years back Eskimos around Wainright found one floating in the ice. This gave the skeptics a field day—weren't mastodons extinct thousands of years ago?

Swede bristled. He hadn't said anything about its being alive. It was dead all right. The flesh was still good enough to feed to the dogs though. He added that most Eskimos

liked their meat pretty ripe so they'd probably eaten some of it too.

Maybe this one had been brought in by the winter ice pack. But in that case it was already dead—how could it have got from the beach to where it was found, practically in the middle of the island? A good question.

Alternately the men argued and carved. The two tusks were in excellent condition, only a few small surface cracks; the heart of the ivory was absolutely perfect. I pointed out that this offered a new use for the grinding and buffing wheels in the powerhouse.

At times the hobby was a mixed blessing. The friction of corundum wheels on the ivory set off a terrific stench; even the powerhouse men howled in protest, though they did their share of carving souvenirs. But they all kept at it. Souvenirs grew in number and variety. Swede turned out to be a real artist, turning out a set of beautiful chessmen. Everyone had a watch band made of ivory links, embossed with seal, polar bear, or walrus heads.

Now that we had a trail out northwest, we constructed two small shelter cabins for the Rush and the North Hill outposts. We had two main problems. They must be invisible from any distance. They had to be secured against blowing away.

Neither of the peaks afforded much room. We sank the cabins in from the very top, leaving only a minimum of walls and roof to show. On lumber we were in luck. Because of the exposed position and terrific wind velocity ordinary lumber would never stand up; but the warehouse contained a good supply of heavy-duty lumber.

The trail hacked out of the tundra wouldn't take the truck; the jeeps took a beating; we used up a lot of time. All of us got pretty irritable. Van Meter's bitching was colorful and expressed the feelings of all.

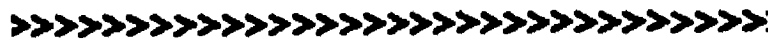
We couldn't wait to set up the outposts until the buildings were completed. Digging the holes and building the rude huts went on around the clock, but meanwhile the men slept in pup tents. In case of a gale-force wind they could count on the tents blowing away in seconds if they weren't staked down extra hard. The sites were on the lip of old volcano craters, in cinder-ash formation.

At Rush Hill they got their wind the evening of the second day out there—a wild wind, driving a wild rain. At two in the morning the pup tent was gone. The sleeping bags were awash.

The nearest shelter was the village, about seven miles away. About noon the men rolled into town and made their report. They'd have come sooner, but hell, if they'd started stirring around in the pitch dark they'd probably have fallen over the edge of the damned crater. Their innate sense of the ridiculous was intact. They spilled two gallons of water out of their sleeping bags, along with themselves.

This was one time I certainly thanked God and the St. Louis fur processors for bathtubs and a boiler for plenty of hot water. I had the men soak for a while in hot tubs and get some sleep. We could cover them that night.

We hung their sleeping bags alongside the furnace to dry. As it took a week, they borrowed sleeping bags and headed back to their post.



Chapter Five

I WAS with Swede and Berkeley when we first saw the reindeer. We were getting the telephone line strung from Rush Hill to Mt. Palovina, overlooking the rookery.

We rounded a small knoll, and again I had this sensation that the whole area was swinging and swaying. It was a thousand reindeer taking off at a gallop. A reindeer herd in motion is a vast melee of brown, dun and white, spotted beige. I thought there must be a lot of casualties, with all that rush, all those clublike horns. You could tell this herd had had a good winter and reproduced well. Graceful fawns were everywhere. They'd lost their infant unsteadiness and dashed about among their elders with gay confidence.

Berkeley said he expected that they'd be shaggy. Swede informed him that this was summer, they had shed their rough winter coats, this short, smooth, glossy fur was their summer dress. Berkeley wanted to know why they looked so top-heavy too, and Swede explained that, and about how the bucks shed their horns before fawning season—a protection for the fawns when they came along—and the does after the fawning season was past. Swede remarked respectfully that nature sure had a lot of savvy.

I expected the jeep to scatter them. Instead the herd angled back around the knoll, tearing away in the direction from which we came.

We had a stand rigged in the rear end of the jeep and had been paying out the wire from a reel. It had been going easily, but suddenly we felt a jerk, and the wire fell slack. Swede gave the wheel a twirl, turning the jeep around on

two wheels, and we hustled back. About a quarter of a mile away we came to a gap in the wire. Two reindeer were all tangled up. The only way we could get them loose was by shooting them. A hell of a note! Lay the wire one minute, reindeer wrecked it the next!

I had a sudden thought. We could use some fresh meat. I told Berkeley to take the animal on the right, I'd take the other. We had to be sure to hit in the head or neck—ruin less meat that way. In a minute we had two fresh-killed reindeer.

Something else occurred to me. If the rest of the detachment ever found out the animals were all wrapped up in telephone wire when we shot them we'd never hear the last of it. We agreed not to say anything about the way we got the meat. We set about concocting a story to show that we were the world's sharpest shots.

Loading the animals on the jeep hood, we bounced back across the tundra. We were quite a sensation, riding through the village. There had been a lot of wishful talk about a feast of reindeer meat, but until now nobody believed we'd really get it.

Dunn wanted to know if they had been easy to shoot. I have the impression it was Berkeley who leaped at the opening. "Easy! The reindeer are so damned wild out there that they smell you a mile away—if they get a sight of you they take off like a typhoon. You guys' tongues would still be hanging out for fresh meat if this detachment didn't have a couple extra-fancy crack shots."

"Baloney," said Dunn impassively. He was also a good shot. I saw him squinting at the carcasses. He remarked thoughtfully that the whole story sounded queer to him. He made a motion, saying, "I bet you found a couple with broken legs. Here—let me see."

"Broken legs!" howled Berkeley. "Those son-of-a-bitchin'

reindeer lit out like greyhounds at Hialeah! Man, it's near as bad as shooting quail!"

Grinning at Berkeley's fury, Dunn moved to the stove to stir something, saying calmly, "As long as you guys—er—shot 'em, then you better skin 'em too; I got no time to be skinnin' reindeer with a bunch o' hungry hyenas like you guys to feed. Besides, if I do it once you'll have me doin' it from now on."

"Sure," I said hastily, "we'll skin 'em for you." Anything to keep the wire marks on the legs to ourselves. "But never mind cooking any of the meat for a few days—green meat can give you one hell of a bellyache."

Skinning out the two carcasses was a short job. I was surprised to see how fat they were: a two-inch layer of tallow all the way around each one.

As we hung them up, Berkeley whispered, "Thought sure when Dunn made that crack about broken legs, some wise guy'd take a good look."

"My exact reason for agreeing to skin them right out," I whispered back.

Three days later Dunn roasted one whole hindquarter. We had a feed of reindeer meat tender enough to cut with your fork. A few had sampled reindeer meat before and weren't partial to it, but agreed that of its kind this was good.

We got a postscript on the reindeer situation while the blasting line was being hooked up to the switchboard in the powder magazine at Telegraph Hill. From the northwest corner of the hill a large draw ran back into the interior of the island. At the end of the draw nearest the hill there was a construction of heavy plank. We figured it was a reindeer corral. Evidently the natives would herd the reindeer in, cut out the bucks for killing, let the does loose again.

It took two weeks to complete the outposts at Rush Hill and North Hill. I made the radio station the command post. This central terminal for all the telephone lines made it possible for one man to control the arterial situation, an asset since we were so shorthanded. I planned to detail more men in a pinch.

Nobody liked outpost duty, and I couldn't blame them. The buildings were cramped, uncomfortable, and lonely, especially at Rush Hill and North, where they would barely contain a stove, table, and two bunks. I took the stoves from native houses in the village. They were all right for warmth but poor for cooking, so the grub was poor. Van Meter mentioned the monotony too. He had a point. Four hours on, four hours off, day after day, seven days a week, could get on your nerves.

Through our goings and comings around the island—we realized gradually that this bleak island in the middle of the Bering Sea supported more life than many an island of the same size in more temperate climate. With seals, murres by the millions, a thriving reindeer herd, and innumerable white and blue foxes St. Paul was anything but deserted. The men on outpost at North Hill discovered that the whole faces of the cliffs were pocked right down to the water's edge with holes hollowed out of the soft cinder ash by the murres, nested by the hundreds of thousands. Now was the nesting season, and in every hole were small heads, wide-open beaks perpetually thrust outward, while a cloud of adult birds wheeled and soared back and forth bringing food. I had heard that the island natives collected the eggs to salt down in heavy brine in barrels. Eggs collected in the spring kept fresh—at least fresh to Aleut and Eskimo taste—as long as a year.

It looked as though this rookery would furnish the makings

for a thriving guano industry. But it was a peculiarity of the region that when the sea was clear of ice the heavy fall and spring storms threw sheets of spray straight up the sides of the cliff, washing the guano out to sea.

In the village Mac, the pet reindeer, became more attached to us every day. He figured out that there was food to be had in the hotel, and if the door was left open, he'd mosey in to get it. His horns were beginning to branch out, but that didn't stop him. Dunn would chase him out, but Mac thought this was a game and followed him right back in.

The natives must have taught him to eat tobacco. He was always nuzzling up to one of us and nipping a stray cigarette out of a pocket. He chewed up cigarettes, throwing back his head and rolling his eyes with pleasure. It looked as if he'd joined up with us instead of the herd.

Swede got the idea of training him as a prize fighter. He started shoving him around by the head and darned if the reindeer didn't catch right on. In fact he caught on so well that it didn't pay to turn your back on him, or he'd come up behind you and push you on your face. I put a notice on the bulletin board, but it didn't curb Mac.

Important Notice #1
St. Paul Island, Alaska
Subject: Reindeer etiquette

The St. Paul edition of Emily Post, regarding manners of reindeer, has been misplaced. Pending reappearance, each individual in this detachment should make conscientious effort to improve the manners of the local reindeer. Failure will force passing city ordinance, keeping reindeer off the streets.

Signed

SGT. ELLSWORTH
NCO IN CHARGE

We didn't get our morning newspapers, but from radio dribbles we pieced together the progress of the war in various theaters. It looked bad to us. Van Meter summed up things pretty well from our point of view. "Sons o' bitches! Hope I get a chance to pay 'em back for makin' me sit on my duff in a place like this!" I thought, Van Meter gripes about being in the Army—and wouldn't get out if you showed him the way.

Our more sober reaction was to extend ourselves to do what had to be done. The sooner we got it done the sooner we'd get off of here—maybe. Every day there was some caustic talk about Dutch Harbor not sending us any mail. That wasn't good, and I worried about it. We were instructed to establish an aircraft landing strip; could be that had something to do with holding up our mail.

I made a special reconnaissance of terrain and decided that a good location would be the foot of Mt. Polovina. Once this had been a volcano; it had erupted, blown off one whole side of the hill, strewing the flat around the base with a thick layer of cinder ash.

Swede was enthusiastic about what he had to work with. "The boys'll know they got a runway," he said. He and Appleton kept the bulldozer roaring. After they had been at it some time, Swede asked me to take a look. "It's about as good as we're gonna get it with the equipment we got—there's a little dip in one end but it'll take a gas shovel and a flock of trucks to do much about it. So I guess this'll have to be it."

If it was good enough for him it would be good enough for me.

Everybody off duty went out to look it over. Four thousand feet long, a hundred feet wide—it was fine. The dip was approximately five hundred feet from the southerly end. It didn't look too bad to me. I said that if the pilots couldn't

make it in here they'd better report back for more training. Swede and Appleton looked pleased as kids on graduation day.

Someone said maybe now we'd get some mail. Swede came up with the novel suggestion that if so he and Appleton had better charge us a special delivery fee. Four bits a letter ought to be about right. They'd worked like the devil to fix this field—they rated a bonus.

Dunn put in his bit. How about him getting a bonus for feeding them—they sure ate like jackasses.

If they worked like jackasses didn't they get to eat like 'em? Dunn tied it off with, "*And* make noises like 'em too, don't forget!"

The completed air strip did a big job psychologically. You could feel it in the air. *The mail'll be in any minute now.*

I decided to nudge Dutch Harbor anyhow, just for luck. That night I encoded a message to remind them that we were still on earth, and to look in our mailbox.

FOUR THOUSAND FOOT AIR STRIP OPERATIONAL HERE TODAY STOP ONE HUNDRED FEET WIDE STOP

Two days later I read the reply twice to make sure I was seeing straight.

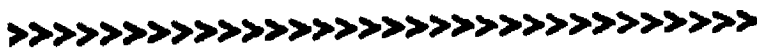
WELL DONE ON AIR STRIP STOP CONSIDERING SETTING UP WEATHER STATION ST PAUL STOP

I tacked it up on the bulletin board and waited for the uproar. I didn't add any comment, hoping they'd figure out that men sent in to set up the weather station would bring the mail.

That night I thought the tension loosened up just a little bit. Everybody got letters written to send out. Someone bawled peevishly, "How'm I gonna let my folks know where I'm at?" It got a laugh. Van Meter advised writing across

the top of the paper "The Lost Legion"—it would give the home folks a lot of fun with a map.

This was normal. I breathed a little easier, wondering how long it would take Dutch Harbor to get around to following through. Some of the men were interested in a definite date. But their guess was as good as mine.



Chapter Six

ONE night when I was asleep before I hit the bunk, I was suddenly shaken by the shoulder. "Lights out to sea, Sarge!" Before I got my eyes open I was halfway into my pants. "Where out to sea?"

North East outpost had phoned in. They didn't say if the lights were moving. They phoned as soon as they spotted them.

We tore over to the radio station. I cranked up the box and called North East. Did they still see the lights? Berkeley was out there.

Yes, he did. On duty Berkeley was clipped, efficient, like a surgeon making hairbreadth estimates. Yes, they were still moving; estimated distance, a couple of miles offshore. Looked like a submarine to him. How did he figure?

He described a low fog bank, hanging about two hundred feet off the water. He figured that a glow in the fog bank must be light funneling up from a hatch or open conning tower. Two other lights moved at intervals too. A couple of times beams turned upward in the fog. Could be flashlights.

I considered rapidly. I said we'd better see if we could keep it spotted till daylight, so I'd have a little more to go on when I messaged Dutch Harbor. I reminded him that if it was a sub they'd be on the lookout for lights ashore. Show none at North East.

Check. He'd let me know if anything developed. He added crisply that if the phone line out there should go dead, I could take it that there had been a landing party.

As all outposts were hooked into this same circuit, by

now they all knew the situation. I directed extra vigilance. A submarine would probably be the eyes of a task force. Watch for more lights, especially any moving farther inshore. I warned them. *Do not show any lights. Repeat, do not show any lights.*

I hustled back down to the hotel to wake everyone up. By now we were all making a habit of sleeping with firearms within easy reach.

I went around banging on doors. The first was Steichen's. I threw it open—and looked straight into the muzzle of his revolver. I yelled, "My God, don't add to our troubles—shooting the wrong guy!" He dragged one arm across his eyes and blinked. Lowering the revolver he mumbled that he figured it was them, sure.

"Lights off North East Point," I explained, adding that Berkeley thought it was a sub, but I didn't see how it could be one of ours.

Steichen was still shaking. He mumbled that he might have shot me.

A little shaky myself I said I sure thought he was going to. Anyway, we had to get everybody rounded up—he was to get the other guys in his section. I turned at the door—after my experience with him he'd better identify himself fast when he went around the rooms. I went out, thinking that it was a good sign, reacting that fast. One of the things I dreaded was that, as time passed and nothing much happened, there might be a tendency to slip into the state of mind that nothing was going to happen, and get careless.

I found Van Meter at the ready in an unexpected manner. Not wanting to take any more chances on getting shot, I rapped loud on the door and simultaneously flung it open—In that instant there was the God-damnedest racket—and a bucket of water pouring down on me—something big and

metal hitting the floor, followed by another—clattering and rolling— *"What the hell!"* I hollered out.

Van Meter was roaring in the darkness. "Get your God-damned yellow hands up, lousy ———." I sensed him sprinting at me. This guy must have gone off his chump! Scared half to death, I hit him around the knees with my flashlight. "It's me—Ellsworth!" That hatchet face of his pushed right up under my nose. "What th' hell's goin' on!" he hollered.

Pulling back, I looked around. I had to laugh. Mike was taking no chances on not having at least some chance to fight back. Two washtubs were rigged over his door and two buckets of water, connected with a rope looped over the doorknob.

Squeezing at my clothes, I explained. "Lights out to sea! Well, you're certainly set with a welcoming barrage! Now get your clothes on and get downstairs. It may be Japs. Dutch would have let us know if one of our own ships was up here."

He grunted that he'd be right down.

By the time everyone was in the library it was a few minutes after 2:00 A.M. They were wide awake and well armed.

We were taking it for granted that we had an enemy sub on our hands. I said that anyway we'd get the 37-mm. ready for business. A few of them should give me a hand; we'd hook it up to the jeep and be ready for daylight and whatever was going on.

Loading down the rear seat with canister and armor-piercing shells, we threw in a light machine gun and two cases of .30-caliber ammo. I figured this was about all we could do—we'd just have to wait and see. "How about a game of penny ante until daylight?" I said. Dunn fired up the stove and cooked an early breakfast.

Every half hour I called the radio station on the library

phone. Once Berkeley reported from North East Point that the lights seemed to be drifting with the tide. Another time he said, "Wait a minute—think I can hear a thump of Diesels." Maybe they were running in closer to shore, to compensate for the tide. I directed him to keep on it; it was mechanical; he would anyhow.

A half hour before daylight Berkeley reported in. The lights were moving out to sea now.

This hanging around was becoming unbearable. For two hours I'd been on tenterhooks to get out to the Point, look for myself. I couldn't, though. I'd have to use headlights; the night was pitch dark; they'd be seen miles out to sea. We had to keep whoever was out there guessing.

I don't remember daylight ever coming so slowly. Everybody itched to go out to the Point to get a look at the submarine. I wasn't going to have any sight-seeing junkets before I knew more than I did now, about what was going on. I sent them up to Village Hill. Let them keep a good lookout there. Swede and I started off on reconnaissance.

Undoubtedly any sub radio operator had monitored our hourly check-ins with Dutch Harbor. So they knew St. Paul was occupied. They wouldn't get much help beyond that, as all messages were in code.

Dawn had become a sort of pigeon grayness when we got to North East. Berkeley and Godfrey were all excited now. The lights had departed in a southerly direction, they reported. That I didn't expect.

"Come on, Swede." We jumped in the jeep and raced back to the village.

In the equipment of the detachment were half a dozen pairs of binoculars and a battery commander's telescope. We hustled the telescope up Village Hill and planted it where we had a fine sweep of the south. By now all the binoculars

were in use. The fog had closed down at daylight. Soon it began to lift.

The telescope had a lot more range than binoculars. "Hot damn!" I muttered. I could see a vague shape taking form in those swirling mists between St. Paul and St. George.

You wished the mists would hold still for a minute! They'd thin out, you'd strain your eyes till they bugged out, and almost see. . . . A breeze would catch the fog, it would thicken abruptly. Whatever you thought you saw was gone. . . . If it was really only minutes, it seemed as if this went on for hours.

Suddenly a whole submarine jumped through the fog into my range. It was so quick, it showed so clearly, that I jumped. *My God!*

The sub was barely under steerageway. One man leaned against the forward deck gun, staring right at St. Paul through binoculars. Another was perched on top of the conning tower, doing likewise.

"Is it Japs, Sarge?" said several at once.

"It's too far—can't make out features. What else would it be, though?" I turned the telescope over to another man and ran down to the radio station to message Dutch Harbor that we had a visitor. Over my shoulder I called back, "They're really trying to get a fix on what we're doing. Don't give them any help. Stay down out of sight as much as you can."

The message was encoded:

COMMANDING GENERAL DUTCH HARBOR SUBMARINE SIGHTED THIS STATION STOP DO YOU HAVE ANY SUBMARINES THIS AREA STOP

Thirty minutes later you'd have thought I'd asked the day's market quote on carrots from the reply I got.

NO AMERICAN SUBMARINES YOUR AREA STOP ARE YOU SURE IT IS A SUBMARINE STOP

"Holy God!" I yelled. "What do they think I am, stupid?" I replied:

ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN IT IS A SUBMARINE STOP HAVE HAD IT UNDER TELESCOPE SURVEILLANCE STOP

Two hours later another message from Dutch Harbor was decoded, a lulu.

HAVE NO SHIPS NO PLANES THIS AREA PRESENT STOP YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN REPEAT YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN STOP FOLLOW DEMOLITION PLAN AS SOON AS YOU ARE CERTAIN WILL BE A LANDING PARTY THERE STOP KEEP US CLOSELY POSTED ALL DEVELOPMENTS STOP

I had a reply encoded:

DEMOLITION PLAN COMPLETE AND READY FOR ACTION STOP IF POSSIBLE WILL NOTIFY YOU OF ANY LANDING ATTEMPTS HERE STOP

I hoped they'd get the significance of that "if possible," but I doubted it. I ran back up Village Hill.

The submarine was busying herself now. She was cruising along the surface in a half circle, maintaining bare steerage-way, keeping about six miles between herself and the beach, evidently recharging her batteries. I noted anxiously that she was well beyond the range of our 37-mm. antitank gun. That being the largest weapon we had, made it nice.

All of a sudden my right hand was a fist again. They might have caught us by the scruff of the neck at Pearl Harbor, but if they tried a landing party here we were going to make 'em know it. I took another look through the scope. "Looks like he's here to stay," I commented. "The way he's cruising around out there you'd think he owned the whole Bering Sea. With some reason, at that. Dutch says we have no ships or planes in it—while those yellow devils seem to have plenty of both. . . ."

I considered for a moment. If we got any kind of warning that sub wouldn't have enough men to take this place!

Someone suggested logically that if they came in they'd pick the darkest part of the darkest night to make the sneak. Their job'd be half done once they were ashore. I noted with satisfaction, it wasn't an expression of fear; it was just calm deduction.

I pointed out that they weren't ashore yet. Anyway, if they did make it, while they were making the bite we'd get in a few gnaws!

Agreement ran around the group. There was a lot more here than just the instinctive attitude of self-preservation. My fist unclenched; I felt confident, good. In the meantime, I said, we'd take it one step at a time. Every man not on duty should get some sleep—store it up while there was time. I would notify the outposts that one man was to stay on watch, the others were to sleep.

The group broke up, the men moved off casually. Yet, looking closely, you could detect a subdued excitement, under good control, in each man. I thought, They know what they're doing. I felt backed up.

Just before dark everyone jammed their pockets full of C rations and headed out for their assigned places in the plan of defense. My own spot was the radio station, so I could keep tab on all calls from the outposts.

Steichen had the duty. The coffeepot was on the stove. I didn't feel talkative. This thing reminded me of an iceberg, seven-eighths under water. You had to be sure what moves were to be made in case of action, then wait and see. Every once in a while I thought, I wish this thing would break loose; anything would be better than this waiting. Steichen took the thought right out of my mind, commenting that it sure was a long and weary night.

The outposts continued to check in; first one, then an-

other. All reported seeing lights. I began noticing that they seemed to be seeing too many lights. Were they imagining things?

Steichen contributed practically that by this time there might be more than one ship out there.

After a while I drank a cup of coffee. Finally I decided this wasn't getting anywhere. I said, "Look, shake me if there's any change. I'm going to hit that cot in the corner for a couple of hours' sleep."

Unexpectedly Steichen stared at me with hostility. "With an enemy ship offshore you're gonna hit the sack?" he said slowly. "Hell, how can you do that?"

I pointed out that there wasn't another damned thing we could do till someone tried to land. Meantime I could see to it that I wasn't pooped out if and when they did.

He didn't approve of my idea but said he would wake me up if there was anything new. He muttered that he'd bet I didn't sleep; he sure wouldn't be able to, in my place.

Just watch me and see! No sleep since two o'clock this morning? It'd be a breeze!

It just wasn't meant to be. All of a sudden Steichen was yanking my shoulder. We'd better hop to it—there was a party ashore in the middle of the island!

What was that? How did he know!

Rush Hill had given an azimuth bearing on a light they were seeing—it was inland from their position.

Inland! That must mean a party was headed for the village. I grabbed the field telephone, yelling into the transmitter, "Rush Hill—Rush Hill—what was that azimuth bearing again? What's going on out there?"

I'd made the azimuth cards when the outpost system was set up; they were oriented on true north at each outpost, and nailed down so they couldn't move. By lining up the arrow on any moving object and reading off degrees shown

in numbers we had a quick, accurate check on location. The master map of the village was nailed up on the radio-station wall, in order that each bearing could be plotted in relation to the outposts.

Rush Hill replied that from there the bearing was 170 degrees.

I checked on the map. Were they sure they were seeing a moving light? That location was in the middle of this island.

They were sure it was a light, all right. Right now they couldn't see it, but they had watched it quite a while before calling in. It bobbed up and down, as it would if a man was carrying a light over rough terrain.

Well, whatever they did, don't show a light; and keep their eyes peeled! I looked at my watch. It was close to dawn now. If a landing party was on this island it couldn't possibly make the village before dawn. I was going out now to rig up a surprise—just in case. . . .

I encoded a radiogram fast:

JAP LANDING PARTY ON ST PAUL STOP IF YOU DO NOT HEAR FROM US AGAIN WRITE OFF THIS STATION STOP DEMOLITION PLAN WILL BE CARRIED OUT AT PROPER MOMENT STOP

I handed it to Steichen and said that if I was not back here by eleven o'clock, or he heard a lot of rifle fire, he was to get this out pronto.

He wanted to know quietly what he was to do then.

"Then you and the man in the powerhouse head for Telegraph Hill. If someone hasn't done it already, push the plunger, blow the works. But—be damned sure you send that message beforehand. Got it?"

"Got it." He gulped, adding, "I sure hope somebody doesn't push the plunger while I'm still in this radio station."

"You'll never know the difference," I said. I wished I hadn't. It sounded melodramatic. I gave the hand crank of

the telephone one more tremendous whirl and yelled into the receiver, "All outposts check in!"

Everybody on their toes—the checks came fast.

"Now listen to this. As of this moment every man knows what he's supposed to do, you're all on your own. In about ten minutes I'm leaving this radio station with four men—all there are in this sector with the exception of the radio operator and the powerhouse man. You won't hear from us again till at least ten o'clock. Use your heads—don't get excited. Rush Hill reports this landing party so we're going to attempt to nail it. If it is a landing party there may be forty—fifty—men. I estimate that because I've heard Japs pack their submarines full, and the one I saw today is sure a big baby. Putting less than this number ashore would be suicide—I believe they're smart enough to figure that. So, if this is a landing party, and they get to us first, all of you attempt to get to Telegraph Hill, blow up the town. We're not goin' to leave them accommodations for a garrison of a thousand men. *But*—don't go blowing up the place unless and until you're dead sure there is a landing party here—one we can't handle. If you find the wrong thing, though, don't waste time. Blow—and blow fast." I paused. I hated to say the rest. There was a God-damned fine *esprit* in this detachment. A shame to see it sacrificed. But I had to wind it up.

"Good-by and good luck," I said.

I turned away from the telephone. Steichen's face lengthened. I saw his jaw harden. He said, "Well, Sarge, best of luck."

"Same to you, boy." I grinned. "We may both need it."

I jumped into the jeep, rounded up the other four men, and made for Telegraph Hill. I followed the ravine where the reindeer corral was; Rush Hill reported the lights in that direction.

I dropped the four men off in prepared positions at the

side of the road near the pumping station, leaving them one light machine gun and plenty of ammunition and hand grenades. I went along on foot, stumbling in the dark over volcanic boulders, getting generally banged up as I headed for the highest point of land in the center of the island. Nothing more you could do till something happened, or daylight came. I settled down to sweat it out.

I snatched at the first streak of daylight to sweep the surrounding area with binoculars. Sector by sector, trying tensely not to miss a thing. Not a thing moved.

Nine o'clock came. Broad daylight now for some time. I hadn't picked up a thing but a few browsing reindeer.

I let my eye take in the sea beyond the village. *For the love of*— The air was clear, no fog anywhere—and there was a submarine! It was a lot closer to shore now than yesterday. I leaped up, slinging my rifle across my shoulder, headed for the road on the dead run. My lungs heaved painfully like a pair of abused bellows, my knees wobbled. I hollered to the men to get out of their positions and come with me; we piled into the jeep and tore for town.

Pulling up with a squealing brake in front of the radio station, we were met by Steichen and Van Meter, the only men still in town, according to plan. If all of us hadn't still been in such a tough spot the relief on their faces would have been comical. "Steichen—message for Dutch Harbor." I encoded rapidly:

JAP SUBMARINE NEAR VILLAGE LANDING STOP HAVE BEEN INVESTIGATING LIGHTS CENTER OF ISLAND STOP POSSIBILITY WE HAVE LANDING PARTY ASHORE HERE STOP DO YOU HAVE ANY PLANES STOP

The reply came:

NO PLANES STOP

I thought bitterly, Simple and to the point.

Calling all outposts to bring them up to date on developments—not that they were extensive!—I suggested again that everyone sandwich in as much rest as possible. Inasmuch as the submarine had actually been sighted by several of us and we knew its general position, we had to assume that we might be in for another rough night. It was advisable to get ourselves in as good shape as possible.

Out of curiosity I asked Rush Hill once more. Were they absolutely certain they had seen a light at the point indicated?

The response was a trifle stiff. *Certain!*

Half humorously I commented that it must've been some reindeer's taillight—I had just come in from there and all I had seen was a few browsing reindeer. Had Acree also seen it? He was out there now.

No, he hadn't. He was in the sack, following my advice about getting some sleep.

I couldn't understand why I hadn't been able to locate anything if it was out there. If Japs were on the island they must have dug holes, crawled in, pulled them in after them. Nothing to do but go on keeping our eyes peeled.

Back at the hotel Dunn hustled up some food. We were halfway through the meal when Steichen tore into the hotel, hollering at the top of his lungs. North East Point reported two midget subs just now—two-man type—cruising alongside the beach!

Chairs overturned as everyone leaped up—a cup of coffee flew off the edge of the table and smashed. I thought, Two-man midget subs have a very short cruising range; the sub must be the mother ship.

Van Meter, Evans, and I jumped into the jeep and raced off for North East Point, the 37-mm. rattling on behind. Swede and Berkeley were out there already.

"Where're those midget subs!" I demanded, pulling up with brakes screeching.

"About a half mile offshore—right over there. Look—" Swede flapped his arm excitedly.

It looked like two small conning towers all right, cutting along stubbornly. For the Bering Sea the water was unusually calm. I peered through binoculars—*well, by God!* I lowered the glasses.

I explained to Swede patiently that it seemed to me he had lived in Alaska long enough so that, when they cruised along the beach, he should know—a couple of killer whales!

He thought I was kidding him. He snatched my glasses, trained them. Slowly his face turned beet-red. He threw me a sheepish grin. "Well I'll be a monkey's—"

"You sure are." Anyway, it showed that they were on the ball out there. It didn't surprise me, with a big sub hanging around somewhere, that we would get keyed up. We got into the jeep and headed back to town. No telling what would cut loose next.

The sub kept on cruising around, a couple of miles offshore. It was bothering me. Why didn't they make up their minds—do something—show their hands—instead of hanging around, working on our nerves? I thought angrily, I've got a damned good notion to run the 37-mm. up to the top of the hill and try lobbing a couple of shells out there—hit 'em at the water line.

I sampled how some of the others would feel about it. Van Meter was all for it. If we'd bag us a submarine Dutch Harbor might show their appreciation by transferring us out of here!

Common sense told me not to jump into anything. I wasn't any too sure our shells would penetrate. The sub was undoubtedly so heavily armored that small shells would bounce right off. If we fired on them they would certainly fire on

us; if we hadn't done them any damage we would be in a stew. They had a big deck gun out there—they couldn't miss the village with it if they tried. And if they should ever hit one of our mines—God!

I decided you could let off steam thinking about an idea; in actual practice it might not work to advantage.

Someone wanted to know, if the sub hung around here long enough, did I think Dutch Harbor would scare up a plane or a ship.

"Your guess is as good as mine—but you know how they hammered into us that we're on our own. We're expendable and how!" I kept wishing those bums out there would try for a landing if they were going to, be done with it. Part of our whole procedure was to keep prepared for anything, but I couldn't make myself believe there was anything but some simple harmless explanation about the lights up beyond Telegraph Hill. Still—anything was possible and I wasn't going to turn my back on that. But neither was I satisfied to waste our energy running in circles. As long as we couldn't do anything but wait, we might as well improve our time by sleeping. I was for the sack anyway; the rest could do as they liked.

So everybody except those on actual duty spent a good deal of that day sleeping.

At dusk the outpost guard above the village woke me up with the news that the sub had moved in, almost to the entrance of Village Cove. They were showing deck lights brazenly now, he complained.

Van Meter speculated that the commander had doped it out. We were a small force; when he got good and ready, he'd just step in and wipe us out.

Could be. It wouldn't change our planning much, though. With the two light machine guns set up near the boat landing and manned, the Browning automatic rifle in the pre-

pared position on the knoll above the village, we could still only wait. The only thing surer was the General's warning: *Don't expect any help from outside.*

I stepped over to the radio station to check. Beach handed me a mug of coffee, remarking that this God-damned waiting got on your nerves.

I had been giving that aspect a good deal of thought. In fact I'd decided to do something about it, give everybody something new to think about.

I gave the telephone crank a long turn. Everyone checked in fast.

Telling them to listen carefully, I announced that I had decided to change tactics. Judging from the fact that this evening the sub moved in closer, I thought maybe he was getting ready for the kill. So here's what I want you to do. . . .

I instructed that every half hour all night, all available lights were to be shown for intervals of five minutes. There was a buzz of comment all along the line.

It was my opinion that the commander would cruise around the island once more before trying to land. If he saw lights often and at a number of points he would get the idea that there were a lot of men—more men than there actually were. I figured it might work. At least it was an idea. He might change his mind. . . .

Berkeley cut in crisply, wanting to know what we did if they did land a party tonight. Someone else said we'd just be sitting ducks, giving them light to guide them right in. . . .

I thought fast. Here was a further idea. Two men in each outpost, right? All right, station one man a few yards distant from each outpost—the other man stay inside to operate phone and lights. This gives us a decoy inside, an observer outside.

Towne made some comment about having shot ducks over decoys plenty of times but never thinking he'd be a decoy. . . .

The more I considered this action the better I liked it. This commander had got used not to seeing any lights. All of a sudden he begins seeing them at five positions. He'd ask himself what the hell was going on.

I sensed that nobody was very enthusiastic about putting the idea into effect.

The night dragged. But reports came in from the outposts with efficiency. Just as I expected the sub was circling the island.

Daylight. Van Meter and I were at the top of Village Hill. "Look out there," he said, pointing a long, bony finger. Now the sub had stationed itself at the entrance to Village Cove once more. Only this time it was a little farther out. And instead of two men on deck there were six, all using binoculars.

The pay-off might be coming up. I decided to call in all the outposts. If and when we had to make an actual stand we might as well make it in a body. That way we'd have a hell of a lot more chance. If we were scattered all over the lot they wouldn't have to half try. I was determined to do one thing—make it hot as hell for them if they came after us. I guess I wanted specific approval from Van Meter—something to keep up my own morale. From the way his jaw worked I could see that he didn't think much of the outlook, though. "This is one time I've got to be right," I remarked. Somehow it didn't carry much conviction. Van gave a grunt. "Glad it's you and not me, Sarge," he said. It wasn't very comforting. Van Meter wouldn't kid you. I thought, In itself that has its good points.

I threw the concealment strategy overboard, sending out the two jeeps and truck to pick the men up at the outposts. By noon everyone was in town. Everyone yammered to know what was coming off now. The sub was steady in her position, dominating the entrance of Village Cove. Swede made a heavy joke about surrendering. The tension was making

me irritable, and I snapped at him. What the hell did he mean? We were sent here to do a job, we were doing it. . . .

"I've decided to consolidate our position, that's all," I said, looking sharply around for objections. "If we're all together we can put up a scrap if we have to. Also I've worked out a new wrinkle. . . ." I explained that only the upper feet of the knoll was visible from where the sub was now lying. All right. Swede would drive the bulldozer up there and start digging. Any kind of hole, any size; just attract attention and keep on attracting it.

While the sub watched his activity the rest of us would assemble behind the knoll. Each man would carry a rifle and a couple of clips of ammo. Keeping a distance of about a hundred yards between them they would file up the knoll on that side, along the top, down the other side, then circle around and repeat.

They were beginning to get the picture. I cautioned them not to run too fast—if they did they wouldn't be able to keep the file going—and I wanted it kept going till the sub got the idea of about twenty times more men on this island than there were.

They began to grin. They liked the idea of pulling such a simple gag on jokers sitting offshore making it disagreeable for us.

Berkeley remarked judiciously, "Fine strategy—if it'll work." Like a cashier hunting for a mistake in the totaling he added, "What happens if they decide to handle it by planting a few shells on top of the knoll with their deck gun?"

A good question. "We have to take that chance," I said resolutely. Those bastards had run us ragged long enough. The sooner Swede got going with the bulldozer, the sooner we got started, the sooner we'd wind this thing up—one way or the other. I took the head of the procession, up the gulley to the starting point.

For the next little while the only sound to be heard in our vicinity was the busy clank of the bulldozer, the grunting and panting of the men, toiling on the hill. I snickered to myself. To the sub commander the activity was probably as weird as it was unexpected.

Six trips up and down made the mens' tongues hang out. How long could they keep this up? I took a look through the binoculars.

The gag had worked! The sub had hauled anchor and was moving farther out to sea. To make it look good I let our "force" take a few more turns up and down the knoll. I then passed the word to head back for the hotel. It was surprising to see how fast the marchers smartened up.

I decided that we'd stay on the safe side and keep all but two men in the village that night. Berkeley and Evans would stay at Telegraph Hill. Berkeley asked evenly if that meant blowing the place if the sub should slip back and jump us after all.

"Right."

In that case Berkeley said he would round up some chow. It gave the men a good chance to laugh. Swede contributed the thought that nobody was going to blow Berkeley up on an empty stomach. It was common knowledge now that, in addition to stupendous meals at table, Berkeley kept a large tin of cheese and a tin of crackers cached under his bed for nibbling between times. To Berkeley, Swede said there was nothing like being caught prepared—a slab of cheese in one hand and a bunch of crackers in the other!

"Malarkey!" remarked Berkeley, stalking off unconcernedly.

Not all the men were satisfied that it was a good thing for us to stay in town in a body. I pointed out that in the last analysis the outposts were only for warning, had no defensive value. I was convinced that if the attack did

materialize the focal point would be the village, so the best thing was to have our strength there. Telegraph Hill would still afford us the means of warning from all points of the compass. But this way, if they did land on us, we could make sure that before they got the last of us we would make them know they'd been in a fight.

Van Meter remarked judicially that I was right.

"I'm not absolutely sure yet," I admitted, "that the sub plans on actually leaving. When they review this cockeyed performance of ours, they may not be fooled after all. I'd say that just now they're not sure. We'll just have to wait and see."

Exploding suddenly, one of the men hoped to hell they would come in tonight. He was all for one swing at making it so hot for them they'd pray to die. He was letting off steam and knew he was. Voicing their common aggravation eased the others too.

"Sons o' bitches!" Van Meter roared at that instant, so loudly that we all jumped. His face contorted with rage. He was tired of these yella bellies pinnin' him up like a woodchuck in a hole, he raged. If they stuck their snoots in here tonight he'd personally usher some of 'em to hell!

It expressed our sentiments exactly, but we still had to laugh. When he was mad, Van reminded me of an armadillo with an itch where he couldn't reach to scratch it.

I thought to myself, This is all to the good. Our morale is damned high. Bits of dialogue were flying back and forth, elaborating on the ideas just expressed. A few were elaborately obscene, graphic enough to cause any commander to die of plain fright.

We rechecked our fighting equipment, almost with gaiety. In one way, I had to admit, this outfit was far from G.I. In another, sizing it up, you could feel your throat tighten with

raw pride. I was proud of the detachment. It was full of beans.

Dunn had supper for us early. It was a good one. Then everyone looked over the position assigned to him, and dug a good foxhole. Just before dark, loaded down with ammo. and hand grenades, we took our places. One thing was in our favor. Whatever they did they'd have to do on foot. The sub carried no tanks. Our defensive plan would give them a tough nut to crack.

The hours wore on. A couple of times I stepped into the clear to cock an ear. Not a sound except, once or twice, a far-off, ghostly roar, from some beach master at Polovina.

In fact the island itself seemed changed somehow into a ghost place. A few stars hung in the sky like bits of red and green and electric-blue glass. The sea was a sifting saline scent. The stillness was vast.

The long chilly night beat like small hammers on the nerves. Morning did not lift the tension. The rising sun fanned across the sky. Someone said suddenly, "Look!"

On the horizon a tiny dot was headed south in a light breeze. Someone said eagerly that my strategy seemed to have worked. Van was shaking a mighty fist at the vanishing sub. "Yella, ain't ya, y' lousy bums!" he roared with a great laugh.

"Don't forget," I kidded wryly, "yesterday some of you thought I was nuts."

Swede advised me paternally not to go breaking an arm, patting myself on the shoulder.

There was something else. Our plan might have worked, but also there was every indication that a storm was brewing. The sub would have weather-wise officers too.

The fact that the sub was gone suggested to me that we could relax for a day or two, let the storm be our defense.

That night nobody played ping-pong or even pinochle. To a man the detachment hit the sack. Dunn set out a new can of cheese for Berkeley—he didn't even bother to pick it up!

The storm cut loose when we were having breakfast. Beach called in from the radio station. The anemometer registered the wind at seventy miles an hour, he said.

"Fine," I laughed. "Arrange to keep it that way." I looked through the binoculars. Waves were running as high as fifty feet—best protection in the world against uninvited visitors.

Swede remembered that he had been losing out on his pinochle the last few days. He had a hunch that today would be his day. Today he'd beat any two guys on the island in a three-handed game, he boasted. A big argument ensued as to who was the best damn' pinochle player in the whole of Alaska. . . .

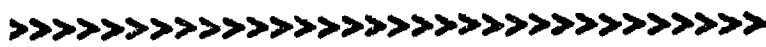
Fortifying himself with a pocketful of dried apricots, Berkeley settled down to some reading; he had rooted out a big dusty pile of back copies of the *National Geographic*. Dunn experimented with using a tender cut of reindeer meat to make mincemeat for pies. I had some catching up to do with the outfit diary.

Once the thought of the village pet, Mac, came into my mind. I wondered if I ought to go out and make sure he had shelter. I decided not to. Reindeer had been looking out for themselves on St. Paul Island a long time before I got there.

The storm hung on, a howler, tearing at the windows. The sea was a roaring caldron. We ate and slept, slept and ate. Swede got trimmed at pinochle and howled libelously. Dunn's mincemeat turned out well, and he rewarded the stove by taking it to pieces and giving it a tremendous cleaning. Stepping into the kitchen for a snack, Berkeley observed that people relaxed in queer ways.

Where the submarine came from, what it was doing there,

what it had in mind, stuck in my craw. But it would probably be a long time before I found out. (As a matter of fact, I never did, or about the lights on the island either.) I had a hunch meantime that it could turn out to be the least of our troubles.



Chapter Seven

BY the fourth day of the storm the atmosphere in the hotel was definitely restless. You couldn't go out except for the most necessary reasons; you couldn't stand staying in. There was little talk, a lot of surly expressions; trifles provoked important cursing and a thick fog of moroseness was visible. A radiogram from Dutch Harbor for once was a pleasure.

> TASK FORCE ONE CRUISER FOUR DESTROYERS ON WAY TO ST PAUL ISLAND STOP

I thought wryly, When a sub is scratching at the door no ships are available. When the sub has left—ships! Anyway, I could use the help in breaking the tension and irritability. They would be bringing our mail. In fact it seemed to me that things smoothed out a little that same day.

About 0900 the next morning the man on duty at the Village Hill outpost phoned down to me, "Five ships coming in sight over the horizon." Grabbing our portable signal light and taking Swede and Van Meter along, we hurried up the hill to see. Everyone in the detachment not on duty was at our heels. In less than an hour all five vessels were anchored in deep water, about two miles directly off Village Cove.

They looked mighty good.

I hoped they didn't expect us to come and pick up a party. There was still a half gale. Maybe they had small boats. On the other hand, probably nothing larger than life rafts or at most a whaleboat; they would be prepared for action.

The cruiser's blinker started up. "Have you a motor launch?"

Yes. I added that the seas were heavy for a small boat.
"Can you pick up a party?"
"Will do."

We could bet on being soaked. Swede, being a good Diesel mechanic, went along. He warned those staying behind to tell Dunn to have a lot of black coffee ready when we got back. I told him he could tell Dunn himself; that I wanted him to go back with a couple of the men and bring down two of those reindeer we had killed just before the storm—maybe these task-force men didn't get too much fresh meat; and our supply could always be replenished. By the time we got the launch in the water Swede was on the dock with the carcasses.

We began taking a beating as soon as we left the headland. The wind was on our stern, blowing like hell, knocking spray in sheets off the top of the waves. A continuous battering smother of foaming water kept swooping through the fifty-foot open boat. We were soaked to the skin by the time we'd gone a hundred feet.

With deep draft and an iron keel for stability this launch had been built for heavy weather. The helmsman's place was a high platform in the stern.

Swede and Berkeley worked the bilge pumps hard. The wind threatened to throw me down into the cockpit, but if you lost the rudder even for seconds in any sea like this the launch would broach to and more than likely roll over. I hung on by an iron pipe railing. Thank God for a Diesel engine—a gasoline engine would be short circuited in a minute by all this water.

It seemed as if we bucked it for hours. The cruiser rode deep in the water, hardly bobbing up and down at all even in these terrific seas. I jockeyed back and forth for several minutes before coming alongside. I must have looked like a caterpillar crawling up the side, but I straightened myself

out in time to salute properly, first the colors, then the officer of the deck, then the two stars of a well-built admiral. He said, "Made rather heavy weather of it coming alongside, eh, Sergeant?" adding affably that my experience probably hadn't called for many approaches of this kind.

I muttered something about having lived some time in Alaska, and having experience in small boats.

He wanted to know if we'd seen anything more of the submarine. Did I think it was Jap? They'd happened to be in the vicinity, so they'd just run up to check on whether it was still hanging around anywhere.

I said I didn't believe it was. It had come suddenly; then it had gone suddenly. Undoubtedly they'd smelled this storm coming—left while the leaving was good. But I had radioed Dutch Harbor when it left? Hadn't the admiral been informed? Oh, yes, but they thought a look around would do no harm.

"Well, who's in charge here?" said the admiral briskly.

"I am, sir. Sergeant Ellsworth."

All right. Inasmuch as they had made a dry run up here, how about taking a party ashore to look around. Had he also heard correctly that there was a large herd of reindeer on the island? If so, his people could certainly stand a few fresh steaks for a change—he had heard that reindeer were easy hunting.

Oh, yes, the hunting was easy all right. But if they needed many animals it would be quite a job. I explained how the whole herd took to its heels if shooting started. The admiral looked crestfallen, and I took him out of his misery, telling him that we'd brought them out a couple of fresh-killed reindeer. You should have seen him expand! He watched the line haul them aboard and thanked us heartily. He said he'd still like to have a party go ashore for a look around; how many could we take in that launch of ours?

Pointing out that he was more of a sailor than I was, I suggested that the decision was his. I would remind him, though, that, going in, we'd be bucking a bad head wind. He could see that we were soaked through, and I'd suggest everyone wear full foul-weather gear. We would be about three times as long going in as coming out.

The admiral and four of his officers clambered down into the launch. I got in and cast off; Swede and Berkeley got on the pumps.

As soon as we were out of the lea of the cruiser we began taking the seas broad on the bow. Jesus! Water banged over the bow in solid sheets like glass. The Navy was soaked, foul-weather gear and all. I heard the admiral hollering. "Put me back on my cruiser!" I ducked my head around to see if he meant it. He did! Turning back in that gale was asking to be swamped. I could read Swede's mind and Berkeley's.

I'll never know how we made it back there and hung on alongside long enough to let the Navy scramble to safety. Then we slewed off into the weather again. The admiral leaned over the rail, and I heard him yell after us, "Good luck! And let me tell you something, Sergeant—if any damned fool of an admiral shows up here again and wants to be taken ashore in a roaring gale, tell him to go to hell—and tell him I told you to do it!" I could make out the fringe of sailors laughing like hell.

The admiral showed good sense. We had bare steerageway and alternately bounced, crept, and leaped along. At one end of the launch water swooped in, at the other water roared out. Giant combers jumped on us like elephants. I figured a couple of times that we were headed for the bottom. Tons of water sloshed around in the bilges, and the boat got more and more sluggish. Swede and Berkeley pumped their arms off. Water came in faster than they could get it out.

Only the Diesel was our friend, thumping away like a fat old contented teapot. Finally, staggering but right side up, it took us into the comparative shelter of Village Cove headland, though by now it too was showing its disapproval. Clouds of steam poured out around the metal hatch as the spray kept wetting down the scorching engine.

Half the detachment was on the dock, watching our return with their mouths hanging open. I ran the launch alongside the dock and left them to pump it out and haul it out of the water; we headed for a gallon of black coffee and dry clothes.

Someone called after me to know which locker the mail was in. There was no way to give it to them easy. I called back that our mail hadn't been brought. I hated saying the words. I heard Van Meter's voice. "Jesus H. Christ!" it said slowly.

Now that I had a chance to take it in, I shook all over with rage. In my mind I began encoding messages for Dutch Harbor. Any one of them would get me a court-martial. So what, I though grimly. I tramped along, cursing everything over an inch high, the water gushing out the tops of my shoepacks.

We stood around the big kitchen cookstove, drinking the coffee. Our wet clothes streamed water on Dunn's clean floor. He watched us bitterly, saying nothing. Berkeley remarked that there were a dozen times on the trip he wouldn't have given a cent for our chances. As an afterthought he asked Dunn how about some of that Roquefort. Dunn eyed him wearily and went and got it.

I thought angrily, The Navy certainly got the best of the deal—they got our reindeer without even our mail for an exchange. Berkeley's mind was running in the same direction. "The next time we have a war I'm going to be in the Navy. I hear that at least they get their mail occasionally!" Dunn, conversing aloud with himself, remarked pointedly*

that when the Army was through with its drinking and its nibbling and its bitching maybe he could get his kitchen bailed out. For a second I thought there might be a fist fight, as Swede, tousling Dunn's hair roughly as he passed by, pointed out that in reality Dunn couldn't get along without us. Muttering idly to himself, *son of a bitch,* Dunn let it pass, filling a bucket with hot water to mop the floor.

By the evening of that day our morale had dropped way down. Up until that time there had been no means of receiving mail. This was accepted with only incidental griping. As soon as a ship came. . . .

We were stunned now because it had never entered our calculations that a ship could come—and not bring the mail. By suppertime the griping reached hurricane proportions. *Five ships—no mail! One ship was enough to bring it—but five!*

I overheard some personal criticism. They didn't bring our mail, but Ellsworth gives 'em a coupla reindeer anyway—and I could feel my ears redden.

But I was in a frame of mind to take it, let them have their gripe. Even when someone else muttered about how come I couldn't at least have traded the reindeer off for a couple of quarts of whisky. The gripe would get it out of the collective system, clear the air. Yet that thing about the whisky. . .

They knew the regulations about booze on board ship as well as I did. Not that I had any doubt there was whisky in sundry lockers. But how far would you get trying to trade for whisky in front of a deckful of sailors!

The hell with it. Darned if I was going to point out that I had killed and cleaned those two particular deer myself, just the other day—so who's business was it, what I did with them?

Someone spoke up and asked me a direct question, how about this mail situation anyway? I pointed out that we had no information that this task force trip up here had started at Dutch Harbor; it could have been at sea and received a directive. I got up to leave the room. "I'm going to look into the mail situation, though. A radio message'll go out tonight." As I went upstairs I heard someone say—it sounded like Dunn, "My girl'll think I've run off with a klootch if she don't hear pretty soon."

"What's she love you for, boy, your cookin'?" someone put in derisively "Sure can't see no other reason."

I began to feel easier. When the talk shifted to the subject of women and its variations, it was all to the good. Women were a constant hunger; the griping about them was lusty but not quarrelsome.

Upstairs I reached a decision on something I'd been considering carefully for some time. I went out into the hall and called down, "Berkeley, see you a minute?"

In the end the decision would have to be mine. The responsibility would be mine. If there were any repercussions I'd have to stand full blame.

"What would you think," I asked Berkeley, "of the idea of our making some booze ourselves?"

He stared at me. "How's that again, Sarge?"

I explained. I'd thought of it when we first got here. If we were at a Regular Army post, hell, we could get beer to drink. Up here it was just as necessary for guys to have some relaxation; more so, in fact. A little booze'd supply an occasional outlet for the blues. The subject of mail was going to be taken up immediately again with Dutch Harbor. Now this task force was here, no telling when any other transport would be coming up. That meant indefinite delay on mail. So this seemed to me the time to arrange for some booze. . . .

Berkeley couldn't see how it was going to be worked.

Easy enough, I told him. Down in the native warehouse there were a lot of fifty-pound boxes of dried fruits including apricots, and several tons of sugar. All we had to do was throw some of that fruit in a barrel with plenty of sugar, pour water over it, let it set till it fermented. We'd rig up some sort of a still. There was all sorts of shop equipment. Shouldn't be too hard. . . .

Methodically Berkeley wanted to know who knew how to make a still. He contributed the information that at the warehouse there were plenty of new barrels, the kind the Fish and Wildlife people packed sealskins in.

I decided the time had come to communicate my decision to the detachment, and I went down to do it.

"If you'll let me have your attention for a few minutes," I began. I noted that a bawdy interlude had done some practical good; they were all pleasantly relaxed.

It was quite a bombshell. They yawped and cheered when I announced that I thought the time had arrived when it would be permissible under the circumstances for us to lay down a liquor supply.

"I want one thing understood here and now," I stated. "In any given group having access to liquor, one or two get the idea of being swacked pretty continually if possible. I'm going to permit the making of a booze supply, but it's going to be kept under lock and key and brought out for special occasions. We're a cinch to spend a good many months here as I figure it now. This booze will enable us to let off steam with a binge now and then. Any man that contemplates making a hog of himself—forget it. Anything like that will get a man automatically cut off the liquor list. Is that clear?"

The discussion turned to the method of achieving this sublime end. The group manifested all the interest of boys

rigging up a cannon cracker to put under the schoolteacher's chair. It was decided to knock out the bottom of one of the barrels and, with the acetylene torch, cut out of sheet iron a piece to fit in the bottom. A hole was to be bored in the other end to receive a piece of pipe and over it a piece of rubber hose, run through water for condensing steam. Heat applied directly to the sheet-iron bottom of the barrel would make a still of renown.

The best scene of operations seemed to be the powerhouse. The man on duty there all the time could keep the fire under the still and oil the engines, too. I explained our raw materials to the men as I had to Berkeley. We would be specializing in apricot brandy, but I felt the detachment presented sufficient ingenuity to develop satisfactory variations.

Spirits improved visibly as we tossed ways and means of this operation back and forth. Someone remarked that if we could look forward to a bender now and then it would go a long way in warding off what Alaskans called "cabin fever," yes, sir.

That reminded Swede of a story. "One winter in the interior I met an old guy—he certainly had cabin fever—wanta hear about it?" Experience told us that when Swede wanted to tell a story it was pretty useless to try and stop him. Van Meter's insults rolled off his back. Inattention didn't bother him. If he had a story to tell, then by God he'd tell it. I decided he didn't need me in the audience.

I received no answer to my sharp reminders to Dutch Harbor that mail was overdue the detachment. To my relief, though, things seemed to settle down a bit. I attributed it to the fact that our liquor project was under way.

Two barrels of mash were set to brew in the powerhouse. Its main body was apricots and raisins, with plenty of sugar. Van Meter was in his element; being on fixed duty in the

powerhouse, he was the logical brewmaster. Not only was he the envy of the detachment, but being Regular Army, he fully appreciated the delicate significance of a G.I. still. Every now and then it pleased him to wonder aloud what would be the sentiments of the Inspector General if he were to stick his nose in the door. It was suggested that, if it were a cold day, the Inspector General would be man enough to inquire if there was any old enough to drink. Van Meter, giving himself up to pleasant speculation on the range of his superior's possible sentiments, would run off a batch of mash with gusto.

Several of the men were of the opinion that he would be a swine about it, drink his fill, then throw all concerned in the can for six months as punishment. Van was continuously pleased over the Inspector General's lost opportunities.

A favorite topic of discussion was who was paying for our liquor supply, the Army or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Commission. Inevitably that led to elaborate defending of the project. If the detachment hadn't been on St. Paul, our recent visitor, the submarine, would unquestionably have taken over the island. That being the case, weren't we entitled to a bonus costing a few dollars? We had saved the warehouse and its contents, hadn't we?

The consensus was that it didn't make much difference who was actually paying for the liquor. Once it was poured out of the jug it belonged to the individual.

An important question arose as to the aging of the brew. No matter how enticing the idea of some liquor to drink, nobody was anxious to risk disaster by drinking it green.

I had been saving up for this. "Ever hear of the method used in the old sailing ship days?" I inquired.

No one had.

"When they were going on a long voyage they'd put several barrels of liquor in the hold. The constant sloshing in

the barrels while the ship was at sea aged it more in a year than twenty years ashore would. I figure we can age ours the same way."

"You mean we gotta wait a year before we get to have a drink o' this?" screamed several at once.

I assured them it wouldn't take long. I explained the method. There were some fifteen-gallon kegs in the warehouse. One was to be charred, then filled with this local white mule. You tossed the keg into the sea with an anchor attached. This was the time for us to be thankful that it was rough hereabouts—in short order the wind and the waves would do us a good job.

"Best damned idea I've heard of yet!" was the unanimous cry.

Shortly everything was shipshape. Into a fifteen-gallon keg were put twelve gallons of liquor, to leave ample room for movement. We located some small anchors, used by the natives on their ground lines when they were halibut and cod fishing. Carefully testing the bottom first to make sure of a good muddy holding ground, we threw the keg into the water with its anchor.

On an average of once a day every man in the detachment, I noticed, just happened to wander down to the dock, to make sure the keg was where it was supposed to be. Now that the initial excitement had worn off, the daily grind of work and monotony was making itself felt again. Everyone yearned for the day when nature would have done her stuff and we could open the keg.

After about a week one of the men got downright uneasy. He proposed vigorously that we should pull up the keg and sample the contents. "We ought to know how things're coming along." The others guffawed at his transparency, and public opinion roundly voted him down.

More and more we talked about the first drink, though. Finally I settled it. Thanksgiving Day would be the day. Away from relatives and friends, stuck off on this ragged end of nowhere, everyone would be feeling more or less in the dumps. A celebration would be the answer.

The current of talk changed to serious boasting of individual capacity. To hear them talk you'd think the U.S. Army had picked the elite of the Drunkards' Club of America for duty on St. Paul Island.

What you might call harvesttime came. Noting from an old island diary someone had left behind that the winters were often severe enough to kill many of the reindeer, and that of those that survived many were in poor condition, I decided that we could properly kill and salt down an ample supply of reindeer meat. I had in mind that, besides adding to our food stores, it would keep everyone busy for some days—in the continuing absence of mail a sizable precaution.

We filled up all the coal bins, too, in the radio station and the hotel. From compiled data in the administration office it looked to me as if winds up to ninety miles an hour often occurred. Even the snowstorms that lasted for weeks would pile hardly any snow on the island, because the terrible winds would sweep it quickly to sea.

Now and then we knocked off, in what we know would be the final days of passable weather, to amuse ourselves with looking in again on the seal herds.

The herds had increased in size. Their behavior reminded me of the flocking up of geese, preliminary to the winter's migration to the south.

Every day for long hours they cavorted in the breakers, like vacationists making the most of the beach in the last days before Labor Day. The only ones that appeared not to indulge in daily plunges were the beach masters; they clung

to their lonely sovereignty, at high points of the rookeries. They were a rather pathetic sight now. Having gone without food all season, they were little more than racks of skin and bone.

Our roving beach patrols had time now to pursue a small pastime. This was to creep up behind a lately born seal, who still spent a good deal of its time snoozing, and scratch it behind the ears. The pup would open one eye, stretch itself, close the eye again and go to sleep, then—suddenly—something unusual having registered on its infant brain—wake up with a jerk and, in a frantic hurry to escape from this two-legged apparition, give such a lunge as to fling itself on its nose and turn a somersault. Whereupon it would point its baby muzzle to the skies and give out with squeals of protest. This roused up the female population and for a few minutes the rookery would be double bedlam. The old bull would glare fiercely at the intruder and turn on a businesslike snarl. You had to keep your eye on him, to make sure he didn't come after you, although that late in the season what passed for his common sense made him tend to think twice about going on any but the most important errands.

Occasionally we spent time watching the mothers give their pups their first swimming lessons. It was Swede who put us on to the fact, strange as it seems, that seal pups aren't born with the ability to swim. When the time comes to learn, the mother coaxes her pup to some selected pool. Gripping it by the loose skin at the back of the neck, she throws it in. The first few times the pup sinks. Mamma climbs in after it and, using nose and flippers, holds the youngster up so it can breathe. It squeals and bleats with its nose above water, chokes on the water, twists and turns in Mamma's grasp. But in very little time it gets the hang of swimming and thereafter can never get enough of it. Then the danger is not drowning, but killer whales, which seem to

know about the swimming lessons instinctively and plan to lie in wait until Mamma relaxes her vigilance. Every year there is a big toll of pups not sufficiently developed to be able to get away fast.

One day about three weeks before the day set for our Wine Festival I received a radiogram from Dutch Harbor.

DETACHMENT ARRIVING YOUR STATION TO INSTALL WEATHER STATION STOP MAINTENANCE CREW FOUR MEN TO REMAIN THERE STOP

Lest Dutch Harbor forget, I sent a fast reminder about our mail, adding that our cigarettes were getting low too.

Right back at me came a hair-raising bit of intelligence:

THROUGH OVERSIGHT HERE YOUR MAIL NOT PLACED ON BOARD STOP VESSEL LEFT THIS STATION 0200 TODAY STOP

I walked around with that message in my head several hours before I could get up nerve enough to relay it to the detachment.

At the time cursing and bitching were no novelties on St. Paul. But when I gave out this word I stood well back.

I came in for salvos, along with Dutch Harbor and her blank-blank-blank so-and-so sons of bitches. They would get around to me later. Just now each and every man had something on his mind that could only and must be said to Dutch Harbor.

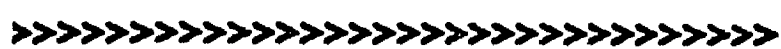
I said quickly, "All messages sent from St. Paul will require my personal O.K. and permission to send. Repeat: all messages sent from St. Paul will require my personal O.K. and permission to send." I added, "I will, however, draft a message from the group and guarantee its dispatch."

Up in my room I took a little time drafting that message. In a way I felt sort of proud of it. If you read it fast it looked

all right; at least not treasonable. If you read it more slowly, it was plenty insulting.

I dispatched it and prepared myself to wait for the reprimand—perhaps worse—that would, I was sure, follow as the day the night.

Dutch Harbor did not trouble to acknowledge.



Chapter Eight

ABOUT forty hours after leaving Dutch Harbor the tug *Trojan* arrived with the detachment of weather-station installation and maintenance men aboard. When she hove in sight, the outpost at Village Hill notified me. We got the motor launch in the water to run out as soon as she dropped her hook.

For the Bering Sea it was a fairly calm day, and as we ran through the line of breakers, the launch got no more than a normal bashing. As I tied up alongside, I noticed a couple of Army officers on deck. I climbed aboard and learned that they were second lieutenants, in charge of installing the weather-station equipment. I asked how much stuff was to be taken ashore. They estimated that it would take the launch two or three trips. I arranged to make one trip first to transport the section men, and come back for the equipment. They said that while I was getting it ashore they would pick out the site for the station.

When I was getting the launch hauled out of the water after the last trip I noticed that my jeep, left on the dock, was gone. Nobody drove it but me. Where had it gone to?

I walked up to the hotel. The minute I stepped inside the door I could feel something going on. You couldn't exactly put your finger on it. . . . I stopped a man who seemed to have some place to go in a hurry. "What's going on here?" I said.

He shot me a look of disgust and mumbled something about "My God, this shavetail . . ."

Van Meter came hustling by. With an unprintable aside

he said something confused, about just getting out of OCS and taking saluting for the first rule of the Army, something too about being in charge of the weather-station installation. Over his shoulder he made a very vulgar sound. "The rank-happiest guy I ever saw—an' I've seen a lot!" he rasped as he went out.

So that was it. I could feel myself stiffen up. Any squirt of an officer had come to the wrong place if he wanted to be kowtowed to here. I caught someone else on the fly. "Know who took my jeep?"

"He did," reported the man gladly. Rapidly I was given a few details—an officer whose dignity didn't permit walking a few feet—an officer interested only in being correctly saluted—an officer who promised everyone in sight that before the day was out this post would be in decent running order.

I thought, Well, this is something! As I understood it, these officers were to be here only long enough to set up the weather station. Wouldn't you think that for that long they'd try to get along comfortably with the permanent detachment!

It occurred to me that probably our detachment had not been any too friendly. The officers embodied the failure to check on mail and bring it with them. Of course, Dutch Harbor should have seen to it. I could understand how the men felt, though; these officers should have thought of it.

I went upstairs to wash for supper. I would size up the extent of the trouble and decide what steps to take.

The minute I opened the door to my room I noticed two strange bags in the middle of the floor. What in all hell was this! I started to yell down stairs and check on it. But acting on a hunch, I threw the bags out in the hallway. It was to be hoped they were good and strong; I threw them hard.

Something warned me to be prepared to show proof. I dug into my packsack and fished out my orders, signed by the

Commanding General, Alaska Defense Command, stating that I was in command of all personnel on St. Paul whether permanent or temporary, regardless of rank or branch of service, until relieved of duty there.

I considered it thoughtfully. It was an unusual order, all right. But it had been made out in this manner in order to put me in absolute authority over the defense and demolition plan for the island. I stuffed the papers in my pocket and went downstairs.

The bitching had become bold and general. At this rate developments wouldn't be long in coming.

I had hardly taken my usual place at the head of the table when the weather-station section arrived. The officer in charge, Lieutenant Luciano his name was, stepped into the dining room. Taking a quick look around the room, he pulled in his lips like a corset string and spoke in a tone as dry as a beetle's shell. "Sergeant, I believe Army procedure calls for the commanding officer to sit at the head of the table."

"That's right, Lieutenant," I said.

"Then I will take the seat. I rank Lieutenant Keyes by four months, I'm the senior lieutenant." It struck me that he wasn't any too secure in his own mind. But he went on to say peevishly that, while he was on the subject, he might as well say that he intended to have a little talk with me over the lack of discipline at this station.

I grabbed a quick look around the table, taking care not to meet anyone's eye exactly. Then I explained that, by an odd coincidence, I intended to have a little talk with him, too. It had been my intention to make it private, but since he was ready, now was as good a time as any. What it summed up to, I said, was that we had some rather unusual conditions on St. Paul and that it was my decision that what doubtless looked to him like laxity was an aid to efficiency.

It would be just as well not to let it upset his digestion, but I was going to go on sitting where I was. If he wanted to eat dinner he'd better just sit down and make himself comfortable. Suddenly I remembered his stuff upstairs. A little sharply I told him where it was, that if it were put in my room again, this time it'd go out the window.

The Lieutenant had an apoplectic look on his face. He stared around the table wildly; I paid attention to my soup—but not so closely that I didn't catch the collective detachment expression as the men stared back at the Lieutenant. *We've been here with the Sarge for quite a while,* they seemed to be letting him know; *we kind of think things are running fine.*

The Lieutenant's countenance was progressing through a number of shades, from pink to purple. He roared suddenly, like a jackass hit in the rump with a pitchfork, "Sergeant, I can, and I will, have you court-martialed for this."

"When that single bar you're sporting turns to three or four stars, Lieutenant," I said gently. I decided it was only fair to give the guy a chance not to commit suicide altogether. I held out my orders, remarking that perhaps he'd better read them.

He snatched them, rapidly read them through. Shooting me a murderous glance, he wheeled and started to stamp out of the room. I reminded him that I'd take my papers, please. I thought we might as well get the whole business cleared up. I believed he'd been using my jeep, I said. As it happened we had only two jeeps here, and both were needed. It being only two hundred yards from this hotel to the site picked out for the weather station, it would be a good thing henceforth if he walked. Equipment was as hard to get, here, as mail; I paused, wondering if that would sink in—or do any good if it did. In any case, I said, it was inconvenient if not impossible to get any spare parts for damaged equip-

ment, so it was extremely necessary to take care of everything we had.

The Lieutenant wanted to fight about the jeep. It was an Army jeep. He would use it when he found it convenient.

By God, I was beginning to get sore! What a jerk! As patiently as I could I explained that I personally had signed for all the equipment on St. Paul. I even had to sign a bill of lading for the equipment brought in for *his* weather station. When I made myself responsible for property, owned by the Army or anybody else, I took damned good care to look out for it. The jeeps weren't on the island for joy riding and were not now or at any other time going to be used by any half-assed jokers too lazy to use their feet. For a minute I felt a little scared—that hadn't wound up sounding quite like merely the warning I had intended.

By now the Lieutenant's windpipe was bothering him. He croaked that this was the most damnable exhibition he'd ever heard of and he was going to correct it, I could be sure of that. He was going to the radio station this minute and send a radiogram to Dutch Harbor requesting permission to place me under arrest for return to that station for court-martial.

Up to now the detachment had not eaten a thing or made a sound, watching this passage at arms in complete fascination. But at this elaborate threat a titter ran around the table. This was getting to be as good as a U.S.O. show—without girls, that is.

"The radio is under my orders, I must inform you, Lieutenant," I said gently. "I'm afraid there'd be just no way for you to get a radiogram out of here just now."

He leaped on this evidence of aggravated insubordination. He demanded incredulously to know if I actually refused him permission to send a message through my—er—this radio station.

Certainly not. If he had a radiogram that in my judgment was of importance, I would see that it was encoded and sent out without delay. The fact that I personally had to encode and decode made it a little difficult. I had quite a busy evening laid out for myself and it just didn't look as though I'd be able to put through an extra radiogram.

"You'll hear more about this!" he hollered. "If it's the last thing I do in this world, so help me God I'll see you court-martialed."

This could go on all night! I thought, What you can't handle you'd better plan to ignore. Intimating that this was going to end the discussion, I said coldly that when he had calmed down a little I'd recommend that he think one thing over, namely that sometimes a newly commissioned lieutenant could, without half trying, make a lot of trouble for himself. To tell the truth I was beginning to feel that it was a pretty screwy situation when an n.c.o. could talk like this to an officer with the full assurance that the officer could do nothing about it.

Luciano opened and closed his mouth like a goldfish. No words came. He turned and strode out of the room. Snickering, the detachment began to eat.

We could hear him stirring around upstairs, probably looking for a room for himself. When I thought it over, I decided he'd dumped his gear in mine because it had a telephone. I don't know who he was thinking of telephoning to; the telephone probably just appealed to him as part of his rightful prerogatives.

All during the argument the other officer, Lieutenant Keyes, had been a silent, openmouthed, and embarrassed witness. He slid into his chair now and began eating. A slight grin played around his mouth. Politely he addressed a pleasantry to me. "Well, Sergeant, you seem to have everything here under control." From his bland expression you

couldn't tell which way he meant that to be taken. But I sensed that he didn't have much in common with Luciano.

I explained that I thought *we* had everything pretty well in hand. Casually I added that military discipline was right and necessary in most situations, at Army posts in the States, for instance; but that under conditions such as these we had here much of it would not only be ridiculous but often a real handicap. The spectacle of Luciano's officiousness rankled; I remarked to Lieutenant Keyes that I doubted if the Lieutenant would attempt to take over command at any post in the States where he was assigned on a temporary errand. Why couldn't he look after his own job and be satisfied?

Keyes nodded, remarking that perhaps we should just say the Lieutenant was a somewhat blinding example of what a second lieutenant should not be. He gave a wry grin. It affected different people differently, he said; some just couldn't seem to take being made gentlemen by act of Congress. I thought, Too bad they didn't put Keyes in charge of the assignment, instead of Luciano.

Keyes said, "By the way, the Adjutant at Dutch Harbor told me that you fellows are doing a fine job up here." I thought, He's been waiting for his chance to tell us that. A nice guy. A gentleman, I decided, before the act of Congress got to him.

"Wish I could say the same for them!" I said. It just slipped out. "Twice now our mail has been 'overlooked.' We'd sure like to know what the score is."

Keyes looked mortified, blamed himself for not making a point of checking on getting our mail aboard. He understood that we had a small landing strip now—when he got back to Dutch Harbor he'd certainly see if he couldn't do something.

I told him about the air strip, how Swede didn't have anything to work with but a bulldozer. Keyes was very inter-

ested. Was the ground solid enough to get out a strip that way? We explained about the volcanic ash.

Swede squirmed like a boy complimented for his graduation day speech when I said he knew just how to handle the problem.

Keyes brought up the subject of reindeer. He had hunted a good deal, never had a chance though to get a reindeer. I explained that it didn't offer a very sporting proposition, if that was what he was interested in; once you located the herd all you had to do was get close enough for a decent chance at a shot. Nothing to it.

Relaxed talk and laughter ran around the table. After the scene with Luciano everybody was back in a good mood. There was time to savor the fact that a situation wherein an enlisted man could tell off an officer and get away with it was not only rare but every enlisted man's dream and not easily realized, but that here this miracle had come to pass. Also everyone took a liking to Keyes, in direct proportion to his despising of Luciano.

If we hoped the opening collision would teach Luciano a profitable lesson, we were disappointed. I got the impression that he was no more comfortable now than we were. Having absolutely no previous experience in the handling of men to guide him, he couldn't seem to keep from taking advantage of his position—as far as I let him, which never was far!—constantly stirring up things for all concerned. His own men couldn't seem to stop him. As incidents piled up, his bad humor worsened. A dozen times a day I had cause to realize that this Luciano was really something.

It bothered me to be colliding with him constantly. The annoyances that had plagued us before his arrival looked very small indeed.

The second evening of his stay among us I observed him striding down the hill from the weather-station site, a brightly

burning flashlight in his hand. As he walked along he amused himself by sweeping the air with the beam. It was a powerful light, the night was dark, it could be seen for miles. Reports poured in from the outposts. *Lights in the village area!* The whole island had been blacked out since we had seen the Jap sub.

I was waiting for him at the front door. Without preliminaries I said, "Lieutenant Luciano, you are senior officer of your weather detachment. But I am giving you notice now, the next time you play games with a flashlight on this island it will be my unpleasant duty to confine you to the village jail where you'll stay till morning. The dumbest buck private in my outfit knows better than to pull such a trick."

He stared at me, his mouth working. I noticed a blue-forked vein bulge at his temple. I pointed out sternly that at present the Bering Sea was very much a Japanese sea and that St. Paul Island was in the middle of it. If he did such a thing at Dutch Harbor, he'd be in the can in a second. We could oblige here, if he couldn't see things our way.

Having blown up several times since setting foot on St. Paul, the Lieutenant now blew sky high. "By God, now I'm going to beat your head off if it's the last thing I ever do!" he shouted. Involuntarily I drew back a step—this damned fool looked as if he might try just that.

I suggested that such talk would get us nowhere—while he was here it would be better if he remembered that he was an officer and behaved like a reasonable human being. With a lick of disgust I reminded him that having been made an officer did not make him also a superior being; he still pulled on his pants one leg at a time, like the rest of us.

With that he emitted a howl of rage and started for me. It came to me that I'd heard a door open and close behind me. I hadn't looked around. Now Lieutenant Keyes stepped up, saying contemptuously that Luciano had disgraced his

uniform long enough and it was disgusting to be in the same section with him. Luciano might be the senior officer here, but the time had come to find out if he was the better man—so come on—get his hands up.

I stood there staring with horror as they stepped outside and squared off.

It didn't last long. Luciano was no more of a fighter than he was a man, and Keyes polished him off fast. Mumbling, cursing, Luciano dragged himself inside and upstairs to clean up. Keyes mopped his face. He gave me a rueful grin, remarking that probably I could have done a more lasting job, but he thought he ought to save me the—er—trouble.

At that I felt sort of cheated. I'd have been willing to assume the risks for the satisfaction of planting a couple on the gent's nose. Of course you couldn't expect much luck in a fight between an enlisted man and an officer, so he'd done me a favor. Keyes remarked that probably Luciano would make trouble for him too. I saw suddenly how I could return the favor.

"How could Lieutenant Luciano make trouble for you, Lieutenant Keyes?" I said.

Naturally Luciano would call a witness to the disturbance.

Disturbance? Witness? I put an expression of surprise on my face. What disturbance? What witness?

Keyes threw back his head and howled with laughter. He guessed he got my meaning. He must be mistaken in thinking that there had been a disturbance, that a witness could testify to it. Thoughtfully he rubbed his cheek on which it must be that there only seemed to be a blue-black bruise.

I assured him that everyone gets wrong impressions at times, mistakes are easy to make. . . .

Luciano came looking for me after breakfast the next morning. He had a paper in his hand. He would like to have me sign it, he said. I asked him what paper that was. The one

witnessing the fight between himself and Lieutenant Keyes.

"Fight? What fight, Lieutenant?" I asked the question with polite detachment.

He stared at me with hatred. What was I trying to do? I knew what fight, perfectly well. The fight last night, when Lieutenant Keyes had intervened between us.

Pretending to be completely confused then, I gave him the business. If there had been any fights on St. Paul I would certainly be the first to know. Did the Lieutenant feel all right? Presumably he had heard what the strained conditions of war were apt to do to men. I was beginning to worry about him. First he had seemed to suffer from delusions of grandeur. Now he came and asked me to witness a fight he insisted he had been in. Would he consider seeing the Medical Officer when he returned to Dutch Harbor? I gave it as a piece of friendly advice. I let a thought occur to me suddenly. On the way down the hill last night from the weather station he must have stumbled in the dark, had a fall, perhaps hit his head—in fact that was rather a bad cut over his eye—and wasn't his nose swollen a trifle? Perhaps these had given him the idea that he must have been mixed up in a fight.

The Lieutenant clapped his hand to his forehead, letting out a howl of helpless wrath. He whirled around and started out of the room. Not noticing the half-open door he hit it a head-on blow with his already battered face. Blood spurted from his nose. He kept on going, staggering on up the road, his body slightly jackknifed so the blood could stream into the road without staining his clothes. He waved his right fist, addressing the empty air.

Of course the grapevine had got hold of the fight. But already I had warned all men in the detachment to have heard nothing.

The trouble was, Luciano himself couldn't let well enough

alone. He braced Swede about having seen or at least heard of the fight. Swede shook his head solicitously. He hadn't heard of any fight. Must be a touch of cabin fever, Lieutenant. Swede confided that sometimes cabin fever came on pretty fast. But then, in wartime, everything speeded up, didn't it, Lieutenant?

Scowling blackly at him, Luciano sought out Van Meter. Van was the picture of shocked unbelief. A fight between an officer and an enlisted man—or even a fight between two officers! Come, come, Lieutenant, don't let's joke about anything as serious as that. He, Van Meter, a witness? How could the Lieutenant think that an experienced Regular Army man could have witnessed a flouting of strict Army Regs. and not have reported it at once? The fact that he had reported nothing certainly proved—didn't it?—that he had seen nothing. He sure wished he could help, but the Lieutenant could see how it was. . . .

As an afterthought Van Meter applied the harpoon. The officers hadn't brought along any—er—liquor from Dutch Harbor, had they? His expression was virtuous. The only fights he personally had ever witnessed in the Army were over either booze or women. A droll grin unreeled across his angular countenance. "An' there sure as hell ain't no women here, Lieutenant," he yelped.

Now Luciano knew beyond question that he was the victim of an enthusiastic frame-up. With a mutter he turned away.

For several hours no one saw him. Then one of the men, coming in from a trip out to Rush Hill, observed him walking dejectedly back through the old draw toward the village.

It may be that on that walk the Lieutenant looked deep into his soul, because from that night on he seemed to settle down to getting the weather station in operation as quickly as possible. He began letting fall little hints that his work

was almost done—he and Keyes would be leaving soon. . . .

Our detachment took an irreverent but gratified view of this prospect. As a body they'd be glad to see Lieutenant Luciano long gone.

The *Trojan* couldn't get going too soon. Every day the skipper hunted me up on shore, asked me how soon I estimated he could leave. I took it he avoided asking Luciano's opinion on anything as far as possible. But couldn't I do something to hurry up the weather-installation men? The ice season wasn't far off. Stray ice floes were more numerous every day. Any time now the main ice pack would put in its appearance from the north.

I explained to the skipper that somehow I'd got the idea that the Lieutenant was anxious to leave too. That he probably knew what he was about, without advice from me.

The skipper sure hoped so. He'd hate to be spending the winter up here, like us guys. He sure didn't want any ice pack catching him. At least at Dutch Harbor you could get a drink of whisky once in a while.

"Oh, well, you haven't got anything on us there, skipper!" I laughed. His eyes flew open wide. "You see we've got a fifteen-gallon keg o' liquor aging right now in the tide."

He shook his head in wonder. Where in hell had we found it?

When I told him we hadn't found it, we'd made it, he thought sure I was kidding him. What did we make it out of—seaweed? He laughed knowingly. An old sea dog, he'd known of stranger things being used!

Not at all, not at all. Here we lived in the lap of luxury—the native warehouse stocked with all kinds of dried fruits and sugar—what more could you ask? We'd only had to whip up a still and start it working.

He was still skeptical—but would be glad to have proof. How about breaking out a little sample. You might call it proving a miracle!

Sorry. It was being saved for Thanksgiving. This had all been carefully planned; I'd promised the men a good bender. I impressed on him that by that time they'd sure be able to use it. He had heard, of course, that we hadn't had any mail since our arrival in the spring, almost five months now?

The skipper looked solemn. That was bad, all right. He ought to have called up post headquarters before he came up here. He was sorry.

I thought bitterly. Everybody's sorry. A lot of good that does the detachment. He flushed with embarrassment. The next time they sent him to an out-of-the-way spot he'd know.

"I've told 'em, and told 'em, by radio!" I said. "I finally raised hell. Those so-and-sos didn't even acknowledge the message." I scowled, adding that I supposed the detachment would survive.

At last the weather-station installation was completed. Lieutenant Keyes had been kept on the jump and didn't get any chance to hunt reindeer. He was a nice guy, we all liked him; I insisted that he take along a couple killed by men in the detachment a few days ago.

He was hesitant to take anything we worked hard to get. But down at Dutch they'd sure be appreciated. When he left, the food there was lousy, probably hadn't improved any.

I advised him to take them along and think nothing of it. We had a roving patrol out all the time; any reindeer meat we could use they could bring in. If he'd put in a strong word about our mail we'd call it square. He said he'd certainly do what he could. At least he could give them a good clear picture of mail as a morale factor in a place like this. I wished

him luck on that angle. My own efforts hadn't had much effect. I'd tried everything, up to and including insults.

That afternoon I ferried out to the *Trojan* the installation men who were leaving. To maintain the station four sergeants were staying. Pierce, Graves, Sullivan, Gates. We took the two reindeer carcasses out in the launch too.

Everybody but Luciano shook hands and wished us well. I could see Luciano's mind was still on causing trouble when he landed back at Dutch Harbor. In fact he called me aside on the *Trojan* deck at the last minute. "It's only fair to tell you, Sergeant, you've had your fun with me—and now it's my turn. Immediately on my arrival at Dutch Harbor you're to know I'm going to report everything that's happened here."

I looked him over. A born louse. I could see what was going on in his mind. He wanted me to crawl, beg him not to report me. Like hell! "You do that, Lieutenant," I said pleasantly. "Here's something else I think you should think about. I know something about Alaska. I don't believe it'll ever be the place for you. Why don't you get the Alaska Command to transfer you out—somewhere you can ride herd on G.I.'s and be happy." He started to splutter. I swung over the rail and into the launch.

It seemed downright peaceful and quiet with Luciano gone. Except that the weather section showed a tendency to be rank-heavy—a common failing of the Air Corps, I sometimes thought—they were good enough guys. Like us they were glad to be rid of Luciano. But I soon discovered that didn't prevent their objection to taking turns on K.P.

When I mentioned the roster to Pierce he informed me that they hadn't been sent up here to do K.P.

I guess I was still a little jumpy from that oaf, Luciano. I pointed out sharply that if he thought our detachment

was here to do K.P. for him, he was mistaken. K.P. had one purpose for all, continuing to eat. I presumed that was of interest; I'd never seen any G.I.'s who weren't interested in regular eating. So they'd just better make up their minds to take turns on the K.P. roster. The radiomen had put up a squawk about it in the beginning, but they'd all come around to it all right. I was sure the weather section would.

He tried to get cute. Their duties at the weather station kept them busy enough. . . .

No different from the rest of us, I pointed out. With outpost duty and all the other jobs connected with the special conditions here, we all did K.P.—myself included though strictly speaking I wasn't required to. But I figured that here we had one common interest—keeping up to maximum efficiency in case we waked up some night and found enemy bayonets about two inches from our gullets.

That alarmed him. Did I think there was a chance?

Otherwise what would we be sitting here for? But the only way we could be ready for it if it came was stay in shape and work together. This whole outfit was part of the American Army. I didn't want to see any guys with specialized jobs breaking up into cliques, getting too good for any part of the task in hand. That adage about the chain being as strong as its weakest link really applied here. If we all pulled together, the winter shouldn't be too bad. If we started pulling and hauling against each other—well, I reminded him, consider the snafu we had enjoyed thanks to Mister Luciano. I looked Pierce in the eye. "I wish you'd talk to your outfit—get them to co-operate," I said. If I put it to him this way maybe it would give him a feeling of some pride, to be able to influence his section.

"I'll do the best I can, Sergeant," he said, his manner smoothing out. "I don't say—being a bunch of n.c.o's—that they'll like doing K.P. for any privates. But, like you say—"

I had an afterthought. "Were you told about my being in charge here?"

Yes, the Adjutant at Dutch Harbor had called them all into his office and explained; I was in charge of everything on the island, what I said in any and all situations was final. Only—they'd never thought I'd be interfering with their work. . . .

It wasn't a question of interfering with anybody's work, I pointed out. Certainly I was no weather expert, had no desire to mix in with it. They would be called on for only their fair share of K.P., just as in case of necessity they'd have to take part in the general defense plan for the island. I could assure them that if things reached that point they sure as hell wouldn't feel like squawking!

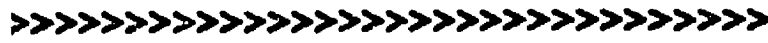
I was relieved when he said I'd made it all sound pretty practical; now that I'd explained it he'd give me all the co-operation he could.

I decided I could afford to stick out my hand too. "By the way," I said, "I presume you've heard about our G.I. still in operation here."

He guffawed. They sure had. The weather outfit judged it to be a fine idea.

I said dryly that I'd thought they would approve. For their information we were going to tap the first keg on Thanksgiving Day, which was coming soon now. When the time came, I'd appreciate it if he'd keep his eye on the men in his section, see that they didn't make pigs of themselves—a common danger in view of our long aridity—and that they didn't get too drunk. As for me, I thought my hands were going to be full with the original detachment.

"It'll be a pleasure, Sarge," he said, winking at me with good humor.



Chapter Nine

AS luck would have it, exactly eight days before Thanksgiving Day a big flock of snow geese settled on the large salt lagoon near the village. I had been waiting for something like this; a few fowl were needed for our holiday dinner.

For a whole day the geese remained practically in one spot, evidently resting up for the flight southward.

At dusk three of the men and I wheeled the 37-mm. anti-tank gun down to the shore of the lagoon. Berkeley and I fabricated three shells. Unloading a canister, we refilled the shells with bits of nails, which we cut up with bolt cutters, and plugged the ends with carefully fitted pieces of cardboard.

Next to the gun we dug a foxhole where we spent the night. The night was cool, with very little wind. We had good warm sleeping bags, and it wasn't unpleasant at all.

As the Arctic dawn broke we heard the geese honking and gabbling among themselves. I thought we'd better not talk loud—hadn't I heard somewhere that geese have keen hearing? In a few minutes it would be light enough to get to work.

We raised the edge of the shelter halves we'd staked down over the double foxhole and crawled over to the gun. Gradually the light strengthened. An enormous flock of snow geese slowly took form in front of us. It looked to me as though there were twice as many as we'd seen last night. At least a thousand now. They made a big, busy quacking, preening their feathers and diving every now and then for roots and

other titbits. They made a beautiful sight in the early opal light.

We got the gun loaded and ready to fire. I whispered to Berkeley to be ready with another shell—so we could try them on the wing too. He advised me to be damned sure of my aim—inasmuch as we wanted birds, not hot air, for Thanksgiving dinner! He gave a low, good-natured chuckle.

I cranked the elevation handle until the sights showed the largest concentration of geese. I pressed the firing button.

One eye on the flock, the other on the breechblock, I pulled it down so Berkeley could shove in another shell. Cranking fast, I shot the muzzle skyward, locked the breech, pressed the firing button once more—taking no time for aiming. In all that array I couldn't miss getting something.

We had enough Thanksgiving dinner out there now to suit a lot of starving men. My last shot had finished seven outright, and I saw two more glide down, crippled. For a second I'd been afraid my wing shot was no good—but it had paid off!

Berkeley pointed out that we'd sure ground-sluiced 'em on the water too. There were enough geese out there for a lot of feeds. I patted the gun. It was a good thing we'd had it. We'd have been lucky to get one goose if we tried bagging them with that old single-barrel shotgun left behind by the natives.

Now our work really began. The night before we'd packed down the eight-man rubber life raft, parking it near the foxhole.

We inflated it and shoved it into the water. Armed with .22-caliber rifles, we set out to round up the strays.

It was quite a chore. Some that weren't too badly wounded led us a merry chase before we could get close enough in the unwieldy life raft to finish them off.

Final score after two hours of hard work—thirty-four geese, all fat as pet coons.

As we headed for the hotel, Berkeley remarked with delicacy, "As hungry as I am I could eat the hind end of a skunk." I thought, with a grin, that Berkeley had shed quite a little Harvard elegance in the months on St. Paul. My tastes didn't run in that direction, I replied; still if one of these geese was cooked I could polish it off by myself in no time. Anyway I hoped Dunn had plenty of hot cakes and reindeer steak for breakfast; last night I'd warned him to be prepared to feed us well for our labors.

I commented to Berkeley that it had always been a mystery to me where he stowed so much food; he was skinny as a fence rail; if I ate half as much as he did I'd be too fat to navigate.

He pointed out to me that in the Army a man didn't get much pay. Wasn't it only fair for him to take it out in chow?

It was a point of view. I had to agree that he upheld it nobly.

We received quite a welcome, much exaggerated smacking of lips, anticipatory groans, and sighs over feasting. Swede complimented us, remarking that in the old market hunting days Berkeley and I would have done all right. He admitted that when we were fixing up the shells he thought we were nuts. He expected to see the whole works blow up because, the 37-mm. having a rifled barrel, he figured the cut nails might form a plug inside, blow the breechblock right back in our faces.

To tell the truth I'd been afraid of the same thing. But I had looked the gun over carefully and decided that it was strongly enough built at least to take a chance. Anyway—we needed those geese for Thanksgiving dinner.

Berkeley nodded, saying that even on the wing shot we

got eight or nine birds. Had any of them happened to see that?

No, it had been too dark to see that far; but they saw us chasing the cripples all over the lagoon—they'd sure made us sweat to catch up to them!

I served notice that now the birds had been shot, it was up to the rest of the guys to pick them. Berkeley put in frankly that he'd tried picking a goose once and it was sure one hell of a job.

I relented, saying that we'd all pick them; there'd be no idle fingers on St. Paul this day. It was a good thing we'd brought in so many—considering that the outfit ate like horses.

"Jackasses," said Dunn emphatically from the fringe of the group. "Just jackasses." That assertion always seemed to afford Dunn some kind of relief. "You don't look so underfed yourself," I reminded him.

For the next few days Dunn was a very busy individual indeed. And it seemed to me that every time I looked for some one man in particular I'd be sure to find him in the kitchen. They'd hang around there, kind of drooling, reminding me of kids back on Grandma's farm in Iowa.

Dunn had unearthed a stock of canned pumpkin and dried apples. He made some more mincemeat with reindeer meat and turned out twenty-one pies, one for every man on the island. He found enough spices, nuts, and assorted dried fruits to concoct four enormous fruit cakes. Swede stood around kidding him. "Mother D., you sure make this Army post a homey place to be!" Swinging a broom at his head Dunn remarked wearily, "Son of a bitch," without any personal feeling, and Swede nearly toppled two mince pies onto the floor as he fled.

Nights I lay in bed smoking in the dark, giving careful thought to the problem of guard duty on Thanksgiving Day. I finally decided that the thing to do would be to pull everyone back into town the day before Thanksgiving. If I was going to avoid a big casualty list this occasion needed careful planning.

Two days before Thanksgiving Berkeley and I went down to the water and hauled out the keg of brandy. We packed it uptown and locked it up in the village jail. It would be safe there. I had the only key.

The night before Thanksgiving Day all twenty-one of us assembled for supper—the first time we'd all been in one spot since the submarine left us.

I rose from the table and went into the library, followed by the others. From a cupboard where I'd placed it, I took out a gallon jug, which I set on the table. "Let's sample our St. Paul Special!" I announced. God knows how I'd been able to keep it out of their reach, but the roar of delight was gratifying. The room shook with yelling. In seconds you could feel the barometer of morale rising. Everyone clattered around to find a mug for himself.

Not only had the jostling of the surf done a good job of dispelling the taint of fusel oil, but it had given the brandy a fine color, an even finer bouquet, a definite promise of authority to be experienced. While we filled the mugs, there was a large licking of lips. An impending Great Occasion made itself felt.

I decided I ought to propose a toast. "Well, here's to what comes—whatever it is." It wasn't very inspired, but who cared. Down the collective throat gurgled our brandy.

There was an instant of judicial silence.

"Pretty smooth stuff," said Van Meter with firmness. "I was kinda worried there for a while...." I felt relieved. If

anybody in the detachment would have a professional opinion, it would be Van Meter. And, of course, Evans.

Swede hollered at him that nobody'd ever known he was worried; the way Van Meter'd been acting, anybody would have thought he invented the process and all the ingredients as well.

Van looked aloof and important. Oh, he knew it wouldn't poison anyone, he just thought it might be—well—too green.

With exaggerated care Dunn set his mug down on the table. He wiped his face fastidiously on his apron, picked up his mug again. Before taking a mighty swig, he remarked benignly, "I've seen better—" He drained the mug, and looked around at all and sundry with unusual friendliness—"but I can't remember where!" he concluded, punctuating with a vast hiccup.

I had left nothing to chance, timing the bringing out of the liquor. Two drinks apiece, before the dinner bell would go.

Everybody felt well treated, the atmosphere of the meal was as pleasant as ever I'd seen it. When we were about through the main course I rapped a fork against my mug. So instantaneous a silence was downright flattering. "Well, men," I said, "I believe everyone's earned a rest. I figure that tonight you should be free to enjoy yourselves. I made an inspection today; the ice floes are coming down from the north so fast now that we're not in much danger from that quarter. I haven't heard tell the Japs're using any icebreakers to transport troops. Anyway I'm going to take the guard duty tonight on Village Hill, and I want you to have a good time. Oh, yes, and we'll have to keep a skeleton force on duty—a man at the powerhouse, one at the radio station, one at the weather station. You can fix the duty up between you, and the rest can get as pie-eyed as you please." I had an afterthought and pointed out that Dunn was going to have a feed tomorrow that'd be fit for a king and nobody

would be able to enjoy it who was too drunk or too hung over, either or both.

I felt good about the liquor project. A good deal of tension had built up again. They couldn't get over Dutch Harbor's laxity on the mail. A blowoff of this sort would do a world of good.

Guard duty at Village Hill that night was without incident. After it was full daylight I scanned the horizon with binoculars. Not a thing to be seen. I headed for the hotel.

What I noticed first was three empty jugs. What I noticed next was a bottomless silence.

I went around and looked into the various rooms. More or less noisily as the case might be, the occupants were asleep. I noted with satisfaction that tension had vanished from all faces.

I went downstairs again. In the absence of anybody who seemed to be planning to do so, I built up the fires in the two coal ranges, put two enormous pots of coffee on to boil. I figured the demand for black coffee would be pretty heavy this morning.

Along about ten o'clock I woke everyone up. Somewhat to my surprise I got no complaints. In a short time everyone came clattering down stairs. Looking around I remarked that this was a pretty good-natured-looking group, under the circumstances. One or two referred to a strange increase in their head sizes, but they grinned.

It was my experience that at such robust times there always had to be a goat. I noted that Beach evidently was it. Gradually I got the story pieced together. After having had one drink too many—at least—he had entered the bathtub with the laudable intention of sleeping it off. This tantalized Swede, who hit on the idea of painting him up, using food coloring for pigment. The art work had been done by Swede and Gates of the weather-station section.

When Beach appeared, he was a horrendous sight. He had a dark purple nose, a green ring around each eye, an orange blob for a Vandyke beard, and twin patches of deep red on either cheek to complete the design. Having avoided looking in the mirror to inspect the extent of last night's disaster, he was mystified by the yells of delight that greeted his arrival.

Though it was apparent he was in no condition to do any great amount of laughing, he remarked that someone might tell him the joke, so that he could laugh too.

At least Swede was willing to live dangerously. He advised Beach to find a mirror and look at himself. Beach ascended the stairs heavily. In a moment came a maniacal howl. His threats showed considerable imagination; not the least of them was to paint a rainbow on the ass of whoever had done this thing.

This sent the detachment into fresh fits. Swede, tripping over something, rolled around the floor hollering like a hyena. Beach's threats had a touch of the ludicrous, considering that he was of slight build, physically one of the least sturdy in the group.

We listened to him, stamping around, and sloshing water. After a while he descended again. His visage was still notably decorated; but as the day wore on he seemed to steel himself to the periodic outbursts of glee.

Dunn came to me and asked about having dinner at 4:30. If it suited everyone else it was fine with me. In fact I thought it was a fine idea for several reasons. For one I'd like to catch a little sleep myself. How about someone agreeing to wake me up at 3:30?

Swede said sure, he'd give me a buzz. I could have set the alarm but hated the thought of the din.

Well-primed with a stiff slug of brandy, I fell dead asleep.

It seemed about two minutes later when Swede woke me up with a rugged shake, informing me that it was almost dinner-time, and besides, the detachment had a real good thirst on, and how about it?

And with the load they'd taken on last night! It ought to have made them want to stay sober for a month, at least. Such an argument was not for Swede. How, he wanted to know, could a guy row a straight course with one oar? He tucked his head on one side like a bawdy old parrot. The fact was, he said sagely, what this outfit needed was another bender to straighten it out. After all. . . .

I called him a faker but warned him that I was going to get in on this one myself. I had decided to take the outpost duty again tonight—but I figured on having the company of at least part of a load.

Swede slapped his thigh with satisfaction at this news. It was about time I did some serious drinking before the men got the idea I was too good to do my drinking with them. I knew he was kidding, but it startled me just the same.

I took Swede with me down to the jail, and we drew three more gallons out of the keg. It was certainly dwindling. On the way back to the hotel Swede let out a guffaw that rattled around in the stillness. First time, he hollered, that he ever saw whisky locked up in the can—the usual custom was to wait for the stuff to get inside the man, then throw him in.

I deposited the liquor on the center table in the library, alongside a huge bowl of a brew Dunn had made out of raisins. I asked him if it had any kick to it. Berkeley said not, though it tasted pretty good. I sampled it. It tasted pretty much like grape juice. It had a faint alcoholic tingle to it though.

By the time the dinner gong rang this was a pretty well-organized group of men. And the dining room too was a sight to behold.

In the middle, like a parade of little brown soldiers, were

six roasted snow geese, nut brown and crisp on the outside, plump with dressing, and smelling like heaven. Flanking them—the works! Mashed (dried) potatoes, canned corn, peas, two enormous rice puddings, two huge fruit cakes, mince pies, pumpkin pies, apple pies, hot rolls—the collective stomach approached this dream empty except for some black coffee and the fine old brew.

This was an occasion and should be treated as such. Before we began eating I got up, tapped my mug with a spoon.

"Men, you all know this is Thanksgiving Day. Maybe it doesn't compare very favorably with other Thanksgiving Days we've known at home, with the people we love. But Thanksgiving's an old American institution, and we're Americans, and we ought to be able to dredge up at least one reason for being thankful. As a matter of fact I believe I know of at least three reasons. First, we're still alive—we can be thankful for that, can't we? If that bunch of Jap bums had had the guts to try landing a party here, it's a cinch some of us at least might not be—maybe none of us. Second, we should be good and God damn' thankful for Dunn, our cook. Third"— I paused, looking around at the shining, relaxed faces—some of them a little puffy— "we ought to be thankful we had the materials and the knowledge to make some good booze." A roar of hilarious agreement went up.

Berkeley interrupted. Gentlemen, there was another point also. For many reasons a spot like this could have developed into eighteen kinds of double-dyed hell, but Sergeant Ellsworth had made it—Berkeley looked around, his eye dwelling lovingly on the geese and the booze—a little heaven, he wound up extravagantly. "We can be thankful we have one of the God-damnedest, smartest, most efficient n.c.o.'s in the whole U.S. Army here." Everyone howled and applauded. This was embarrassing, but it was touching to me too; there had been times when I'd been pretty rough on some of

them, driving them hard, making them keep to schedules in spite of the fact that one day passed very like another and nothing seemed to happen.

But that was enough in the way of bouquets. I held up my hand. I said I appreciated the kind words, and that I now suggested that we apply ourselves to stretching this Thanksgiving dinner out as long as we could. We were on the threshold of the Arctic winter. In these latitudes the winters could be grim. So a good lively session of eating, drinking—*repeat, drinking!*—and shooting the bull would be something we could all look back on with pleasure, and carry along with us into whatever adventures were in store for us. If any friction had developed between any of us along the way, I wound up, though I hoped it hadn't, this was as good a time as any to erase it.

"Sure," shouted Swede, "let's bury the hatchet—only not in anybody's head! Though I wouldn't mind a go at that Luciano!" He gave a yawp of derision.

"All right then," I said; "bombs away!"

For the next three hours we alternated between a terrific hubbub and a wonderful concentration of man-sized eating and drinking. The brandy and Dunn's wine went round after round. Dunn looked surprised and pleased at the constant demands for seconds, thirds, even fourth and fifth helpings.

Suddenly Berkeley remarked that it was 6:30, and it appeared to him that things were quieting down a little. While he and Swede were still in good shape—their drinking capacities now seemed to be immeasurable—some of the others were showing signs of fading away. Berkeley thought we should take a nose count, see if anyone needed help.

There were some casualties—one curled up on the library floor, with an Audubon book about birds tucked under his head. Two young roisterers knelt beside one of the bathtubs, their chins carefully holding them in place. Dunn snored

contentedly on the kitchen floor, comforted no doubt by the presence inches from his nose of the skeleton of one of the geese. One man had crawled part way under the ping-pong table and was sleeping deeply, a tall glass of brandy miraculously unspilled clutched firmly in one hand.

It seemed a good idea to take the alarm clock with me up to the Village Hill outpost. I set it to ring in an hour. When it did so I set it to ring in another hour. And so on and so on through the night. On the hour, every hour, I called the radio station, giving them the all clear. Once I rang steadily for ten minutes before getting an answer. At any other time I'd have given the guard sixteen kinds of unshirted hell. To-night I didn't mention it. This was Thanksgiving Day, what was left of it—what was left of us!

In a few days the ice pack would lock us in its cold embrace. Tonight Thanksgiving wrapped about us like a soft blanket.

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Chapter Ten

ONE night, eight days after our memorable Thanksgiving dinner, excited reports rang in from two outposts on the south side of the island about a bright light out to sea—far, far out. Taking the azimuth bearings from the stations, orienting them on the master map in the library, I found they agreed. The light showed at the northwest end of St. George Island.

With my own eyes I'd seen the natives evacuated from St. George. Had the submarine worked around to putting a party ashore there? I directed the outposts to keep watching.

By now the water south of St. Paul was dotted with ice floes. The ice pack was creeping steadily down on us from the north. I estimated that the area between the two islands would be frozen over solid in a matter of days.

Though the day guards maintained the watch, nothing showed. Full darkness brought reports again—lights in the same area. I was stumped. Their position was out-of-the-way rather than in the village area.

I encoded a message for Dutch Harbor:

LIGHTS SIGHTED TWO NIGHTS IN SUCCESSION ON ST GEORGE ISLAND STOP LATEST KNOWLEDGE I HAVE ST GEORGE DESERTED STOP

A reply came in two hours:

ALL CIVILIAN PERSONNEL ST GEORGE EVACUATED STOP NO MILITARY PERSONNEL THERE STOP DO YOU HAVE TRANSPORTATION PROCEED ST GEORGE TO INVESTIGATE STOP

The word went back:

HAVE FIFTY FOOT OPEN MOTOR LAUNCH BUT BERING SEA ROUGH IN NOVEMBER STOP SCATTERED ICE FLOES BETWEEN THE TWO ISLANDS WITH SOLID ICE PACK NORTH OF ST PAUL STOP WILL ATTEMPT TO REACH ST GEORGE TOMORROW STOP

Knowing there was no danger from this direction now, that afternoon I called in all outposts from our north side. They were glad to be called in; with increasingly cold weather life in the rude huts we had contrived to build was somewhat rugged.

I asked for volunteers to go across to St. George with me the next day. Everyone in the place offered to go.

I explained that it would be rough and dangerous. In fact if I didn't have to they'd never find me going on the trip! I selected Berkeley and Swede to go—three men were plenty to risk on this deal! If the wind came up, we stood a good chance of not getting back here all winter; any stiff breeze would jam the ice pack down between the islands in short order. I let the others know that I appreciated their willingness to give me support; at any rate they could make up a detail to get the launch ready for the job.

The oil tanks were filled, and a couple of drums of fuel oil lashed to the sides of the boat in such a way that they couldn't roll. A couple of fifteen-gallon casks of fresh water and a half-dozen cases of C rations were put aboard; the lubricating oil was checked and an auxiliary five-gallon can of it put aboard too. I thought that ought to do it.

The three of us rolled into the sacks early that night; I intended to leave at daybreak.

By the time we got down on the rock the wind seemed to have lessened from the previous day. I counted on it too soon. The minute we left the protection of the headland we

began to get it rough. Five miles out from shore I saw that we'd never make it. Bucking the wind we took the seas over the bow. With the launch cruising at half speed we were shipping so much water that no matter how fast you pumped, the bilges couldn't be kept clear. Only one decision was possible. I yelled that we'd go back. I had on two pairs of mittens and my hands felt as though they were frozen. Swede's pants were split across in two places—spray had formed an ice cake on them. I caught snatches of ribald references to Swede's pink cheeks. The pumping might warm Berkeley and Swede up a little, but though they were taking it with fine good humor, they couldn't avoid being just about frozen too.

Three of the detachment had noticed us turning back and were on the dock. They asked derisive questions having to do with our having gone soft, and we all laughed. We left them to get the launch up out of the water, and clumped up to the hotel like robots in our frozen clothing.

In dry clothing we gulped hot black coffee in the kitchen. It burned the lining of your mouth but warmed you up, going down. I was glad I had some stuff to check and so could hug a stove for a few hours.

When I began to feel human again, I went to the radio station and sent a message to Dutch:

ATTEMPT TO REACH ST GEORGE UNSUCCESSFUL STOP MOTOR LAUNCH ALMOST SWAMPED PERSONNEL NEARLY FROZE STOP HAVE YOU ANY PLANES STOP

There was a brisk reply from the Harbor:

PROCEED ST GEORGE AND INVESTIGATE AT ALL COSTS STOP IMPERATIVE THIS STATION KNOW OF ALL ACTIVITIES YOUR AREA STOP

When I finished decoding, Sergeant Steichen cocked an eyebrow, remarking that as Dutch Harbor wanted to know *all* we might tell them about the booze.

My mind was on more serious things. We were going to have to make the trip, notwithstanding its foolhardiness under present conditions and the real prospect of disaster to personnel. If a williwaw hit us out there, we would be done for.

The radio operator watched me with interest. He asked me what I was going to do. There could be only one answer. Try again, five o'clock tomorrow morning. He shook his head and mumbled something about being lucky—the only thing he knew anything about was radio.

I passed on the instructions to the detachment at supper. I was impressed by the sudden burst of indignation from Dunn. If we left at that hour it would be pitch black, we wouldn't be able to see half the ice floes out there, likely we'd smack up on one of them, sink the boat and ourselves with it. What kind of sons of bitches were they down there at Dutch Harbor anyhow?

It meant more to me than just words. I thought, This is real loyalty, a lot more than just words. It made me feel lucky.

I outlined the plan to hook up a searchlight to the storage batteries in the boat and keep one man in the bow for a lookout. I'd make the party four this time instead of three. I figured that we should make the early start because the wind usually moderated in the night and only came up again with the sun. If we got a break, we could make St. George in four hours. The last few days the prevailing wind had been from the south. If we made it over all right, and the wind didn't change, we'd have the wind with us for the trip back. I asked for another volunteer. Jim Acree remarked

that everybody'd like to go if there was any chance of making it, so I'd better do the picking. All right, I said, I'd pick him.

Van Meter was in there as usual with his skeptical figuring. If it was Japs, they'd see us while we were still miles out, be waiting for us with machine guns. He made a bull's-eye on the spittoon. What he couldn't figure out was what they were using nowadays for brains down at Dutch Harbor.

I pointed out that Dutch Harbor might have considered that—or might not; anyway we had our instructions so getting machine-gunned was a chance we had to take. I took an offhand look around to see whether the volunteers felt like reneging. No indication of it.

I explained that I figured we'd strike the coast of St. George a little this side of the spot where the lights were seen, then creep along till we found the source. We would take the Browning and a couple of cases of ammo. I didn't feel much like defending Dutch Harbor; but I had to say it looked to me that they must be really short of planes, otherwise would they leave this up to us? They knew as well as we did the Bering in November was no place and time to be fooling around in an open boat.

Van Meter let it be known with some assorted oaths that he had no such good opinion. In words so fierce that they were comical he painted a picture of some second lieutenant parked on his duff, framing radiograms that would show us who was who.

"There will be a slight intermission for general bitching," I laughed. No encouragement was needed. They made it plain and fancy and all unprintable. And at five in the morning the four of us left on schedule for St. George.

As we pulled away from the dock, Van Meter inquired, helpfully, who would be in charge on St. Paul if we didn't get back. It struck me comically. I yelled back that they could fight it out among those left. They'd find the code at

the radio station. They could message Dutch Harbor for instructions—and happy landings!

The searchlight rigged up by Van Meter from an old auto headlight worked fine. There was a mere whisper of a breeze. I thought, For once the weather is going to be on our side.

Berkeley stayed up in the bow watching for ice. The stars were clear, millions of them. We had put on as many layers of clothes as we could carry and still move. It seemed colder than the day before, but if we didn't get soaked, we ought to get along all right.

I reminded Berkeley not to use the light any more than he could help. Full daylight wouldn't be until about ten o'clock. If we could avoid being spotted we ought to make shore easily before it was light.

At eight o'clock, dead ahead of us, clear and bright—a light! It was Swede who figured it out first—a freighter, a big one.

Berkeley took a look through binoculars and reported no one on deck. If it were American, Dutch Harbor would have told us.

To minimize noise I cut down the Diesel. I picked out a small cove not far from where the freighter was anchored, and we made for it, barely crawling along.

We were almost in place to drop anchor when a searchlight raked our vicinity. Closer and closer it came to us—then it swept right past us! *My God, what a relief!* A thin arm of land jutted between us and the sea, and we scooted inside. It hid us safely. We could be damned thankful the launch didn't have a mast.

Swede dropped the anchor cautiously over the side. All of us were panting. I decided to leave Acree with the launch while we reconnoitered. He wasn't any too pleased; what was he supposed to do if we didn't show up again?

If we didn't show up before morning, I directed, he should

head back just before daybreak for St. Paul. I wasn't worried—I thought we were going to get through, but in case we didn't, as soon as he got back have a message encoded to Dutch Harbor, explaining everything.

There was an uncomfortable expression on Acree's face, but he said quite casually for us to take it easy, not risk our necks too much, he'd see us. . . .

We let ourselves down into the life raft. We got ashore with a few strokes of the paddle. Pulling the raft far up on the beach out of reach of the tide or inquisitive eyes, we began creeping warily along the boulder-strewn beach. I noted that the freighter's searchlight was poking around the sea off to the westward now.

There was a little knoll on a line with the freighter. From the far side we could see without being seen. The crest was a clutter of volcanic boulders—they looked like a setting of prehistoric birds' eggs—and we found a place in among them where we could survey the situation and, if necessary, make a getaway.

The morning light came up, like footlights on a stage setting, and suddenly the freighter stood out clearly. No flag, no name, no number. But it looked like a Liberty-type cargo vessel.

It would be a miracle if they hadn't picked up the thumping of our Diesel. Any minute I expected to see a boat launched, an investigating party coming ashore to look for us.

Swede sighted a figure in the wheelhouse, but he couldn't make out the features, whether it was a Jap.

All of a sudden Berkeley gave a gasp. Two figures had stepped on deck from a hatch. "Women!" said Berkeley in a loud whisper.

I didn't believe it. Neither did Swede. But we were wrong and Berkeley was right. They were women, all right. What's more, they were Russian women! It was a relief that at least

they weren't Japanese. I had heard of Russian cargo ships using women as deck hands, but I never took much stock in it. Swede was all for going out immediately to visit.

We watched for half an hour. Then a gong rang—a huge clamor—and the crew mustered on deck. There was no question about its being a Russian ship. At least in the European theater they were still our allies, so I gave the word. We scrambled out of our hiding place and walked down to the beach. Their lookouts spotted us in less than a minute. There was a lot of scurrying around; some of the crew ducked inside, came on deck again carrying guns. I noted that two machine guns were hauled around and placed in position to cover us.

We waited at the water's edge. A dory swung overside, came in rapidly. One man stood in the bow, aiming a submachine gun at us. The keel grated and squealed on the gravel, and he jumped out and hustled over to us. "American?" he said in a big bushy voice.

"American," I said. "Who are you?"

He shifted the gun to his other hand, lowered it. He explained that they were the Russian freighter *Sophie Turkov*. He was the first officer. In a crude sort of way he seemed good-natured.

I said, What was a Russian vessel doing in this locality?

Rudder damage, he said, stop made for repairs. He wanted to know if we lived on this island. There wasn't much point in being cagey; a submachine gun settles any doubts fast. I explained that we had seen their lights from St. Paul, thought maybe Japs were making a landing here, we came to see. "No Japs—we looked!" he shouted with a laugh that would carry across the steppes. He looked around. The deck watch had reported noise of a motorboat two hours ago; where was our boat? He added, laughing again, that he thought the deck watch had had a vodka dream.

I admitted that we'd probably been heard all right and that the searchlight had almost picked us up. I jerked my head to indicate that the launch was anchored just around the point.

He invited us aboard the vessel—the captain would like to see us.

I figured for one thing that we ought to go, get an idea of the setup for possible future reference. And I had a curiosity to see the ship at close hand. I accepted; Berkeley went to pick up Acree and bring the launch around to the side of the vessel. Swede and I got into the dory.

The crew was lined up at the rail when we pulled up to the boat falls and a rope ladder. It struck me as a strange-looking crew in more ways than one.

Swede couldn't get over the idea of the women. They weren't very much on looks. They had huge shoulders, big waists, arms like pistons, and they made up about half the entire crew. Later on, the first mate happened to remark that there was room in Russia's merchant marine only for the largest, most powerful women.

As we arrived on deck the first officer started talking in a low, guttural tone to a huge, burly man. I decided he must be the captain, which was correct. Motioning us to follow, our pal led us rapidly along the deck to what seemed to be the officers' mess. After we were seated, he let out a yell. It sounded like the bull of Bashan. A woman mess attendant bustled in. He rapped out Russian words to her; she ducked her head respectfully, hurried out again.

The officer seated himself near the captain at the head of the table. He explained to me that they thought all the islands in the Pribilof group were unoccupied, but when their radio operator reported loud signals every day, they sent a party ashore to see if anybody was on St. George.

There was nobody there, they determined, but the captain wanted to know if the inhabitants were still on St. Paul.

Allies or no allies, I hesitated to answer questions. I said casually that civilians had been evacuated, but American soldiers were in charge of the island.

"Many soldiers?" said the mate, on what I took to be instruction by the captain.

"Enough," I said. Nothing in my orders said I had to take Russians into my confidence. "Couple of thousand." It would give them something to think about.

The mate looked surprised. He sputtered to the captain in Russian. The captain kept saying things in a tone that sounded to me insistent. I made up my mind they wouldn't get any more information.

The woman mess attendant bustled back with a big pot of tea—black as sin—thick chinaware cups, and two quart bottles. The mate asked us genially if we'd like a drink of vodka I didn't look around at the men with me. Their horse sense would tell them to look out for dynamite. I indicated that we'd be very pleased. He barked at the mess attendant, and she handed around the tea and the liquor. The cold was still in our bones—we could stand a stiff drink—but the size of the cups made me nervous. These weren't the kind of people I felt like taking the chance of insulting.

The mate roared that he was going to give a toast. It was a rough one. "Captain say kill all Germans!" With that they threw their drinks down their throats, and a trifle more cautiously we followed suit.

"Same to the Japs!" I replied on the spur of the moment, taking another mouthful. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed Swede. Nothing cautious about him. He was taking one hell of a swig.

Things happened to his face suddenly—it contorted in an expression of excruciating amazement. With a strangling gulp

he fought for air. Reaching over, I thumped him a couple of times on the back. Tears ran down his face. He choked and gasped.

The Russians looked pleased. This was a tribute to the potency of their hospitality. I explained to Swede it was only the juice of potatoes—run through a few extra times, just to make sure it could walk alone! Swede gasped that pretty soon he wouldn't be doing much walking.

Just then there was a loud bump outside. The noise rang out, for the vessel was anchored, her engines still. I jumped up. It must be the launch. Berkeley had never run it; now that I thought of it, neither had Acree. We went on deck to investigate. Casually, feigning innocent interest, I remarked that their vessel resembled a Liberty ship.

That was right, they assured me; and this was lend-lease cargo they had on board too.

Out of Seattle, I presumed?

Out of Seattle. The captain had brought along his mug of vodka and took a complacent pull on it.

I surmised they were bound for the Kamchatka peninsula. From the way he nodded it could have meant anything. Again I had a feeling of disturbance. These people were very interested in information, not interested in giving much in exchange. . . .

The launch had made a lot of noise but no damage. Berkeley and Acree were invited into the officers' mess; instructions were bellowed at the attendant to serve them. We sat around and drank, watchfully because now the mate, prodded by the captain, was really asking questions, about the whole Alaskan area; Pribilofs, Aleutians, St. Matthew Island, the Bristol Bay sector. I was beginning to feel pretty good—but not good enough to loosen up and tell anything that would be much use to them. In fact I amused myself by telling them some things that were downright misleading.

I'd have said it couldn't happen, but in about a couple of hours we began to get tired of it, even the plenteous liquor. I got to my feet, announced that we had to be leaving. It was quite a long way back—we wanted to make it before the weather turned. No use taking the risk of getting stuck out here all winter. I thanked them for the refreshments. I decided on the spur of the moment that it might be good tactics to invite them to visit us if they came by that way. If I didn't they might think something fishy was going on, and come anyway. I still didn't have their curiosity about the islands figured out, but one thing was sure; if they accepted our invitation, they wouldn't get to see any more than we wanted them too.

But the mate said they didn't have time. The rudder was fixed; they were leaving in the morning. I got just a sense that he wanted me to ask where they were bound for—so I didn't.

When we were crossing the deck, I noted that there was a full cargo of American-made jeeps and trucks, and barrels of Diesel oil and gasoline stored in every available inch of deck space. I thought wryly, one fully loaded Russian ship—compliments of the American taxpayers. How many more were roaming the seas? And for what ultimate use?

We got into the launch and headed back for St. Paul. The Russians watched us out of sight, grinning and waving and gabbing among themselves. Swede nursed his head and moaned about his lost opportunities with the ladies of the crew.

The more important thing was that the sea was still calm. We didn't realize how lucky we were, until it turned out that that was the last calm day before the ice pack clamped down on both islands.

The detachment listened to our account of a Russian freighter but wouldn't believe the part about the women

deck hands. When Swede made anatomical gestures with his hands, they believed him even less. Only Van Meter was willing to admit that it might just be possible. He had heard, too, that the Russian merchant marine used women deck hands. He added a vivid opinion as to what they were probably like.

"Like hell!" snorted Swede, launching into an inspired description of their looks and physical charms. He even described how they'd sat on our laps while we drank vodka and told stories. He leered around at his luckless friends, winking and smacking his mouth. This was too much for Van Meter; in considerable detail he gave his opinion that Swede was full of guano.

Swede dwelt on the qualities of vodka as a drink. It was calculated to burn out your bearings, but of course that didn't matter to a good drinker. . . .

I offered the opinion that he'd made pretty much of a pig of himself in a short time, but he said he only saw two bottles and wanted to make sure he got his share in case there wasn't any more. Besides, he figured this was just some strong kind of beer. . . .

As any argument usually did, it all reminded Swede of a story, about a Russian wedding he went to one time in Fairbanks. Had he ever told us? Everybody was feeling good because we had got back safely. No, Swede had never told us about the Russian wedding. Tell us now. I can't remember all the details, but the story went something like this.

The wedding had been a very nice affair. The groom was a big shot in the Fairbanks Russian colony. Two marriage crowns were brought up from the Russian church in Sitka for the occasion. Wonderful workmanship, beautiful design. The groom's crown had a miniature of Jesus on it, the bride's a miniature of the Virgin Mary. The crowns were overlaid with filigree, silver and gold.

Someone wanted to know if they weren't pretty heavy to wear on your head. Swede explained that you didn't wear them; throughout the ceremony another couple held the crowns over the heads of the bridal couple. The ceremony took two hours.

Then came the party. Swede swore they started out drinking whisky and vodka and wound up drinking grain alcohol mixed with honey and rum. The rum, he informed us solemnly, was a hundred and fifty proof, the grain alcohol ran around a hundred and eighty!

"Many survivors?" inquired Van Meter.

Not many, Swede admitted. He personally played it safe, stopping while he could still see. Besides, he wanted to find out what would happen next.

What did? The best man got so drunk he had to be put to bed. Then the bride became the worse for wear and had to go to bed too. Too drunk to notice, she crawled into a bed that was already occupied. Then the bridegroom noticed she was missing, and began looking for her.

At the moment Swede happened to be watching a Russian girl trying to balance a glass of the weird mixture on her nose while she bent over backward, trying to touch her palms to the floor. She'd lost ten glasses in a half hour but she was still game, though damp. Suddenly there was a yell from the bedroom—the door flew open—a procession of people naked as jay birds poured through the room. The best man was in the lead, trying to get away from the bridegroom. He was having a hard time, because the bridegroom had him by the hair with one hand and was beating him over the head with his wife's girdle with the other. The bride? She was close behind, yelling at the top of her lungs that twelve men had all been trying to sleep with her. And the Russian girl, trying to do the trick with the glass? She was just going to succeed

when this whole conga line hit her square in the caboose—everyone going down for the count.

It was a good story, even if Swede didn't know exactly how it ended. Figuring that the cops were about due to quiet things down, he beat it before anybody else got their clothes torn off and he got accused of rape. He heard later—when he left, they were all scrambling around in the middle of the floor like a mess of scorpions—that someone pulled open the door and dragged someone else outside to finish the fight. It was forty below zero, and they didn't have any clothes on, so they shook hands and hustled back inside for a drink.

It struck me that I had better go and get a report out, get the Dutch Harbor brass off the anxious seat. "Off the what?" yawped Swede, happily making a noise, very loud, very indelicate.

I sent the message:

INVESTIGATED LIGHTS ON ST GEORGE ISLAND STOP FOUND RUSSIAN FREIGHTER NAME SOPHIE TURKOV ANCHORED THERE FOR RUDDER REPAIRS STOP

Yawning, I went back to the hotel to hit the sack.

Chapter Eleven

THE grinding monotony of the Arctic winter was upon us. For the next few months we would have a steady diet of shrieking winds and driving snow. The winds could work on your nerves like a file.

There was no outpost duty. There was no need for it; the Pribilofs held us in ice-locked protective custody.

It was constantly on my mind that Dutch Harbor had not seen to it that we got mail before we were locked in by the winter. I planned for maintaining a daily work roster, down to the last trivial details, which in themselves could take up only a few minutes of a man's time. In this grim environment idle hands could breed dangerous mischief.

The fires were kept burning in the wooden tank house above the village so the water supply didn't freeze. To maintain the temperature above the freezing point, stoking went on continually—a means of keeping four men relatively occupied throughout the twenty-four hours. Firing had to be done with considerable care; the coal stoves used by the natives were old and full of cracks. Also the roads were soon drifted over, and the men traveled the short distance to the pumping plant on foot. We dumped the garbage from the hotel only once a week, but weather conditions made the chore a full-scale Arctic expedition, and we had to pick our time. Swede would take the bulldozer and plow out the quarter-mile stretch of road from the hotel to the edge of the cliff over which we dumped the garbage. The balance of the detachment loaded up the truck and battled a way through snow that usually was new-drifted. More often than not

Swede hooked a chain on the truck bumper and towed it back to the hotel. Driven by the relentless winds, snow covered any path in minutes.

Even though we were locked in we couldn't afford not to be on our toes. About three weeks after the investigation trip over to St. George something happened that shook us up and kept us that way for some days.

One morning six of the detachment were loafing around the library, center of our community life. The usual bitching was progressing at a comfortable pace; a few of the men were reading old magazines or Fish and Wildlife publications when—there was a sudden thunder of airplane motors. Out of the north, flying at about five-hundred feet and seemingly traveling wide open—four four-motored bombers! They whooshed by so fast that no one made out any markings.

I cranked the telephone box sharply for the radio station. Sergeant Steichen was on duty. "Send this to Dutch Harbor—no time to code—as follows: Four four-motored bombers passed over this station at 1027 heading south. Stop. No identifying markings seen. Stop. Looked like B-17's. Stop."

I told Steichen to read it back to me, which he did.

Whatever Dutch Harbor knew or learned about the visitation was too important to impart to their St. Paul observers; my message went unacknowledged.

Indirectly the incident became useful to us, providing the basis of a running gag of the more unconventional type. It hit a definite low in humor, but as they helped time to hang less heavy on the collective hands, such things had a constructive value.

As it happened Sergeant Gates of the weather-station detachment was sitting near a window in the library facing north when the planes sped over. Everybody was surprised to see him leap from his chair and dive headfirst through

the window. He landed in a snowdrift. The men crowded around. What ailed Gates?

He stood in snow almost to his waist, his arms dangling awkwardly, his legs braced apart, on his face a look of dismayed indecision.

I asked him what the hell was the matter. Was he hurt? I couldn't see any marks on him.

He mumbled something—it sounded like, "Nothing like that."

Standing there in that clumsy position, he looked pretty foolish; we couldn't make out what was the matter. He shifted his weight slightly. A wincing expression crossed his face. He began stammering out an explanation.

He had been reading something absorbing—he had forgotten that he needed to go to the toilet....

A guffaw began running around among the men. This might be as good as one of Swede's big lies. Gates finished his uncomfortable story—when the planes went over, the noise startled him so that he jumped out the window and—well, we might as well know—his bowels moved.

The roof blew off. We laughed till the tears ran down our faces. Gates went on standing there, cramped, ludicrous.

The library was warm, the snow was cold. He waddled for the door like a duck, making a beeline for the bathroom, the pack following at his heels. He rushed in, slammed the door, locked it. One or two of the men beat on the door. Did the poor little boy want any help, getting off his nasty dirty clothes?

We heard him muttering in helpless rage, "Go to hell, go to hell!" Someone offered to get him an extra supply of paper; he'd better clean up good, the detachment couldn't stand for anyone packin' a big stink.

Van Meter offered to get a new pair of pants from Gates's room. Someone else recalled seeing a supply of cotton down

in the warehouse and volunteered to stitch him up some diapers. "Lots easier to wash, next time. . . ."

Inside, Gates cursed doggedly. "To hell with all of you. Go to hell. Get the son-of-a-bitchin' hell away from that door. To hell with you. Go to hell—I'll—"

"You'll what, Gates? You'll move 'em again?" Someone bleated melodramatically in a falsetto, "Oh, no—not that! Not that!"

Throughout the afternoon at intervals someone in the library would recall the look on Gates's face and let out a yawp of helpless laughter.

At supper Swede fired a fresh broadside. He and Berkeley had made a bet, and Gates was the only man who could settle it. Gates regarded them suspiciously.

It was Berkeley's contention that Gates's brain moved first, his bowels second. Swede held that the bowels moved first. . . .

"Go to hell," said Gates moodily.

Berkeley took him in hand like a rebellious child. This was of scientific interest. Did Gates want to hold science back? They were thinking of writing up a little report—sending it down to the medical officer for his research file. File on reflexes, y' know; human reflexes were a mighty important subject. So—well, Gates himself could appreciate—they had to ascertain which moved first—brain or bowels?

Gates remarked bitterly, "Jesus, but you guys are funny." He slammed down his knife and fork, flung himself up out of his chair. Berkeley shook his head disapprovingly. The idea of a man deliberately withholding valuable information!

Van Meter put in that it was Quartermaster information too. He had it on good authority, the Army had a big problem whenever green troops went under fire. Guys got that bowel trouble right off. The Quartermaster's department had to be ready to furnish new pants.

Berkeley persisted. This was the scientific part of the deal: if the bowels moved first, it was a body reaction. It was a patriotic duty to supply the information; in turn Swede and Berkeley could do their patriotic duty, turning in the data.

Gates paused at the doorway. The whole God-damned bunch of them could burn in hell, he gritted out, his face brick red, his eyes glistening with tears of rage.

Most of the time nowadays the weather was so foul that we were thrown back on activities such as studying up on the birds wintering on the island. The snow buntings—black and white, with a wash of rusty brown, and traveling in large flocks—afforded a relieving touch to the otherwise cheerless landscape. They darted and swooped about the tundra throughout the bleak winter days.

Twice we spotted a huge white Arctic owl. With its large tufted ears and phenomenal wingspread, we could only wonder why this stranger had chosen to wander out to the middle of Bering Sea. When Swede first saw it, it was feeding on a snow bunting. I wondered why the devil Swede didn't kill it; owls as big as that could use up a dozen buntings for just one meal. I didn't like to think of having all our snow buntings killed.

Swede said he tried sneaking up on him to do just that; but before he could get in position, the owl spotted him and flew off.

I had an idea. I posted this announcement on the bulletin board:

"*REWARD:* One day's K.P. in exchange for one white Arctic owl."

Everyone pitched in, trying for the reward. But the owl was too wise for us. You couldn't get close enough for a decent shot. The reward went begging.

I made a note that two bald eagles remained on St. Paul

all that winter, living in the vicinity of Zapadni Point. Also a number of gyrfalcons haunted Reef Point; evidently they lived on stray ducks and sea gulls, with smaller birds for dessert. Swede was amazed at their hunting technique. They were fast as lightning. The instant they sighted quarry they folded back their wings and plummeted straight down. The quarry was already as good as dead.

Chapter Twelve

THE men got around to making Berkeley's enthusiasm for eating the butt of a practical joke. One evening most of us were minding our own business in the library, reading or playing cards, when Berkeley came bouncing down the stairs as mad as a hornet. What he wanted to know was what son of a bitch had been fooling around with his grub.

We knew he was referring to his private larder, but to have some fun with him Swede inquired with a suspicious innocence, "What grub?" It was only three hours since dinner; Berkeley had stowed away enough grub for at least three men.

Berkeley disclosed that there had been a box of crackers and a ten-pound can of cheese under his bed. Some son of a bitch with a mighty distorted sense of humor had hollowed out big gouges in it and in them planted pats of—Berkeley's tone was outraged—reindeer droppings! What did we think of that? And who was the so-and-so who'd done it? Berkeley wanted an answer.

Swede pointed out, with a disarming twinkle, that he must be mistaken; it would be rat droppings. No, said Berkeley wrathfully, too big to be from rats. Besides, he had seen no rats on this island. Well, Swede would be willing to lay a small bet that it would turn out to be rats. Other animals on St. Paul grew big—why not rats?

Berkeley wasn't satisfied but he saw that, at least for the moment, he was up against a blank wall.

A few days later, happening to step into the powerhouse on an errand, I surprised Swede and Van Meter engaged on

a peculiar project. From the area where the reindeer herd ranged they had brought back about a half bushel of reindeer droppings. These they were first soaking in water, then remolding into large pellets. They had even gone to the trouble of making molds for them out of bearing metal, so they could set them. They let me in on the plan. They were going to plant bigger and bigger pellets in that cheese can of his until they convinced him that he was sharing a room with a rat as big as an elephant.

It was childish business, but it would be useful in relieving monotony—for all but Berkeley.

Three days later Berkeley came leaping down the stairs, holding in his hand four of the pellets, about an inch in diameter. What the hell kind of animal left droppings as big as these, he wanted to know. He'd never seen anything like them in all his life.

It just meant, Swede volunteered, that the rat was getting its growth. He added the advice that the rat must like the same kind of cheese as Berkeley; better look out, the rat might take a nibble out of him some night, too.

I examined the exhibit with seriousness. Yes, sir, it certainly looked like rat droppings to me. Maybe the rat was suffering from piles. Berkeley glared at me and around the room at the others. City born and bred, he was confused. Mumbling and muttering, he went off to his room.

A week passed. This time when he stomped downstairs he was rolling around in the palm of his hand three pellets the size of ping-pong balls. "I looked at these through my reading glass!" he announced fiercely. "It's animal dung all right—but what kind of animal!"

Swede peered with curiosity. Yes, sir, that rat was sure gettin' to be a whopper. Couldn't be coming in through any hole—must use the door. Say! Maybe it lived in the attic—it had a door leading to the bedrooms. Swede started off

provocatively to inspect the situation. The rest of us tagged along. I remembered noticing a couple of baseball bats, over there in the corner of the library—we'd better take them along in case we encountered this king-size creature.

As we neared the attic, Swede admonished us in a theatrical whisper to take it easy. He'd ease open the door and shoot in the light—we might surprise the rat.

I knew the joke was nearing some sort of a climax. But when Swede shone his flashlight into that cluttered attic, I was actually startled by the horrible spectacle suddenly revealed. Caught squarely in the beam was what appeared to be a truly enormous rat—eyes as big as saucers glaring with a reddish glow—and the whole size of the thing was appalling!

Berkeley backed out with a rush, grabbing the door and jerking it shut with a tremendous slam, and heading down the stairs at a dead run. "I'm getting my M-1 rifle!" he hollered over his shoulder. "That thing's big enough to gnaw on a man!"

Swede leaned weakly against the door, laughing so hard I thought he'd fall down. I took the flashlight from him, opened the door carefully, and took another look, shining the light. Swede and Van Meter had performed a masterly job!

Over a wooden framework they had draped strips of reindeer hide. Apparently the eyes were glass reflectors, scrounged from the taillights of trucks on the island. The thing even had big whiskers—thin copper tubing hammered to pointed ends.

Berkeley came leaping up the stairs with his rifle. Had we heard the damned thing moving around while he was gone? We said we hadn't. But did he think that rifle would be big enough to stop a rat this size?

He paused, considering. Well, I had hunted considerable game, what did I think?

I was dubious. This Army ammo. was solid stuff, it didn't

spread out like the lead bullets people generally used for big stuff.

He was stumped. We couldn't leave this monster to run loose—some night he'd eat someone alive!

It was too much for Swede and Van at that point. They exploded in laughter. Berkeley stared at them. Light dawned. The bastards! They'd been playing a trick on him—but not quite as big a one as they thought—a while back he'd begun to smell a rat—that is—

"You sure did!" howled Swede, leaning against the door frame for support. "And saw him too—take another look!"

Looking at them doubtfully, Berkeley leaned past them, peered along the flashlight beam into the attic.

"Sons o' bitches!" he remarked, but reluctantly his mouth began to curl in a grin. Everybody roared. Being essentially a good-humored guy, pretty soon Berkeley was laughing as hard as any of us.

From time to time we made use of the safety valve of trips to one of the outposts, spending the night and returning the next day. I regarded it in one way as a good idea; in another it was a hazardous one. The winds could attain a terrifying velocity; on a really bad day in a driving snow you couldn't see your own feet. Storms blew up in seconds; one of my constant worries was that a party might get caught outside the village and not be able to make shelter, with a very good chance of perishing in the open, or wandering over the edge of a cliff and falling into the sea. I laid down a fixed rule, that the first thing on reaching an outpost was to be a check with the radio station, so we'd know that everyone was safe. The men needed a change now and then from being cooped up. But I sure didn't need any casualties.

One day Appleton and Beach decided to relieve monotony

with a hike along the shore. This was a favored pastime. Every heavy storm washed up stuff out of the sea, sometimes even ivory tusks.

After they had been gone about an hour they came tearing back, to report half of a big bomber lying on the edge of the ice field at Polovina Point. It looked like one of our B-25's.

Had they seen any bodies around? No, but they didn't have binoculars, and the thing was lying about a half mile from shore.

It was too near dark to go out then, but I said we'd make an early start in the morning.

Beach had the duty, but Appleton went with Van Meter and Swede and me to point out the spot.

When we got to where he thought we should be able to see the wreckage, we couldn't see a thing. Appleton looked all around, trying to find something he recognized, but he said it all looked different than it had the day before. After puzzling for a few minutes he figured it out. In the night the ice pack had driven up on the beach, changed the appearance of everything.

The ice pack had been busy, all right. The effect was awesome. Giant ice floes upended a hundred feet into the air, piled every whichway along the shore, in some places driven by the relentless pack far up on the beach. By now, Appleton guessed, wherever the wreckage was, it was ground to splinters.

I figured, though, that whenever they passed along here the patrols could keep an eye out.

A month later at just about that spot a six-foot section of wing tip washed up. Stamped on it in numerous places was the Russian hammer and sickle. Evidently some luckless Russian pilot had come down on the ice pack, either been killed in the crash and dragged under, or died of exposure,

his body destroyed by the grinding of the ice. We kept careful watch for other signs; the winter wore on, but none appeared.

I had not let the detachment suspect it, but for weeks the thought of Christmas Day had been a mounting dread to me. No mail since spring, no prospect of any till the weather eased off; with the coming of Christmas the lack would be magnified. There were signs of it already; these days the bitching contained very little comic relief.

I had the still operating spasmodically so the supply of brandy was good. Dunn was laying his plans for another gigantic feed. I was going to authorize another party similar to the one at Thanksgiving. But the detachment was feeling the approach of a cheerless holiday season and growing correspondingly restless. In the past month the morale of the group as a whole had undergone a definite change. Little arguments over nothing blew up into sharp squalls. Swede stumbled over Godfrey's feet in the library, Godfrey flew into an almost hysterical rage, cursing Swede out of all proportion.... Berkeley sauntered into the kitchen looking for a snack, and Dunn threw a mug at him, narrowly missing his face.... As each incident arose, I tried to settle it without taking sides, without leaving any scars on anyone's tenuously balanced feelings, to be a cause for brooding. Berkeley told me one day that this winter would qualify me for duty in the protocol section of the State Department.

More likely some booby hatch, I thought desperately. Sometimes I got damned mad at guys fighting over nothing.

The shortage of cigarettes didn't help much. I'd got to thinking about that and made a count; we had cartons enough to last about ten days more—if nobody smoked more than five cigarettes a day!

There was something even more serious. All our spare

parts for the power plant had been used up, too. If anything went wrong with the plant now, we'd be off the air.

I wired Dutch Harbor indicating that power-plant parts, cigarettes, and our mail were *musts*. And? The message was not acknowledged. I thought helplessly, When this station goes off the air on account of power-plant failure, they'll wake up to the fact that there's an outpost here for their protection—or was!

A few days after this gloomy survey of our situation we received Christmas greetings from the Commanding General at Dutch Harbor, and this happy disclosure:

POWER PLANT PARTS CIGARETTES AND MAIL WILL ARRIVE ST PAUL BY AIR WITHIN THIRTY DAYS STOP

Christmas Day was less than thirty days away. *Thanks for nothing!*

At supper Swede commented on the fact that he'd looked forward to Christmas in worse places but never with a bunch of long-faced guys such as he saw around here these days. He added that sometimes he thought the more civilized men got the less they were fitted for living in isolation. "The happiest people I ever saw were a bunch of Barren Land Eskimos—they'd never seen a white man before."

"Why, Swede," I laughed, "you surprise me; under that rowdy exterior lurks a philosopher." But he had a point. Sometimes I felt like going out to one of the outpost shacks and setting up housekeeping alone for the rest of the winter. I could trap a few foxes and let these guys fight things out for themselves till spring came.

For the Christmas Day feed Dunn really put himself out. If possible it was even better than the one we had Thanksgiving Day.

The thing that was missing was Christmas spirit. To a man

they came to the table sullen and preoccupied. The only point of agreement seemed to be on getting as drunk as possible in the shortest possible time. It worried me. At Thanksgiving time getting drunk had been all in the interest of good fellowship. Now it was a concentrated expression of cold rebellion against frustration and grievance.

And a thing I had dreaded ever since we arrived on the island had materialized. Once these men had been a unit, one part of the same army. Now, subtly, they were broken up into cliques. The weather-section men worked against the radio section in little, mean ways; the G-2 men grated on the weather men; the air was full of barbs.

All through Christmas dinner Swede, Van Meter, Berkeley, even the hovering cook Dunn, took turns at trying to liven things up. But I noticed that in the thin guise of jokes and banter they managed to get in little digs. We stuffed on the good food, but there was no sign of that hilarious appreciation lavished on Dunn for his Thanksgiving geese and pies. Everybody seemed interested only in getting through with the eating so they could settle down in the library for the really serious drinking.

It didn't take open trouble long to materialize. A couple of the men were banging away at the ping-pong table; the rest were playing cards and drinking, or talking and drinking, when—wham! the lid blew off. I felt it coming even before I heard it. Berkeley, Swede, and I were playing three-handed pinochle.

I recognized the voice without looking around. Sergeant Pierce, of weather. His complaint was that the jokers in G-2 were having it too easy, and from now on the weather section wasn't going to pull any K.P. I looked around. His face was red and belligerent as he waited for reactions to his declaration of independence.

Sergeant Steichen roared in. That went for the radio section too!

I knew I had to deal with this before it got out of hand. I threw down my cards and stood up. "Now just a minute, you guys—" I glanced at Pierce and Steichen— "This happens to be a unit of the U.S. Army and I happen still to be in command of it." I paused for a couple of seconds. "The system we're using now is a good one. For that reason we'll keep right on using it. If any guy has lost interest in eating he is free to drop off the K.P. roster. Otherwise everyone'll take K.P. as usual when his name comes up."

By now Steichen was feeling his muscles. He outlined a method of practical rebellion. The warehouse contained plenty of food—those that didn't intend to do K.P. would cook their own grub. Anyway, it was final; no more K.P. for the radio section. "That's final, Ellsworth."

I told him I was afraid it wasn't quite as final as he would like to think. I tried to make it sound dry, not hot. I mentioned that besides the warehouse there was also a good jail on the island, and I wouldn't hesitate to make use of it for the good of the job. I wanted to reason this out. Both men were in charge of their sections; of all people they should certainly know better than to start a squabble, and in a place like this, furthermore on Christmas Day!

I decided on summary action. Stating that what brandy was left was to be locked up immediately, I directed that as of now they were to do K.P.

It caught them off guard. Steichen sputtered that they couldn't be forced to do K.P. What was more they weren't going to do it. Not any kind of K.P.

I explained that we'd have to see about that. Meantime, here was the key for locking up the brandy.

It was a touchy moment. They eyed me belligerently. Muttering, "Son-of-a-bitching brandy," Pierce picked up a

couple of the jugs. Steichen said nothing but followed suit; they stamped out of the room. In a few minutes I observed them trudging across to the jail, their heads bent against the wind and wagging while, I dare say, they settled between them what kind of a guy the Sarge was.

As luck would have it that was the day when the new K.P. roster was due to be made up. When the time came I posted it on the bulletin board. Sgts. Pierce and Steichen were down for six consecutive days each.

Pierce came a-running. I wasn't going to do this to him, he threatened. Steichen was close on his heels. His threat was to radio headquarters at Anchorage, have them relieve me of command.

Oh, cut it out and don't make me laugh, I advised them. My orders were perfectly simple and plain. I was in charge of this station. Even if they requested it, I didn't expect to be relieved. I gave them a bit of serious advice. What they were trying to pull was mutiny. If they requested that I be relieved, that point would inevitably come up. I didn't believe it was necessary to tell them what happened in cases of mutiny in wartime.

"But," muttered Steichen, now not quite so cocky, "we're noncoms. We wouldn't have to pull K.P. in any big post."

I reminded them that this wasn't a big post. Besides, they were overlooking something. I too was a noncom, I pulled my turn at K.P. the same as everybody else. How about getting it into their heads that in a place like this rank meant nothing, a man was just another man. Had it occurred to them to wonder why I was put in charge in the first place, instead of a commissioned officer?

Both eyed me sharply. They'd been wondering about that, they admitted.

In a place like this, I pointed out patiently, if an officer kept things G.I., the detachment would get so sore at him that

before the winter was over either they'd drive him nuts or go nuts themselves. I wanted them to understand this thing before we all got in hot water. So I told them what the officer who detailed me for the job had said to me. He said he thought I had something that was a rather rare commodity these days, common sense. If I could get by a winter out on St. Paul without killing somebody or getting killed myself that was about all they'd ask of me.

I turned away. Whatever happened now, I'd made my pitch, said everything I could. For a minute I held my breath, wondering which way it was going to go.

"Well—er—we'll change our minds about pulling K.P.," Steichen announced, "if you'll just take our names off that six-day tour of duty. We'll take our regular turn when it rolls around."

I wanted to make an impression on them. I had to, for the good of everybody. I said the roster would have to be left as it was; I couldn't be making up new work rosters every time someone found fault.

They could hardly believe I was going to hold them to the six days apiece. I remarked that, considering the stink they'd kicked up, if I let them off, pretty soon others would start pulling the same line. When I stuck to my decision they'd think twice.

They muttered and grumbled like little boys told to bring in the kindling. I could just as well let it go this once. . . . No, I said simply. When Steichen got back to Anchorage he was damn' sure going to report a lot of things that happened here. That was his privilege.

All of a sudden—it surprised me, too—I got mad. I said loudly that we'd had enough of this tripe; the next time there was any fuss like this I was going to kick some teeth in. I didn't think they'd relish a soup diet for the rest of the winter, and I sure didn't know of any dentist on St. Paul Island.

They wandered away, griping to each other. They did their six days of K.P., but with ill grace and looking pretty hang-dog.

That week the rest of the men watched me speculatively. I thought I'd registered an object lesson; yet sometimes I wondered.

Tension kept on building. I warned myself that unless something developed to improve things I'd better be prepared for a really big explosion.

Two weeks after Christmas I decided I'd better not let things ride any longer. I sent a message down to Dutch Harbor:

URGENTLY NEED REPAIR PARTS FOR POWER PLANT STOP ALSO MAIL AND CIGARETTES STOP

The next day—miracle of miracles!—came the answer:

PLANE ARRIVING YOUR STATION NEXT TEN DAYS STOP

In my opinion Swede and Berkeley were two of the coolest men on the island; I lost no time in getting hold of them. By way of acquainting them with my fears I showed them the radiogram, saying that I thought things on the island had reached a damned dangerous point. The bitching had changed since Christmas to thinly disguised threatened insurrection. Tonight, I said, I would call a meeting of all men on the island. I would give them the word about this plane. In the meanwhile, how long did Swede estimate it would take him to clear the air strip?

He could take a trip out there in the morning and see. I suggested that while he was about it he'd better take along the bulldozer, clear the road as he went. We'd cross our fingers it didn't get closed in again with new snow. One thing

was sure; the road would have to be clear, so the truck could get out to handle the mail.

Swede was no pessimist, but he said quickly, "What mail?" I knew just how he felt. Ten days was an age. Any number of things could change the priority down at Dutch Harbor. Mail could easily go on being just something that we didn't get.

"I think they really mean it this time," I said, hoping not to be let down. "I think we'll get serviced." Berkeley got off a random sarcasm to the effect that if we got as much mail this time as last we wouldn't need the truck out there, somebody's hip pocket would do.

I made them an angry promise. If that plane didn't bring us mail I'd go back on it to Dutch Harbor and personally raise hell till I found out the reason why. Having said this, I shook myself like a dog. Don't ask me why; nerves, I guess. I explained what they already knew—that things up here were as they were because of no mail. And by the way, tonight at the meeting, even though I had this bit of what should be good news, to pick everybody up off the floor, Swede and Berkeley could do me a favor by keeping their eyes open. Things could really pop yet around here. If they should, we wanted to jump in and stop them before they went too far—otherwise somebody was liable to get murdered.

Berkeley commented that the stuff about Pierce and Steichen and the six consecutive days of K.P. hadn't gone down very well with the rest of the men; the two had kept bitching to anybody who would listen. Berkeley added that, in their place, he'd probably have done the same.

I said that, in the situation, it couldn't be helped. I was a pretty easygoing guy as usual, but if I was pushed too far I could sure be hell. Those two better watch their step—they could wind up with worse than six days of K.P.

Swede made a quip. I didn't scare him, he said. I shot

him a hard look. Come to think of it, you could get pretty sick of Swede and his lip too. . . .

"Well," I said bitterly, "all I can say is everybody'd better watch their step. This place isn't gonna blow up in my face if I can help it!"

When the notice had been posted, I heard a lot of grumbling and growling from the direction where the men gathered in little knots. I passed through the hall a couple of times, and they stopped talking or—you could tell—changed the subject. I thought to myself, with anything less than a hell of a lot of good luck this meeting can wind up in a free-for-all.

The men straggled into the library around seven o'clock, grim-faced and unusually quiet. It struck me as ominous that there was none of the usual horseplay.

I took a chance on relieving the tension with one fast swipe. "I had a radiogram from Dutch Harbor today. A plane will be in here sometime within the next ten days. It will bring our mail, cigarettes, and the power-plant parts we need. I suggest you finish up all your letters and drop them in the mail sack here in the corner of the library—the plane will take them out."

"About God-damned time we had mail in here," snarled Steichen. He was staring balefully at me over the heads of the others. "You could have had mail in here at least a couple of times—if you were interested in anything but making yourself a reputation with Dutch. I don't think you half tried."

Louse! I felt like jumping across the room and giving him a good swift punch in the nose. I held onto my temper and went on, "This meeting was called for the purpose of trying to get some of the bellyaching and backbiting off the list. We still have a long time to spend together, and some of you guys seem to be getting cabin fever. If anyone figures he

has a justifiable complaint he should write a letter now to the Alaska Defense Command, and I'll see that it goes out on this plane. I only want to say one thing—if you make a complaint just be sure of your grounds—damned sure."

Steichen let out a sneering laugh. "I think I'll write a letter about the brandy you've been making. The Command'll sure appreciate your runnin' a G.I. still." It sounded like kidding—yet you couldn't be quite certain.

"It's your privilege," I said evenly. "Here's something else everybody might as well know. I've kept a diary of everything that's happened here. That diary is being sent to G-2 headquarters on the plane."

Feet scraped, there were a couple of exclamations of surprise. "You mean to tell us you've been putting down the fact that we've made hooch here?" someone demanded.

"Certainly. The Colonel who is G-2 for A.D.C. is, as I size him up, a capable student of psychology. That's one reason he's got his job, He'll understand the problems of a place like this, the need for a safety valve—which the hooch is."

"Aw, that's a lotta s——," Steichen snapped. "Nobody'd have guts enough—and that goes for you too, Ellsworth—to tell headquarters we're making booze here."

I turned to Berkeley. Reminding him that he knew where I kept the diary, I directed him to go up and bring it downstairs. Also to bring one of those big Manila envelopes. I remarked that I could just as well put the diary in the mail sack now. Then nobody would have occasion for any doubts about what I said.

Berkeley loped off upstairs. I resumed, saying that while we were all gathered here there was something else we might as well get thrashed out. Steichen and Pierce—ever since they'd drawn the extra K.P. they had been generally throwing a monkey wrench into any and every thing they could. I was putting them on notice. It was to stop. Or something

would have to be done that would give them cause really to gripe.

Truculently Pierce wanted to know why they wouldn't react to the unjust treatment I'd handed out. "And the idea of noncoms doing K.P. for the benefit of privates is sure something I never heard of in this man's army."

I asked if he'd ever heard of any former noncoms doing K.P. Well, yes, he had. I reminded him that if he'd pulled the stunt on an officer that they had pulled on me they'd both be former noncoms by now. "In fact—" I paused, teetering on the edge of something that could blow the lid off for sure. I decided to chance it— "if you guys don't straighten up and fly right it might not be too late yet."

I held my breath. Berkeley came in with the diary, kept in loose-leaf form. Pierce and Steichen didn't say a word. I breathed a little easier—a very little. I told Berkeley to read out loud the part about the brandy, then to turn to the part about Thanksgiving.

As he did, if I hadn't been pretty sore at all the fuss, on top of the frustrations of the duty, the tensions of isolation, I'd have busted out laughing at the expression on this face and that one around the room.

"Well," chirped Swede, "I can sure see where we all spend next summer in the stockade at G-2 headquarters."

Van Meter wasn't too worried. More likely, he thought, they might set up a new detachment, put us in as instructors in construction and operation of outpost stills.

I let them know that none of them would get it in the neck, that I was the man who was sticking his neck out. I added bitterly that I seemed to be getting a hell of a lot of thanks for it. I changed the subject. Once more, did anyone else have any bitching that should be heard?

Feet moved, bodies shifted in chairs, a couple of men cleared their throats loudly. But nobody made any speeches.

I said I would consider that the last call for squawks. The main thing now was that in a few days we'd get mail. "Meeting's dismissed." I walked rapidly from the room. Better not to be there to hear any afterthoughts.

The way to the air strip was badly drifted. It took Swede two full days to hack a passable trail. When he got there, a treat met his eyes. Wind had carried off all the snow, the air strip was bare.

Eight days from the time of the first radiogram I got another. I prayed that it wasn't another disappointment. It said:

IS AIR STRIP OPERATIVE STOP PLANE WILL ARRIVE YOUR STATION WITHIN FORTY EIGHT HOURS STOP

I encoded a reply in jig time:

AIR STRIP OPERATIVE HERE STOP DO NOT FORGET MAIL AND CIGARETTES STOP REPEAT DO NOT FORGET MAIL AND CIGARETTES STOP

We settled down to an organized chaos of waiting. There was spontaneous horseplay again, hearty talk, the detachment was making for a milestone at a gallop.

I went around with a load of questions on my mind. What if a storm should blow up? What if the plane should suddenly be needed elsewhere? What if the plane crashed? What if—what if—

I noticed that the bitching was in a generally lighter vein. Berkeley lost a sock, careened through all the bedrooms looking for it, swearing to slit the thief's gullet. He found it behind his bunk, swore with laughter that the thief had returned it stealthily, fearful of the consequences. Dunn

burned a batch of biscuits and swore comically for fifteen minutes. One thing wasn't funny. Godfrey cut his hand at K.P. and practically had hysterics before we stopped the blood and got him properly bandaged. He ate no dinner and reported sick when it was time for him to go on duty.

On the whole, though, I thought we were in good shape. Privately everyone was ticking off the hours till we could expect the plane. Twice I found out that Swede had run the bulldozer out over the road to the air strip again. Not wanting equipment used unless it was absolutely necessary, I said he should have taken it up with me. But I didn't make much of a point of it. Swede handled the bulldozer with the care you'd give a babe in arms; besides, I knew by this time there could be a hell of a lot worse things than a bulldozer out of whack.

The morning of the day we expected the plane every man not on duty climbed into a truck about eleven o'clock and headed for the air strip.

At 12:43 exactly Van Meter hollered in a voice like judgment, "Plane!" The sky was the color of tin. There was a snow squall not very far away. Sniffing I could smell the wind just beginning to turn. "Plane!" roared Van again. He looked like Ichabod Crane, waving those long arms of his.

A C-47 roared up on a slight climb from the south, streaking in. She made her turn, circling the village. The men were jumping up and down, yelling like fiends. I was so relieved over our not being let down again that I just leaned against the front wheel of a truck. You could tell from their faces, the men were sure the mail was here. They just weren't letting themselves doubt it.

The red cinder ash of the strip showed up brightly. All around the edges of it there were ruffled collars of shining snow.

Twice the pilot circled the village, sizing up the runway.

He made his last turn, the glide, touched down, and taxied up to the clot of jumping jacks. The rear door opened, a crew man dropped a ladder, a second lieutenant said in a Texas drawl, "Any of you guys interested in receiving some mail?"

Van Meter drew back in mock surprise. "Mean to say there's mail for us poor bastards?"

The lieutenant laughed. "Who's in charge here?" he said, pulling a book out of the knee pocket of his flying suit. "Cargo manifest to be signed."

A pleasure, I told him, adding that I hoped he had brought everything.

Mail, cigarettes, power-plant parts—was that everything?

Someone yawped that if he gave us the mail and cigarettes he could keep the rest. Swede clamored at the lieutenant to know what he thought of the landing strip.

"Yours?" The pilot let his lanky form down the ladder. "A nice job, son. I been goin' in on lots worse lately." It pleased Swede. He explained that this was the first ship to land on it. If the lieutenant thought it was O.K., then he, Swede, must be as good as he thought he was! He guffawed and someone put in that we all liked that in Swede, his modesty; he was the shy one of the detachment.

You could feel the men relax, expand. I felt good about it, relieved.

The mail came out first. I decided the plane crew had planned it that way; in my own mind I thanked them for it.

After neglecting us for donkey's years Special Services had come through nobly. Twelve cases of cigarettes; four cases of assorted candy bars, ping-pong paddles and balls (we had enough of them), four crates of books and magazines, two cases of toilet soap.... Van Meter hollered, "Swede, honey, you're sure gonna smell pretty from now on!" The collective eye grew larger and brighter as the pile of freight was trans-

ferred from the plane into the trucks backed up to the cargo door. All this—and twenty-eight sacks of mail! How much excitement and joy could men take! I signed the manifest with a flourish.

As I handed it back, the lieutenant said they would push along now. I was just on the point of asking them to come up to the village for an hour; possibly, depending on how I sized up their discretion, for a libation. But their schedule called for leaving immediately.

The C-47 used up less than half of Swede's runway in the take-off. Circling, dipping a wing for good-by, it headed south. Everyone piled into the trucks. We had mail!

We culled the official mail out fast, to be opened later. Everybody was around the mailbags on the library floor, lending willing hands to the sorting. It was a helter-skelter good time—a man would come to a letter addressed to himself, rip it open, read a few lines, stuff it in his blouse pocket, grab up another fistful to sort. . . . We ate dinner three hours late.

Beach was due to go on duty and only had time to sort a small amount of mail. He found a couple of his letters and took them along with him to the radio station. He kept calling back every few minutes to know if any more for him had turned up, especially bearing a certain return address. Beach was the kind of a guy who was easily kidded. In no time he had been convinced that he'd got all the mail there was for him. When he came down after his duty was over, his face was white and drawn. They couldn't hold out on him any longer and handed him a fat pile of letters. He made a mock swing at Van Meter, catching him just enough off balance to topple him backward over the end of a table. Van Meter didn't bother to get up; just pulled another letter out of his pocket and read it, lying there on his back.

I was having a pretty good time with my own haul when

Swede stepped up, nudged me, and told me out of the corner of his mouth to take a look at Godfrey.

Clear over at one side of the room Godfrey was sitting on the floor, an open letter in his hands. He was kind of looking through it instead of at it. I noticed he was shaking like a leaf.

What did Swede suppose was the matter, somebody die? I whispered. The look of Godfrey began to give me the creeps. Swede thought we ought to go over and see about it.

"Godfrey?" I said, but he didn't appear to hear me. Leaning over, I touched his shoulder. He looked up at me—with a stare that was perfectly blank! "Godfrey," I said again, "anything the matter?" His teeth were chattering; his face had a gray, ashy look. I began to be alarmed. "Look, Godfrey, you'd better tell me; maybe I can do something." I reached over, slipped my hand under his arm, pulled him to his feet. Swede slid a chair under him. "Look, Godfrey—" I was scared now. There was something very wrong here. . . .

Godfrey started then to tear up the letter he was holding. But it was as though it required too much strength, strength he didn't have. His hands fell slack, the letter dropped to the floor. I bent over and picked it up. I asked him if I should look at it. Maybe his mother was dead, or his father. Maybe I'd have to get a leave for him—automatically I began wondering how we'd get him off the island.

"If you want to," he said in a queer, dead tone. "It doesn't matter anyhow."

One look at the letter was enough. A real bitch she must be, hitting him right between the eyes. Godfrey's girl had gone and got herself married—some naval ensign, stationed at Bremerton, a supply officer. "It was bigger than either of us—I hope you'll understand, Rod. I'll always have the friendliest feelings toward you. . . ."

My God, I thought, *the fat's sure in the fire now!* Of all

the men in the detachment Godfrey was the most high-strung. From the first he had struck me as tense and moody.

I said anxiously, "Godfrey, I wish there was something I could do. Can I do anything? Can I take the duty for you tonight?"

"It doesn't matter," he muttered.

I had a thought. I told Swede to take the key, go and get Godfrey a drink. The drink made him sick. He tore off upstairs. He didn't come down to supper. I took the duty for him. A couple of times during the night I called up. Swede reported that Godfrey was in his room, the door shut, no sound.

I asked if he had a knife. It didn't seem likely that he'd do anything to himself with a knife; still, you never knew. . . .

Swede didn't think so. I told him to keep an ear peeled, let me know immediately if he heard anything that seemed off. I knew Swede would be as alert as a ferret. He horsed around a lot, but when there was something serious, he was like a rock.

In the morning Berkeley remarked at breakfast that it sure was pleasant to have some new cards for a change; the old ones were so greasy you could fry eggs on them.

I was feeling like a new man myself. It looked as if we had got everything we needed, all at one and the same time.

With a bawdy grin Swede disputed the "everything." Everything, he leered, but—in pantomime he executed his ideas. This touched off a spirited comparison of blondes and brunettes.

"The day a plane brings women in here," I said, "that'll be the day I leave on the same plane—a guy could get killed in the rush!" Swede chided me; life on St. Paul was warping my viewpoint, he said. I pointed out that one woman in a place like this could cause more hell than fifty men. But, yawped Swede, such pleasant trouble!

The men devised various schemes for stringing out the

pleasure of mail. While some read each letter as they came to it, others piled letters from certain individuals separately, and rationed themselves to reading two a day. Berkeley read his as he came to them, but no more than one a day. This, he pointed out, was the same as the postman delivering every day.

The lifting of the tension made everybody feel so good that Pierce and Steichen even came to me, remarked that they'd been heels, and would I like to let bygones be bygones?

"Forget it," I said. I couldn't deny inwardly that I was glad they'd wised up. We still had a lot of winter ahead of us.

I went through the official mail. It included a new set of monthly codes. I had been expecting to start using a new set on the first of each month. Not having had any mail service we'd run out of codes long ago; so there was nothing to do but use the sets over again. The first day I'd done it I had received a sizzling message from Dutch Harbor, telling me to take a look at the calendar and get cracking on the proper code. I took considerable relish in messaging back that because of the fact that no mail had been delivered to us in all the time since our arrival on St. Paul, there were no new sets to use.

As I expected, message unacknowledged. Also, matter dropped.

Wonder of wonders, though, the official mail included a commendation for the whole detachment from the Commanding General Alaska Defense Command. I tacked it up on the bulletin board, remarking as the men clustered around, that nobody could say any longer that nobody loved us.

Van Meter made some rugged comments about the General taking his ease on his duff in an easy chair back in Anchorage. Come to think of it, wonder what brand of whisky the old man was drinking these days. Van remem-

bered that at Fort Richardson he used to run with the old man's orderly, who disclosed that the General's stomach refused anything but Scotch.

Several of the men suggested that the Scotch undoubtedly was no better than our St. Paul Special. Van said he'd had a snort out of the General's bottle one night; as he remembered, it was damn' good—but he kind of liked ours too. That prompted him to make a suggestion. What would I think about breaking out a little this evening? We could call it celebrating the coming o' the mail—as long as we hadn't been able to celebrate Christmas the way we wanted to.

It was a good idea, I decided. I detailed Swede and Berkeley to go down to the jail and bring back three gallons of our apricot brandy.

It was interesting to note how little time it took to transform the hotel library from the day room of an Army detachment into a good barroom. Several times I thought the inspired chaos would crack the walls. With the exception of Godfrey every man in the detachment was soaring, and out to show off his wings.

For his part Godfrey went about the business of getting drunk with an intensity that scared hell out of me. He hit the mark in extremely short order. Presently he fell on the floor like a stone, out cold. I packed him over my shoulder, took him up to his room, and put him to bed.

When I came down again I said, "I want all you guys to take it easy on Godfrey. This is important. When a man's got the kind of jolt Godfrey got, this is a tough place to be. I don't want to hear of anyone doing any kidding. Don't avoid him—just be careful how you treat him."

There was a general nodding of heads. Berkeley expressed a thought for most of us. It was his opinion that Godfrey was better off. . . . Of course he couldn't see it that way now, but she couldn't be much of a girl.

Someone else remarked that the guy would brood about the isolation, blame his bad luck on his being to hell and gone here on St. Paul.

"He'll have to work it out for himself," I said. "Only thing I want to make sure of is that nobody does anything careless that'll make it worse."

Heads on St. Paul were universally big the next day, although with the exception of Godfrey everybody was cheerful as could be.

Godfrey grew more morose day by day. I turned over in my mind the advisability of trying to get Dutch Harbor to take him out and send a replacement. One day I realized I'd better stop just thinking about it and do something. I encoded a message:

HAVE MAN HERE WHO SHOULD BE REMOVED AT ONCE STOP IN BAD CONDITION MENTALLY STOP

I got a fast answer:

ALL MEN YOUR STATION VOLUNTEERS STOP NO PLANES AVAILABLE STOP

I thought bitterly, I bet it gave them satisfaction to remind us that we're on our own. I confided my anxiety to Swede. I believed that slowly but surely Godfrey was going crazy. It would be best all around to get him away. But Dutch Harbor couldn't see it—or wouldn't.

Swede pointed out soberly that if he did go nuts and we had to keep him here till spring he'd likely drive some of the others nuts too.

He could be right. But it looked as if we were going to have him anyway.

I worried nights about what it would be like if he went off his chump completely. Suppose without our knowing it he got out to Telegraph Hill. Suppose he pushed the plunger. We'd sure be in a fix—the hotel had a bigger charge under it than any building in town!

It was Berkeley's idea that I'd better be on the safe side and lock Godfrey up. I had thought about it. It looked dangerous to me. . . . As things stood there was a chance he'd snap out of it; if I locked him up the chance was he would go nuts.

I came to one decision, though. The next morning I told Berkeley he was to go out to Telegraph Hill and unhook all the mine wiring. With the ice pack closed in there was no actual reason to keep it hooked up. Also he was to cut the wires somewhere this side of the powder magazine. I would attend personally to taking the caps out of the charge in the basement, I said. It looked to me that this was about all we could do.

We did it all. I asked everybody in the detachment, as casually as I could, to keep an eye on Godfrey, let me know if he seemed to be in any serious kind of distress.

Any way I assigned the work, during the winter months, the men weren't occupied enough to suit me. The excitement of receiving mail wore off; you could feel the letdown.

Van Meter, Berkeley, Evans, and Swede took turns operating the powerhouse on six-hour shifts. Van, being a corporal, was in charge.

In a way, being Regular Army, Van was always somewhat of a problem in my mind. It wasn't very definite till I stumbled on the fact that he was nipping at the brandy he made in the powerhouse. The way it showed itself was that he commenced finding fault with everything and everyone.

Swede, usually as good-natured as they came, took a few

cracks from Van without bothering him. One day he blew his top. He rounded on Van suddenly and remarked, a steely glint in his eyes, "You'd better lay off that brandy, bud, and me too, or I'll skin you alive and nail your hide to the powerhouse door!"

At any normal time it would have been funny. But it incited Van, who stretched forth one of those long, splinter-thin arms and flicked Swede on the nose. The next instant he was flat on his back watching the stars go by. Cat-quick, rawhide tough, Swede had clipped him on the button so fast Van never even saw it coming.

Van hunted me up immediately and complained. God damn it, was he in charge of the powerhouse or wasn't he? I asked him what the beef was. Nothing much, he'd just told Swede to shine up the powerhouse floor a bit, and he hadn't liked the idea. That was queer, I thought. Quietly I pointed out that that didn't sound like Swede to me. I said something about thinking I smelled liquor. "You been drinking, Van?" I said abruptly.

He gave me a what-of-it stare. "Just a little nip—I wanted to make sure the last batch is up to par."

I pointed out that it would take more than a nip to give the glow he had on. Furthermore, that stuff was for the whole detachment. If he got drunk every day pretty soon the whole detachment'd be wanting to. So he was to lay off. Besides, if he wasn't half drunk right now he wouldn't have had any trouble with Swede.

The stuff was terribly green, but I observed that Van Meter kept right on nipping.

The next man he had a run-in with was Evans. One day Evans came to work ten minutes late.

God damn it all, roared Van, didn't Evans know he was in the Army now? Evans noted that he was half drunk. Van shouted that in this man's army you had to be on time. If

you showed up ten minutes late for reveille, they'd have you right on K.P.!

Evans reminded him shortly that there was no reveille on St. Paul to be late for. He added that he'd turn up ten minutes early tomorrow morning to make up for it. He had been in a red-hot pinochle game and hadn't noticed the time. . . .

"A helluva post!" muttered Van, staggering off toward the hotel. "No reveille! This ain't the Army!"

When several small incidents of this nature had occurred, Swede and Evans joined forces to get revenge.

The powerhouse was equipped with its own flush toilet. They proceeded to wire it up to the 110-volt lighting circuit, complete with a knife-blade switch that they could close, turning on the electricity once their unsuspecting victim was firmly planted on the throne.

I happened into the powerhouse in order to use a grinding wheel to dress down a bit of ivory for pistol grips for my revolver. It was Van's tour of duty. I remember thinking it was odd that Swede and Evans should be idling around there. But I didn't give it any thought until Swede sidled up to me and said, with a broad grin, "Watch this. It's gonna be good. Van's just gone to the can. . . ."

Evans strolled in from the outer end of the powerhouse. He nodded to Swede. Swede walked over to one corner of the room, reached down near the floor, straightened up again. A bloodcurdling yell rose from the direction of the latrine. "Owww-wwwww-wwww—shut that God-damned generator off! The power's leakin' into the can! Shut it off! Shut it off! I can't get up!"

It seemed that Swede had closed the knife-blade switch. Now he shut off the generator, and Evans opened the switch simultaneously.

Van Meter came limping out of the toilet. I observed that suddenly he was soberer than he had been for days.

"My achin' back!" he groaned and he wasn't kidding. That juice, he wailed, had run through him so hard his toes did a tattoo on the floor, his head bobbed up and down like a jack-in-the-box. The power must be leaking out of the lead-covered cable that ran down to the radio station and into the water pipe. He wasn't going to use that can again!

"Nuts!" hooted Swede, adding the sage comment that the first klootch Van put his eye on, he'd be as good as ever.

I suggested that they'd better start the generator up again. It was nearly time for the radiomen to make their report; they'd be wondering what the hell was going on.

Swede said thoughtfully that this power leak must be something new; he'd used that latrine a hundred times, never got any jolt.

Van advised him darkly to try it now and he'd sure get one. Gingerly he was feeling himself all over. *Jesus, what a jolt!*

Two days later Swede and Evans set the stage for some more fun at Van Meter's expense. This time Berkeley got into the act.

At breakfast he remarked offhand that he didn't see why Van was making such a fuss about the latrine; he'd used it just last night, there was nothing the matter with it. He added that he'd taken a chance on it because it was blowing and snowing, and he didn't want to come all the way to the hotel.

Raising puzzled eyebrows, Swede remarked that he'd used it too. He looked at Van Meter, asking if he was sure he hadn't imagined this jolt he kept raving about.

Hell, no! He got very explicit. It damned near burned his rear off. Still, maybe the power leak had stopped by now; it might have righted itself.

After a short time Swede reported that Van was using the latrine in the powerhouse once more.

I suggested that they'd better watch themselves; Van Meter was a skilled electrician; it would only be a question of time before he discovered where they had the seat wired up.

Swede boasted that there wasn't a chance. They'd done a really neat job, hell, it had taken a week! Anyhow, they had a new project now. This morning, complaining that his bowels hadn't worked good since he got that shock, Van had taken a big physic.

Out of curiosity most of the men on the island seemed to be drawn to the powerhouse—myself included. Ostensibly we had ivory work to be done.

Van was working on a little ivory doll he wanted to give to his niece. I don't know why he didn't notice the air of suppressed excitement; I certainly did. After a bit he got up suddenly and headed for the latrine. Instantly Swede ducked over to the corner and presently, with a tremendous grin, closed and opened the switch a half a dozen times, as fast as he could pull the handle.

A series of bloodcurdling screeches came immediately from the latrine—louder and louder and louder.

"Shut off that damned generator," howled Van, "it's killin' me!"

Holding the switch a little longer now than the last time, so it would tickle Van good and hard, Swede opened it then, giving Berkeley the signal to shut off the generator.

Van Meter staggered out of the latrine. His eyes were wild. He bellowed that now he knew it was a power leak; kept going on and off, every time jolting him harder. Now he knew what a man felt like when he went to the electric chair!

Something in the way everyone howled made Van pause suddenly. He peered around at all of us. "God damn it," he shouted, "this thing was wired on purpose! I'm gonna look an' see." We only laughed harder. We couldn't help it.

"Howl, you apes!" he yelled. "I'm never usin' that can again. If I have to I'll go out in the snow!"

Even though it protected us in one way, we had the chore of checking continuously on ice conditions, particularly the area alongside the dock where the motor launch was kept in the marine railway. If the ice forced enough chunk ice over the dock edge the launch would break up like a matchbox.

For about a week after I'd directed the precautions about the wiring to the mines, things went along without incident. Then, one morning as I was coming up from checking the ice, suddenly a rifle cracked. I felt something pluck at my clothing—a neat hole in the left side of my parka! I took a fast look at the hotel. Godfrey had leaned out the window and taken a shot at me! He was still there, his rifle at firing position! Thank God for the long habit of wearing a revolver and the capacity to use it fast! Jumping to one side I drew my .38 and without waiting to take more than general aim, shot at the window. The shot was good enough to break the window above his head—not good enough to deter him from an answering shot!

He missed me and drew in his head fast.

I needed cover! Sprinting for the hotel, I expected another bullet—this time he might not miss! I made the doorway. Just inside some of the men were milling around, wanting to know what the hell was going on.

"Godfrey—berserk!" I stopped to catch my breath. I explained that I'd been coming up the street and got a couple of shots taken at me—I started for the stairs. "Come on, some of you—we've got to get hold of him while he's still in his room. He mustn't get loose!"

By the time I got to the top of the stairs I had goose pimples. I expected to find him out in the hall—he could

hear us coming—but he wasn't there. I had my revolver out, ready for firing. Godfrey's door was shut.

Advancing to a point a few feet to one side, motioning Swede, Van Meter, and Berkeley to move in back of me, I called out, "Godfrey, come out! I want to talk to you."

Instantly he yelled that he'd see me in hell first. He burst into a wild peal of laughter.

"I'll have to come in and get you if you don't," I said.

"Come ahead, you fool! You'll only make it easier for me. I won't miss this time." He emphasized his meaning by firing twice through the door panel. I noted that he was still using the M-1 rifle. But he had a revolver in his room, too; undoubtedly it was ready for action.

I whispered to Berkeley to get a box of tear-gas grenades that were in the closet in my room. It was the best way to get Godfrey out of that room before he killed a couple of us. I hated to use them, though. I tried to get Godfrey out once more.

No answer. I told him about the grenades. What did he say, would he come along without them?

"Throw 'em and to hell with you!" He laughed wildly. Rapidly he fired four shots through the splintering door.

I eased along the wall to where I could get an angle shot. I leaned forward and tried the knob, but the door was locked. Godfrey either saw the knob turn or heard it. He fired two more shots, right above the knob. Still rifle shots—then I heard the empty clip hit the floor. This was as good a chance as I was likely to get.

I took two quick revolver shots at the door, directly above the lock. Giving the door a fast shove, I jumped back against the wall as the door fell open. Berkeley tossed a grenade over my shoulder into the room, then another. We heard the little reports; tear gas eddied toward us in two pillow-shaped puffs. . . .

Berkeley and I dove in tandem for the door.

We got one quick look at Godfrey. He was standing in the center of the room, swaying, pawing with both hands at his streaming eyes, mouthing terrible curses. The rifle was on the floor by the empty clip. His revolver was on top of the dresser—inches out of reach.

We seized him by either arm, forcing them behind his back. We hustled him out into the hall to the head of the stairs. There was a little draft and the stairs were still clear of the gas. Swede and Van Meter, thinking efficiently, had got a length of rope. We wrestled Godfrey, got him tied up. His strength had never been anything out of the ordinary. Now it was terrific. I caught Van Meter's eye—nodded. Van hooked a short left to Godfrey's jaw; he made it as easy as he could. Godfrey crumpled on his knees. "Get him downstairs," I said. The tear gas was reaching the head of the stairs. We'd better get out of there or none of us would be able to see for a week. By the time we got Godfrey trundled downstairs all of us were weeping copiously. Tears were rolling down Godfrey's unconscious face.

They wanted to know what I was going to do with him. The only thing I could do was lock him up in the jail for a while. He was too strong now that he was out of his head.

If I wired Dutch Harbor what had happened, didn't I think they'd send a plane now?

Probably not, I said bitterly. One thing was certain. From now on as long as he was here we'd have to keep a close watch on him. Even if he couldn't kill us, he might try to kill himself. It was a damned unhappy situation, but there it was.

Berkeley wondered aloud what the chances were of his snapping out of it. I didn't know much about these things; just now they didn't look very good to me.

Swede reminded me again that if we had to have him around very long he'd drive the rest of us nuts.

"We can't very well shoot him, can we?" I snapped irritably. Swede had the decency to look embarrassed.

Godfrey was beginning to come to. When he found he was trussed up, he started cursing us again—primarily me. His eyes, still red and smarting from the tear gas, glittered fiercely. He jerked around on the floor frantically, trying to work the rope loose. "Take it easy, Godfrey," I said. "You'll only hurt yourself." I hated to see the guy in this humiliating position. I felt bad about him. What was happening to him was outside his power to control.

Someone muttered that it sure took a woman to raise hell with a good guy. "Quit it!" I rasped. "Sorry, Sarge, I forgot."

In my mind I ran over the details of the jail, figuring on the next move. Godfrey was up off the floor, sitting in the corner of a sofa. He sat there jerking at the rope, cursing everybody....

The St. Paul jail was a small, one-room building, with bars from floor to ceiling, running down the center of the room. Oddly enough the chimney and stove were in the prisoners' section. This was bad right off the bat. Sooner or later a man off his head would try to fire the building and escape. The only door into that section was through the guard's section. But you couldn't keep Godfrey in that half—it would mean a fight every time anyone tried to enter or leave the building.

We moved him down to the jail in the jeep. I told Berkeley we'd have to just take a chance on a fire. We'd put four buckets of water in the guard section; then if he tipped over the stove, at least we'd probably be able to put out the fire. Guard duty would be four-hour stretches. Everybody would have to take turns. I directed Swede to take the first one.

We had a bad time getting Godfrey out of the jeep and

into the cell. He seemed to wilt suddenly after a few minutes. He fell over sidewise and just lay there. Pretty soon he pulled up his feet heavily, heaved his body over so his face was to the wall, and lay there without moving. Swede muttered, "Some hell of a duty, watching over a nut!" It wasn't like him, and I let it go. You could tell from his expression that he knew it had to be done.

That night I encoded a message to Dutch Harbor:

ONE MAN VIOLENTLY INSANE THIS STATION STOP CAN YOU SEND PLANE IMMEDIATELY TO TAKE HIM OUT STOP

The answer came in the morning:

NO PLANE NOW AVAILABLE STOP WILL SEND ONE WHEN POSSIBLE STOP

For some minutes I sat and stared at the message. Judging from past experience Dutch Harbor would probably shortly forget all about my request, and we would have Godfrey on our hands till spring brought a ship.

I tacked the message on the bulletin board. Everybody who read it looked grave and troubled. You could hardly blame them! It wasn't only the nervous strain over handling Godfrey. A truth had been brought home to them violently—namely, that isolation such as St. Paul afforded could produce insanity. It was a thought sufficiently chilling to put the quietus on even the most carefree souls in the detachment.

They took a lot of it out in concentrated bitching. They discussed from many angles how it would set with the brass at Dutch Harbor if Godfrey happened to be their baby and they had to look after him till spring. Berkeley pointed out coldly that no one with a chicken on his shoulder had any trouble getting a plane ride whenever he wanted it—until

transportation was really needed to get a crazy man moved! Then all the planes were busy as hell.

I disclosed that I had never really anticipated they would send up a plane, even to take a serious case out. Look at all the hell we had to raise to get the mail—and we wouldn't have got that either if we hadn't needed power-plant parts that might save them some trouble.

Dunn remarked that he was sure glad he had the permanent cooking duty, as he never had been much of a hand with nuts.

That reminded me; all the food packed down to Godfrey would have to be stuff he could eat with a spoon. I couldn't risk letting him have a knife and fork. Any time he got meat it must be cut up before it got to him.

We didn't wait long for Godfrey to tip over the stove; just two days. He scattered the glowing coals all over the floor. Acree was on duty. He flew up and doused everything—got the fire out before it made any headway. But it sure made the place stink.

Surveying the mess, I decided that the time had come to rearrange the jail. We would cut a door into Godfrey's quarters direct from the outside. We could leave the stove where it was now and move him over on the other side of the center bars.

While we worked on cutting the door, Godfrey was strangely quiet, though he kept padding back and forth, swinging his arms in the cold. But whatever state his mind was in, it hadn't been idle. When we were ready and Swede and Van Meter stepped in to get hold of him to move him, he hauled off and began flailing his arms like a thresher in a wheat field. He was hollering like a banshee, and the others were hollering directions at each other. We had a wild melee of arms and legs. Van and Swede emerged with black eyes and lumpy cheekbones; Godfrey had an egg on top of

his skull, a sprained wrist, and numerous bruises and bangs. He wouldn't let me near him with bandage and liniment. I tried leaving the makings with him to use—it was risky, with a glass bottle—but he smashed the bottle against a wall right away. Van got a sudden rush of sense to the brain and snatched back the bandage before he could get around to the idea of trying to hang himself.

Wearily I encoded a new message:

IMPERATIVE INSANE MAN BE REMOVED FROM THIS STATION IMMEDIATELY STOP AIR STRIP OPEN STOP

They let me have an answer when they got around to it:

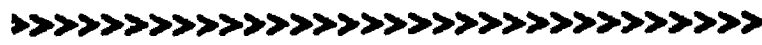
NO PLANES AVAILABLE STOP DO BEST YOU CAN STOP

Groaning inwardly I posted this latest evidence of our high priority with Dutch Harbor. That evening the atmosphere in the library was definitely blue. The antecedents of the Dutch Harbor staff were discussed with libelous detail.

I pointed out that we were lucky in one respect. Someone wanted to know sharply what the hell that respect would be.

As winter made outpost duty unnecessary we had plenty of men to take turns watching the patient. If we had to do it on top of outpost duty it would really be rough.

Berkeley summed up the unanimous opinion that even double outpost duty would be preferable.



Chapter Thirteen

ONE night those of us not on duty were sound asleep in bed when we were jerked awake by someone pounding up the hotel steps yelling "Fire! Fire! The water tower's on fire!" One of the boys on duty at the weather station had seen the blaze. It was now one o'clock.

We all rolled out and hustled up the hill. It was too late to do anything about putting out the fire—largely because of the way the building was constructed. It was double-sheathed, and the constant maintenance of the fires rendered the inner sheathing bone dry. At each end of the tower there was a chimney, constructed not of hollow brick as in most chimneys, but of poured concrete. Thanks to occasional earthquakes, the chimneys were cracked in a dozen places. All that held them up was the steel reinforcement in the concrete.

It looked to me as though the trouble had started in one of the chimneys, which had sooted up and caught fire inside; intense heat, seeping through the cracks had set aflame the whole side of the building. In a little over two hours the structure was flat on the ground. The wooden water tanks burned to almost nothing, charring steadily downward from the top.

The rest of the night we maintained a close watch on the village itself because the driving wind picked up burning boards, tossing them around like jackstraws. The wind had scoured all snow from the rooftops; the only thing we could look to to save the village if it began catching was a three-inch coating of ice, the residue of an ice storm in the late fall. Slabs of the burning wood ate through the ice in a few places,

setting the roofs to smoldering. We were lucky in having a plentiful supply of small fire extinguishers and kept a ladder-equipped fire brigade on the go.

Everyone was all in when we trudged down the hill to breakfast. Exhausted, faces blackened and scorched, clothes spotted over with tiny holes where sparks had eaten through, we presented a dreary sight. Stevens and Evans had badly burned hands. They explained to me that the wind had torn a plank about twelve feet long off the roof and thrown it straight at them. It was burning like a gasoline torch—they had no time to get out of the way—and caught it in their hands to keep from being knocked cold.

I told them not to do anything at all for a while. With those hands they could develop blood poisoning. We'd doctor them up as best we could and depend on them to watch out for signs of infection.

To Swede the fire was like some sort of bad omen. He got mad just trying to figure out what could happen next in such a godforsaken place.

Having put away a good breakfast, I suggested that it could have been worse. This was greeted with jeers addressed to a sergeant by the name of Pollyanna. I laughed. No kidding, it could have been. For instance, if one of the houses below the water tank had caught fire, with the wind blowing in the direction it was, the whole town would have gone up in no time. I presumed they could recall the TNT scattered through town. If the fire had got going good, all we could have done was pull out of the hotel fast and let it go. And the barrels of gasoline would have been flame throwers.

Van Meter looked awed. God, he'd never thought of that! If he had, his tail would have disappeared over the tundra so fast we'd have thought it was a new comet.

Someone had an idea. "What the hell are we going to do for water now for the rheostats in the powerhouse?"

I explained that I'd been thinking about that ever since the fire. How about those five-thousand-gallon oil tanks down near the dock? I asked Swede if he thought he could pull one of them up the hill with the caterpillar.

He could. But still, what would keep the water from freezing?

Well, there was still a big pile of lumber in the warehouse. We could use it to build a housing for the tank. Probably it would be best to double-sheath this, too.

Someone groaned. Just what we needed, having to build something in weather like this! We'd probably all freeze to death in the attempt.

"We have to build it," I remarked simply. Yes, I knew well enough how wind blew on top of that hill. If two men had to hold down a board while another drove the nail—well it'd have to be done. Anyhow it was the only solution I could figure out. If we couldn't operate the powerhouse, we wouldn't have the radio or the weather station; no lights in the hotel, no water either. So the job was a must from every angle. If it took the time of every man on the island we'd have to just hammer away on it till we got it done. I asked Van Meter how long he could operate the powerhouse now without water?

"Prob'ly forty-eight hours more. The tanks are full right now, I think they'll last me that long."

I messaged to Dutch Harbor:

WATER TOWER BURNED DOWN LAST NIGHT STOP CAN ARRANGE TEMPORARY TANK HERE WEATHER PERMITTING STOP

The embers were cold by the time Swede got the new steel tank to the top of the hill with the cat. Just to make it more interesting we discovered a new problem. At one time this

tank had held fuel oil. If it was to be used for the village water system it had to be purified.

How do we do that, someone wanted to know.

The only thing I could figure was to rig a crude Yukon boiler and steam the oil off the steel. "How's that again?" said Berkeley, very skeptical.

I explained. First we would pick out about six big gasoline drums, filling them about three-quarters full of water. We'd get a few pipe fittings out of the village store, hook them all together into one main outlet, with a hose attached at the end. From that big pile down on the flats, picked up by the natives, we would haul a truckload of driftwood and build a bonfire around the drums. When we got up a real head of steam we'd turn it into the tank and the oil would steam off.

"Might work," said Berkeley, looking more interested. Contrivances that could be made to work appealed to Berkeley's type of mind.

It worked fine. It took a lot of brute work and time. The day was over before we finished. Once the steam started generating the barrel heads swelled alarmingly. Fortunately none of them blew up. After we shut down the steam and got a look inside, we found the tank perfectly clean.

I heard from Dutch Harbor that evening; for once they seemed interested, in a peevish sort of way.

HOW CAN YOU BURN DOWN A WATER TANK IN MIDWINTER STOP WHO IS CRAZY UP THERE STOP SEND DOWN FULL PARTICULARS AT ONCE STOP

I started to curse them out, but all of a sudden it struck me funny. Those poor bastards down there, stuck by the seat of their pants to their chairs! I would certainly pity them if they ever got caught in something the least bit out of the ordinary.

I posted the message on the bulletin board. Swede thought maybe we ought to send a copy to Ripley. Van Meter's language was spectacular.

On the face of it it probably did sound screwy, saying that a water tank burned down when it was midwinter. How could I expect them to visualize that we had to keep a fire going to prevent freezing?

That evening I sent a message which explained the fire in such detail that a child could understand it.

The next morning, using the tractor, Swede pushed the steel tank up on the concrete platform where the wooden tanks had stood. Now began the hellish job of building the wooden framework around it. We cursed monotonously. The winds tore and beat at our bodies. Tiny crystalline ice particles cut and jabbed into our skins like knife points. Actually the temperature wasn't too bad. But in Alaska experience had taught me it was better to have the temperature fifty degrees below and no wind, than five degrees below with a wind. Howling and battering at us, the wind tore words from our lips before they could be heard, flung icy dust into the eyes, searing the eyeballs, constantly bathed our faces in a wash of tears that chapped the skin, peeling it away in shreds.

You couldn't hold nails and spikes in your bare fingers. We kept on our gloves, and clumsiness made the job twice as hard. Boards were ripped from our grasp and carried far out over the ice-sheathed sea by the wind. Everything we had to use needed to be secured to prevent its blowing away. With two of the men I loaded a truck with lumber, well lashed down. Up on the hill, as one board was taken for use, we pulled the lashings tight on the rest. Once Evans got careless. Figuring they would be easier to get at, he put

some nails in a tin can and placed it on the ground. In seconds can, nails, and all were out to sea.

Four horrible days it took to build that one small frame building to house the water tank. Many times I eyed my own luck, in having with me men of *esprit* such as this. There were plenty of frostbites on hands and faces. They pained unbearably. But, though there was a constant stream of loud cursing, there was actually little complaining.

We experimented with pumping the piping system that served the village. Once a day we pumped it full; the eight-inch pipe took a good amount of water. Gravity carried the water down to the village.

On the afternoon we finished our building project, Swede suggested to me that it was about time for us to rate a celebration. Matter of fact, the new water tank ought to have a proper christening.

Figuring it would take a good deal of booze to chase the frost out of our blood, I decided it was a fine idea. I remarked that I'd always understood alcohol to be the basis of antifreeze, and went to my room, where the liquor was now kept.

If any man suffered from the cold long that night it was his own fault. We mixed the apricot brandy with grapefruit juice drawn from the native warehouse. Result, a very palatable blend indeed. By midnight the library was a reasonable facsimile of any State-side men's bar. Swede, life of the party when sober, was a one-man comedy show when half drunk. In a way he was an artist about drinking. The state of being half drunk suited his requirements, so he didn't waste time in pursuit of being wholly drunk.

As usual the activities reminded him of an experience. Staring around owlishly, he remarked in a loud voice that the library reminded him of a dive he had been in, at Bristol Bay. We grinned encouragingly. This, he said, was a sort of bootleg joint, nothing but a rattrap. It was a big, one-room

affair, with two small windows for light and ventilation. The bartender kept his liquor stock upstairs. When he needed more bottles, he boosted a little Aleut boy up through a trap door to get them. The kid was a solemn-looking little cuss who looked very funny, handing down liquor one bottle at a time.

The time he was there Swede remembered that the place was full of Aleuts and Swede fishermen. A victrola was grinding out loud music. The fishermen were so drunk they were dancing with each other, or with a few Aleut women that had strayed into the place. Everyone was having a fine time when—wham!—a big crash, somewhere outside.

Swede nearly busted a gut, laughing, he said. Looking outside to see what the commotion was about, he saw two of the drunk fishermen wheeling a big fat squaw down the plank sidewalk in a wheelbarrow. They were running, the wheelbarrow struck a hole in the planking, the klootch left the wheelbarrow and sailed through the air ass over teakettle, and came to a sliding stop on the sidewalk. In a hurry the fishermen yanked her to her feet, and while she screeched, they took down her pants and began digging splinters out of her caboose—one man to a cheek! Every time they got a splinter she screeched louder. It sounded like a murder. More fishermen stood around her in a ring, offering advice on the best way to get the splinters out faster. With gestures Swede explained that the squaw was pretty broad in the beam and stuck up like the whole side of a barn. The fishermen kept on the job, digging hard. You'd have thought, Swede said, they were cleaning fish instead of performing —er—a delicate surgical operation, a humane act!

I yelled with laughter, like everybody else. We told Swede he sure had missed his calling; he ought to be on the stage. Swede grabbed up a hat and jigged around the room, holding

out the hat and yelling, "All contributions accepted with thanks!"

Van Meter had a different idea. "Hell," he cried, "you oughta pay us for listening to your lies! Some o' your stories are so ripe you'd oughta have buried them years ago!"

"Ain't heard you equal any of 'em," yawped Swede, giving Van a shove that toppled him over backward.

It was morning before the party broke up; it had served its purpose; everybody was in fine humor.

Well, never a dull moment—now came a silly radiogram from Dutch Harbor.

ARE YOU USING MASTER MENU FOR 1943 STOP

It hardly seemed worth using the power but I messaged back:

HAVE NO MASTER MENU FOR 1943 STOP

Again from Dutch Harbor:

WHAT HAVE YOU STOP

PLENTY OF GRUB STOP

That ended the series. I tacked it up in its entirety. A lot of our morale vitamins were on the ludicrous side.

At supper we discussed Dutch Harbor uproariously, and just what kind of a place they thought we were in, and what we were doing there. A master menu suggested celery, lettuce, fresh tomatoes. Somebody suggested sarcastically that Dutch Harbor probably envisioned us growing vegetables in water in tin cans on the kitchen window sills.

The brass idiocies put Dunn in a good mood. At the eve-

ning meal, ambling into the dining room, he commented on the fact that it took 110 points to get to OCS, and probably the shavetail that sent the word about master menus had 111. He added, with a big laugh, "Remember that guy Luciano we was blessed with a while back. I sure envied him his brain—oh, brother!"

Van Meter wondered aloud how Luciano was getting along with his plans to have me court-martialed. I said that the sword might be dangling over my head right this minute, who could tell? Out of the tail of my eye I noticed that Steichen and Pierce looked a trifle uncomfortable. Nowadays they were fine; maybe the mention of my being court-martialed gave them a guilty conscience.

Lighthearted interludes were all the more valuable because Godfrey's continued presence on the island had a disturbing effect on everyone, especially on the men who had the duty of guarding him.

Several times he tried literally to dig his way through the walls with his fingernails. They finally became so torn and raw that most of the time I had to have him in restraint. Even a few minutes of observing the poor guy was enough to throw the others off.

I told myself it would do no good, but I requested Dutch Harbor again to take him off the island.

Back came the reply:

WILL EVACUATE INSANE MAN FROM YOUR STATION FIRST AVAILABLE WATER TRANSPORTATION NEXT SPRING STOP

Someone commented that Dutch Harbor thought we were stocked with equipment to handle nuts along with everything else up here. As usual there ensued a frightening assessment of the mental powers of the big wheel there.

"I suppose it's no lie that they're short of air transport," I said pacifically. "Anyway, bitterness gets us nowhere; we may as well make the best of it."

One day Brown and Towne, bored with inactivity and the general idea that we were the forgotten men of the U.S. Army, set out for a hike. It was a beautiful day for a change, one of the finest all winter; clear and cold, a fine day for hiking. They decided to go to Polovina Point and back.

I was doing some paper work in my room when I realized that one of those sudden, wild, wind-and-snow storms we got there had struck. I ran to the top of the stairs and hollered down to know if the men had got back all right.

Swede was just blowing in the front door. He hadn't seen anything of them. He asked Van. Nobody had seen them. I felt my insides give a jump. Those hikers were still out somewhere!

I leaped into a parka, hollered for Berkeley and Swede to come along with me, and raced down the stairs two at a time. Out in front I grabbed up the rope of a toboggan. I thought, We may need this. . . .

Above the lingering wind I yelled to Swede to know how long the storm had lasted. He didn't know; he had been carving some ivory. By this time these sudden, fierce storms were no novelty to any of us. Unless there was some special reason to do so we ignored them. It was a bad habit. Nobody could afford to overlook a single detail of that environment.

About a mile out of the village we ran into Brown. He was staggering all over the place, nearly exhausted.

"Where's Towne?" we chorused, grabbing him and easing him to a standstill.

He gasped that he didn't know. They'd got separated near Polovina. He, Brown, had made a foxhole in the snow and

waited out the storm; probably Towne had done the same. His words came in hard gasps.

I hated to make him talk, but I had to know exactly what he'd done, so I would know what Towne might have done.

"I dug—into—side of—big drift. Used knife and gunstock—snow hard as ice. Crawled into hole—walled it up with snow chunks. Left just peep hole—stayed there till storm blew off."

I directed Berkeley to take him back to the village; Swede and I would go on and locate Towne. I offered Brown the toboggan to ride back on. "I can make it," he said slowly; "you might need it for Towne."

"When you get in," I warned him, "take a good big snort of brandy and roll into the sack. You could get a damned good cold out of this."

"You'll probably find Towne somewhere right around the Point."

"Don't worry about it. We'll find him."

All the way to the Point we investigated every suspicious hummock.

At the edge of the beach there was a perpetual patch of slush and churned-up ice, marking the meeting place of the ice pack and gravelly shore line. The area never quite froze solid. Ceaselessly the groaning ice pack pushed back and forth; first up on the beach, then away from it; and always there was this freakish patch of wetness, this icy slush.

We found Towne, a dark object, lying face down in the slush. Staggering around, trying to get his bearings in the wind and that driving, smothering snow, either he had wandered or been flung into the mass of slush. Before he could get himself loose he had frozen to death.

With great distinctness Swede bit out the words, "God damn this crazy son-of-a-bitching island."

I felt as if I were going crazy myself. First Godfrey off

his head, now Towne was frozen to death. How much more were we going to get?

Swede said, more practically, "How th' hell are we going to get him out of there?"

"The only way we can. Wade in and get him."

"If we fall in over our heads we won't get out either."

"I know. It can't be helped. We have to get him out. I'm going—you stay here. I'll push the toboggan alongside myself, lean most of my weight on that."

"But, Sarge, I'll go along too and lean my weight on the other side. That way if one falls in the other can haul him out."

"No. I can't risk more than one of us. I'll make it all right. Then I can roll the—body—up on the toboggan. Push it ahead of me coming back."

I was all right till I was almost out to where Towne lay. Suddenly I fell up to my hips in a deep hole in the slush.

By reflex I fell forward on the toboggan. I kicked and squirmed till I got loose. Then I pushed over to Towne.

His clothing was frozen fast to the slush. I slashed frantically at the clothing, had to cut most of it loose before I could get Towne rolled onto the toboggan. The water was slopping into my shoepacks, my feet were getting pretty cold, and I was afraid the slush would give way under me again and I'd go down.

I got Towne back on the beach. The last few feet seemed a mile. I nearly went full length into the slush, trying to hurry it up.

Swede observed that the temperature had modified a little, or my feet would be frozen stiff by now. Did I think I could make it back to the village?

"Hell, yes. Let's get going." We were trying to pretend that Towne wasn't there dead, and we both knew we were.

"The faster we go the better for my feet—they won't have a chance to freeze."

We went as rapidly as we could. By the time we reached the pumping station my feet felt like blocks of wood—fair warning that they were beginning to freeze. I said I'd better stop there, build a fire, and thaw out a bit. I'd never make it to town if I didn't.

The last time he stopped by there Swede had cut up a big pile of kindling so he had a fire going in a jiffy. I stripped off my shoepacks and socks. The toes were already white. Swede started up the pump and got some water to soak my feet in—about the best remedy there is for frostbite. I was worried about gangrene, which could get an awful quick start once your feet froze.

The first few minutes of soaking made my feet tingle like the devil. That meant they were thawing out all right. Swede remarked that my luck was better than Towne's. His face worked a little. He said slowly that he wondered if it hurt you to freeze to death, or if you just got sleepy and passed away.

"Guess no one ever got back to tell," I commented inadequately.

Just then the pump-house door opened, and in walked Church and Jorgensen. They had found Towne and the toboggan by the side of the road, and had come over to investigate the smoke pouring from the pump-house chimney. Jorgensen wanted to know how I got wet. We explained where we had located Towne, how we got him out.

"You sure took a hell of a chance," said Church thoughtfully. "One guy dead is enough for the detachment."

I said we had to get Towne's body away from the ice pack; once the ice pack moved we'd never find him.

They said they would take Towne on into the village. "Where'll we leave him?"

The carpenter shop, I directed. We would build a coffin for him there. After I dried out, we followed them in.

When we assembled for supper everyone was down in the dumps. I had warned them repeatedly about the danger of getting caught out in these unpredictable Arctic storms. They'd looked on it as more or less of a joke, that they didn't know enough to keep out of storms. Now the fact was forcibly driven home; these storms were a lot more dangerous than we liked to believe.

I requested volunteers to help dig a grave for Towne. It was going to be a hard job in frozen ground. Every man volunteered.

It was even worse than I anticipated. We went through the ice cover, then down through flintlike earth. By working in relays we managed to get the grave dug in one day.

At supper I remarked that I wished we had a bugler, then we could do Towne the honor of giving him a military funeral. Anyway we would all turn out; that was the least we could do.

Van Meter spoke up. He used to be a bugler, he said. He had never mentioned the fact. Also he had a bugle in his duffel bag. He explained that he was out of practice—he used to be fairly good—anyhow, he would do the best he could.

I felt relieved, and sort of glad. I wanted Towne to have a good burial. We had a firing squad, all right. I got to thinking about Van Meter. He was quite a guy. He put up a big front, about always having it in for the Army. But every once in a while something happened that showed how much pride in it he really had.

The next morning at ten thirty a sad little procession wended its way slowly out along the village street, up the hill to the graveyard. Everybody had seemed shy about tak-

ing over the job, so I said the short service. I began, "The Lord is my shepherd—" A low, indistinct murmuring gradually became more of the words. . . .

"He leadeth me beside the still waters. . . . though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . . ."

Everybody liked Towne; he was a friendly kind of guy, plenty of courage, good personality, always ready to take his share of the work.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Six men stepped forward a little, aimed, fired the volley—one—two—three. Van Meter blew taps. I was proud of him—he did it without missing so much as part of a note. . . .

The wind blew now, not fiercely but softly, like a song, lulling to sleep. I thought, This is Towne's long sleep. . . .

We let the coffin down gently into place. Just as the men were ready to begin filling in the grave, Berkeley pulled his hand out of his pocket and dropped a yellow Arctic poppy on the top of the coffin. I thought, He must have had it pressed in a book. I remembered that once he and Towne had brought a lot of them in and stuck them in a jug in the library. It was a nice thing for Berkeley to think of. I saw the men exchange looks. Then they filled in the grave.

We waited till it was all done and walked back down the hill together. Nobody talked. We looked out to sea. We had a lot of winter ahead of us yet.

Brown was down in bed with a terrific cold. I thought it would turn into pneumonia any minute. The only thing I could think of in the way of treatment was to keep him well dosed with the brandy and pray for the best. He was badly depressed over Towne, blamed himself that they had become separated.

I said over and over again that it wasn't his fault. But

sitting beside his bed, you couldn't help reading in his misery-ridden eyes the belief that Towne was dead because he, Brown, had been stupid and careless. He would mutter feverishly, "I was his best friend, I should have stayed with him, I should never have left him."

I kept assuring him it was an accident, not his fault at all.

But he had known Towne didn't have a very good sense of direction. Brown was convinced now that Towne thought he was heading inland, instead he wandered out into the slush.

"You have to try to forget that part, Al," I kept saying. "The best thing you can do is get over this cold. Try to think about something else—a furlough in the spring, for instance."

"Towne would have liked a furlough in the spring." No matter what you said, he kept coming back to the same thing. There wasn't much you could do except let him work out of it in his own way.

I dreaded the report that must be made to Dutch Harbor. But I couldn't put it off any longer.

> REGRET REPORT DEATH PFC RODNEY TOWNE [Army Serial Number] STOP CAUGHT IN STORM AND FROZE TO DEATH STOP

A reply came:

> REQUEST FULL EXPLANATION STOP

I made it as full as possible. I guess it satisfied some looie because I heard no more about it.

Godfrey wasn't getting any better. In fact he was getting progressively worse.

One day Church and Jorgensen took his food down to the jail. Sullivan was on guard duty. He took the food, unlocked

the cell door, started to hand it in to Godfrey. Godfrey seized the plate, threw the contents in his face, momentarily blinding him, aimed a kick at Jorgensen's belly, clipped Church on the chin. It all happened so fast that Godfrey had torn open the outside door and headed off down the street in the direction of the dock on a dead run before anyone could turn around.

That day it was blowing and snowing. Not awfully hard, but enough. Sullivan recovered first and sounded the alarm. From all directions everybody turned out to find Godfrey. He was dressed lightly—he could freeze to death before we caught him.

We found him quickly. He had just run into the rim of snowy slush at the edge of the beach in the salt lagoon, behind the native warehouse. When we caught up with him, he was making no effort to extricate himself—just standing there, in the slush, with a blank look on his face.

"Come on out, Godfrey," yelled Swede pleasantly; "we'll get you back where it's warm."

The blank look cleared off his face, leaving in its place a look of frenzy. He began screaming insane curses, bracing his feet wide apart, folding his arms across his chest, and defying us to come and get him.

I could see that we would have to go out and get him. He would freeze in no time there. I decided Swede, Van Meter, and I would go. Whichever got close enough first was to knock him out with one punch. We'd better make sure it landed. . . .

We spread out a little, coming at Godfrey in a sort of blunt-angled triangle. I got the first chance to grab him.

As I made my try, Godfrey threw himself full length in the slush, flailing about him with arms and legs. The slush hampered him somewhat, so Swede and I got him by one arm and one leg and hauled him up on his feet.

As we trundled him back through the slush, Swede gasped, "This oughter cool him down, wouldn't you think?"

"By the time we get him on land he'll be half drowned."

We were wrong.

Ashore Godfrey gave one superhuman shake of his entire body. It threw us off balance, but we managed to hang on. Swede swore mightily, "I ain't a-goin' to take any more o' this!" he roared, with which he threw an overhand punch that connected miraculously with Godfrey's jaw.

Someone had brought my jeep; we got him back into his cell. We worked fast. We had time to strip off his iced-up clothes before he began to come to. We stowed him in bed and hustled out of the cell, locking the door on him with relief. I said, "Godfrey, we're going to get you something hot to drink. Take it easy, you'll be all right." He only cursed and screamed and cried.

I thought he'd have pneumonia by suppertime sure. He never got so much as a sniffle out of the episode.

Chapter Fourteen

WALKING up the street in the dark, coming off work one night, Sam Church stumbled over a hunk of ice concealed by a drift of snow, and broke his ankle. At first we thought it was only a bad sprain; but it was a break in one of the small bones. We had to get expert medical attention for him. Otherwise he might wind up with a stiff leg for life.

I radioed Dutch Harbor:

PFC SAM CHURCH [Army Serial Number] HAS BROKEN LEG STOP REQUEST PLANE TO REMOVE BOTH HIM AND PFC RODNEY GODFREY WHO IS INSANE AND VIOLENT STOP IF THIS REQUEST IS REFUSED SHALL RADIO COMMANDING GENERAL ALASKA DEPARTMENT STOP

The reply:

PLANE WILL ARRIVE YOUR STATION NEXT FOUR DAYS STOP

At last one of my messages had actually got results!

Swede bulldozed the road open to the air strip. The field was now slightly shortened by a few snowdrifts at one end. We cleared them off. By the evening of the second day after receiving the radiogram it was ready for a plane to land.

On the fourth day a C-47 appeared out of the south at 2:00 P.M., circling the village twice. Berkeley and I went out to the field in my jeep. Church and Godfrey were made ready to go out in the truck.

Swede had beaten us out. The plane was down when we

got there, and he was talking to an officer. As we bumped onto the strip I remarked that it looked like Colonel Cushing from back at G-2 headquarters. It was.

As I jumped out and saluted, he commented that we seemed to be having a run of tough luck out here. I thought, Now the plane is here it doesn't seem so bad. I grinned and asked him how a busy man such as himself could get time to come way out here—maybe the Commanding General had told him we were all crazy and he'd come to have a look for himself?

Well, yes, something of that kind. It seemed that they had got pretty hot under the collar, down below, on receiving my message demanding a plane. The message was forwarded to the Commanding General; he had turned it over to Colonel Cushing with a directive to investigate.

I was glad he was here and said so. I told him the truck with the two men to be evacuated would be right along, and most of the men of the detachment, too, so he could interview anybody he cared to, either there on the strip or we'd be glad to have him come into the village where the accommodations were comfortable.

"No need for that, Sergeant," said the Colonel. "I've been talking to your bulldozer operator here, found out all I need to know. I personally think you're doing a fine job here; the breaks have gone against you, that's all. I shall report to the C.G. at Dutch Harbor that everything here is O.K."

I seized the opportunity to remind him he might also tell the C.G. to underline the necessity of getting mail in here whenever a boat or a plane got up this way. The main cause of unrest here was the repeated forgetting of our mail. It gave the men the idea that the Army didn't give a damn about their well-being.

"Speaking of mail, Sergeant, we haven't fallen down on you; before we took off I made sure it was aboard."

"Well, thank you, sir. I sure wish every officer in this man's Army was as considerate. There'd be less trouble in places like this."

The irrepressible Swede wanted to know if there were more places like this!

The Colonel laughed. "Thanks for the compliment, Sergeant. And I see your truck is coming now."

The truck pulled close to the plane. Godfrey was a tragic sight, no longer like anything human and tied up tight to prevent escape. As gently as possible they packed him aboard. One look around at the men's faces and you could see that they were feeling like hell. You couldn't say good-by to the guy; his mind was too mixed up to understand or care, yet his eyes blazed with a fierce hating look as he jerked his head around, staring at everybody, cursing wildly all the time. . . .

Sam Church was put in then on an improvised stretcher. We said good-by to him, and, "Tough luck," and, "See you down at Dutch in the spring." Swede cracked that Sam needn't go telling us he hadn't done it on purpose! Everybody laughed. It wasn't *laughing* laughter, if you get what I mean, but it eased off tension a little.

The Colonel said quietly, "This Godfrey—it must have been damned tough on you, coping with that. What happened—or don't you know?"

I said yes, we knew. I sketched in the details; the engagement to the girl back in Seattle, the "Dear John" letter that came in the first batch of mail we received, the attempts to get Dutch Harbor to send for him before things got too serious. . . . I let the Colonel know how Dutch Harbor had reminded us that we had volunteered for this duty. What that had to do with a man's going insane, I didn't know! And besides, they had no planes available.

The Colonel said gravely that these things did happen.

He could certainly appreciate that this was a particularly tough spot for such an experience. On the other hand, planes really were scarce. Dutch Harbor could use at least three times as many as they had.

I said, "We've kept morale here as high as possible. We're not very G.I., I'll admit; but for the most part we've got along fine."

The shadow of a humorous look crossed the Colonel's face. Now that he recalled, he said, it seemed to him he had heard about a few things that happened on St. Paul to a certain—ah—second lieutenant. He had gathered as much—that as I said we hadn't been altogether G.I. But—now he looked directly at me, with a big grin—as far as he could see a fine job was being done and when he got back to headquarters he would mention it frankly. He tightened his collar against the bite of the wind. "Well, Sergeant, we'll have to be taking off—here's wishing you the best." Shaking hands with me—it was like one civilian to another—he went up the ladder into the plane. He turned and pointed to the truck; our mail was on it, also four cases of supplies from Special Services. "A pleasant time to you!" he said with a wave of his hand as he disappeared.

The motors were revved up. A roaring rattled like thunder across St. Paul, died away once to a low mutter, rose to a titanic roar. The wheels began to turn, bit down into the air strip, the plane charged down the field, took the air in a smooth gradual lift. . . .

"Hey, mail everybody!" yelled Swede. We raced back to the village. I remarked to Berkeley that we had three less men now than were needed, but at least all of us were whole. I was sorry as hell for Godfrey, but he had made a drag on morale. Sometimes I thought I was going nuts too. Anyhow, now we had the mail. Maybe things would take a turn for the better. And God damn anybody who'd written anything

that wasn't good news! The memory of Godfrey and his girl's letter still sent a cold chill down my back.

I asked myself, could I do less than break out the brandy that evening, to celebrate the coming of the mail?

Waving his mug in friendly fashion, Van Meter wanted to know what Colonel Cushing's sentiments had been on the subject of our booze making. With a straight face I reported that he just said he wished he could stay long enough to sample it. "The Colonel said you'd be surprised to know how hard good liquor is to come by now, what with shortages and all. In fact he said that if he could establish that ours was really as good as he had been given to understand, he might arrange to have us set up a G.I. still for use around Headquarters."

Van stared hard at me. With great detachment he remarked that in his opinion I was just about the Goddamnedest liar on this island, not excepting Swede. No kidding, though, had the Colonel mentioned the booze?

"Who's kidding?" I said evenly. "He merely wanted to know which men were doing the actual making, and what your qualifications for the job were—"

"Mine!" Van's voice rose to an anguished yell. What in all hell was I trying to do to him?

What else, but give him a good build-up to the Colonel? I was very generous, telling the Colonel that we knew when we started him on it that this Van Meter was a good man for the project; he'd even been run out of Kentucky because he was competition for the big distillers.

Van Meter gaped at me in horror. God a'mighty, he'd be court-martialed sure! Suddenly his face took on a look of cunning. One thing was sure, he pointed out, he wouldn't be thrown into the can alone—I would have to be a witness. Then they'd find me guilty of complicity. But then the light

broke. He looked sheepish. Aw, the Colonel prob'ly hadn't even mentioned the booze. He said it hopefully.

Swede twisted the screw a little. The Colonel sure had. Before the rest of us got out there the Colonel had talked to Swede personally for fifteen minutes; asked him all about the booze—especially could we make it as fast as we could drink it up.

Van Meter felt more at ease now. Swede was showing his usual form. The big, *big* lie!

The balance of the detachment watched with mouths agape throughout this lively exchange. They didn't know what to believe. Was it possible on the face of this earth that a full colonel in the Army could know about booze being made on a post and not lift a finger about it? I made a mental note; sometime when we were badly in need of a laugh I would spring it on them; the Colonel hadn't mentioned liquor.

We made that a red-letter evening. Everybody took pride and pleasure in doing the things they did only when drunk. It added up to a lot of entertainment. Along toward morning, among his numerous talents Swede discovered that he was a poet and in a foghorn voice got off some real horrors. Steichen and Pierce were pleased to pretend that they were seals, one a beach master, the other one of his harem; they barked wildly at each other, smacking their hands like flippers, emitting loud abdominal cries.

For that time of year the next morning the humidity was abnormally high. But again the festivities had accomplished exactly what I hoped. The mail produced no disasters, everybody was relaxed and optimistic, willing to face the everyday grind. Misfortune seemed behind us.

We jogged along till the morning of St. Patrick's Day. Things were quiet when Sergeant Graves careened down the

hill into the village, yelling, "Smoke out to sea to the south!"

Smoke! It must be from an icebreaker. The ice was solid as far south as we could see. Dutch Harbor hadn't passed any word about an icebreaker being in this area. Then I remembered the Russian vessel at St. George. Perhaps this was another Russian ship. Graves said he had watched it for some time before he came down. No use to say he'd been seeing things; it was smoke all right, and it was off to the south.

There was a general exodus from the hotel to the top of the hill to see what could be seen. Graves was right. South of Otter Island a tall plume of smoke was streaming into the sky.

All that day it hung there in that same position. It thinned slightly at times; then for a while it would billow up into the sky in puffs. It reminded me of explosions of black feathers.

It certainly must be an icebreaker—what else could it be?—but it seemed queer that an icebreaker would be using up fuel so extravagantly. At times you'd think it was an oil well afire.

We kept watch on it throughout the afternoon. It never seemed to move away from one spot. Maybe the ice just there was especially tough.

I considered sending a message to Dutch Harbor to see if they could tell us anything. I decided against it. I had a hunch that by now Dutch Harbor would appreciate a little vacation from St. Paul Island and its affairs.

The next morning after breakfast most of the detachment climbed the hill again. The smoke was still there. Gigantic puffs of it, seemingly mixed with steam, still billowed into the air. All of a sudden it came to me.

This was something very few people got the opportunity to see. I believed it had all the earmarks of undersea volcanic activity. Nobody believed me. None of them had ever heard

of underwater volcanic activity. I explained why I was convinced.

For one thing, we observed dark rings, surrounded by white streaks. The white streaks would be steam, the black rings smoke. It must be plenty hot out there for them to be able to force their way up through the ice and water. If only we had a plane—it must be something to see from overhead. The action must be melting a huge ring in the ice pack. An aerial photo would be a curiosity worth having.

The men were skeptical. I pointed out that they must have heard of volcanic islands. For instance, Bogoslof? That had been formed by underwater volcanic action. Where was it? Just north of Umnak Island, in the Aleutians. On some of the older maps it was marked as the disappearing island. Why? Because it did just that. The last time it had come up out of the sea it had two peaks; one higher than the other. Prior to that it had only one.

Someone wanted to know what brand of baloney this was, trying to hand them the idea that an island could pop in and out of the sea like a jack-in-the-box.

I admitted that it might sound queer, but scientists had an explanation. They figured that such an island rested on a geological formation shaped like a wedge. While the pressure was up, the island stayed above water; when the pressure fell, the island sank. I reminded them that the Aleutians still held a lot of active volcanoes.

And was it an actual fact, this Bogoslof Island did disappear and reappear?

Yes, it had happened a couple of times that I knew of. The island wasn't along a route much traveled in peacetime, but it had been pretty well established as fact by reports from reliable observers. Most ships tried to give the place a wide berth.

They were beginning to be more convinced that this smoke

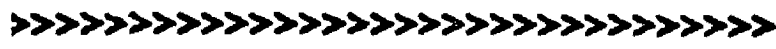
off to the south might be from volcanic action. I decided to message Dutch Harbor, giving them the location of the smoke from the village. They could warn any shipping; otherwise some vessel might get fouled up with a new reef.

Berkeley groaned and growled because he didn't have a movie camera and the means of getting out there. The devil with a movie camera! I was only glad the thing hadn't started up under this island—closed in behind the ice pack we'd be in a hell of a pickle!

Someone said, "What a country; if you're not freezing, you're frying!"

Irrelevantly Van Meter commented that he had seen a hula girl once on Waikiki, hotter than any volcano. Swede advised him not to brag; bad for the blood pressure.

The smoke continued for three days and then slowly died away. For several days we noted a haze in the same position. Finally that too died away.



Chapter Fifteen

WE had stocked the cabin at North East Point plentifully with food and coal before the fall snows arrived. As time passed, most parties that stayed away from the village overnight spent the time there.

One day, being pretty bored with life in town, I rounded up Swede and Berkeley for a hike along the beach and some beachcombing. Japanese objects were often washed up on the beaches. We figured many of them came all the way from the Kuriles.

Approaching North East Point, we noticed something new. A lot of enormous clam shells were scattered about. They were by far the largest we had seen. The queer thing was that many still contained live clams.

Having been born and reared in Nome, Swede deduced that deep-sea clams could only mean that a herd of walrus must be near by; they lived on them. Had either Berkeley or I ever seen a walrus out clam-digging? We had not, though I remembered hearing somewhere that they used their tusks for diggers.

Swede explained how they dove for the bottom, stuck their tusks in the mud, then rolled over; in this way they turned up about a yard of mud and the clams would float free in the deep water. Sometimes a walrus would come to the surface with a big hunk of mud in his flipper and try to wash the clams free. He said it was a lot of fun to watch them, and I could believe it. The clams that they missed would wash ashore—Swede thought these must be those.

We decided to hang around awhile; maybe we would get

a look at them at their digging. Swede said we'd better keep quiet, that walrus could hear a long way off. Also they left a big bull on guard. Even when the rest of the herd was asleep, one always stayed awake to keep the watch. He figured from the shells that the walrus couldn't be very far away although it just might be that they were up on the edge of the ice pack.

Crouching slightly, and walking as lightly as possible, we eased around the shore line till we could look into a little bight. Sure enough, a group of walrus were ashore. We counted twenty-three on the beach, others in the water, feeding. Those on shore were huddled in a small knot; only one of them was awake, a huge bull, the largest of the lot. He kept turning his head from side to side, surveying the beach and the strip of open water between the beach and the ice pack.

In the open water we could see numerous little whirlpools. Swede said that meant a walrus was on the bottom, probing around with his tusks in the mud to stir up the clam nests. Now and then a big head would surface as a walrus paused to eat a juicy clam or two. The walruses were kept very busy, preparing their meals and gobbling them down. Because just one walrus would require a lot of clams for a single meal, we figured there must be a very large clam bed just offshore here.

We flattened ourselves behind three boulders on the beach and for quite a while observed this fascinating sight. The wind was in our favor, and our scent did not reach the walruses.

Evidently the watchman system was considered reliable only up to a point. Now and then we noticed a bull reach out with his tusks and prod a neighbor. In turn the neighbor would prod his neighbor till the whole herd was awake, grumbling and muttering like a lot of sleepy old men over

being disturbed. But they contributed their share to the watching.

Swede said these were all bachelors; they must have strayed south with the ice pack. He pointed out a particularly big one on guard, saying that he had seen a lot of walrus tusks in his time but these were the largest. The King Island Eskimos, he said, came into Nome every summer, bringing ivory along with them to carve into souvenirs for the tourists.

Swede suggested that we shoot the watchman—those tusks of his would be worth having, a nice souvenir of St. Paul Island.

I whispered, How about drawing lots to see who got the big one—there were enough walruses so each of us could have a pair of tusks.

Swede nodded; so did Berkeley; it suited them. Swede pulled up a handful of dry beach grass, made three straws. The man who got the long one got the bull, O.K.?

Berkeley pulled first, the short one. I pulled mine. Swede emitted a good-humored curse. The big one was mine if I could kill him. He and Berkeley made their selections from the rest of the herd.

We wriggled into firing position on our stomachs and took aim. "Ready?" I whispered.

"O.K." On the count of three we would fire—we'd better make damned sure of hits!

One—two—three!

Our rifles cracked in unison. Three bull's-eyes!

As those hit collapsed in the water, the remainder of the herd lunged clumsily but lightning-fast into the water too. In considerably less than one minute a few ripples were all that could be seen on the surface.

"I wouldn't have thought those babies could move so fast," observed Berkeley.

"Let one get after you once—you'd find out!" chuckled Swede. He explained that they could fight like the devil too. Lots of Eskimos had been killed out walrus hunting. Here in the Bering the Eskimos used skin umiaks for hunting them. Every once in a while you heard of a walrus coming up under one of the boats, running his tusk through boat and hunter both. We shook our heads. Tusks the size of these sure would make a hole in a man.

We went over to the three carcasses. Swede went to North East Point to get the ax. It was about three quarters of a mile. I suggested that while he was at it he might as well start up the fire, then the cabin would be good and warm when we got there.

While we waited for him to get back, Berkeley and I amused ourselves. We wondered if we could knock out any of their fierce-looking teeth with stones, tried it, extracted half a dozen teeth. We might as well wait till we had the ax to knock out the rest.

We managed to get the hide sliced away from the base of the tusks with our knives. When Swede got back and we finally got the tusks out, they were in good condition; the watchman's were eight inches longer than the others.

Inasmuch as Swede had fetched the ax, we let him sit on a rock and mastermind the operation while we did the work.

He observed that walrus teeth made wonderful souvenirs if they were worked up just right. You had to grind them across the grain and polish them; they looked even better than plain ivory in wrist-watch bands.

We spent the night at the point; I had brought along a quart of our brandy.

When we got down to the village in the morning, it suddenly struck me that life on the island had smoothed out a

bit. The makeshift water tower worked well enough, no particular new frictions among the men had developed; since there was no outpost duty, there was plenty of time for the other necessary jobs; and morale showed the effect of our being relieved of the strain of Godfrey's presence.

Our appearance with three pairs of walrus tusks touched off the idea that every man on the island ought to get himself a pair. From then on three or four of the men would head out toward North East Point every other day. They didn't have much luck. The walrus herd, having taken to the sea, showed no sign of returning.

A message arrived from Dutch Harbor April 7:

CIVILIAN PERSONNEL ST PAUL RETURNING THERE AS SOON AS ICE PERMITS STOP WHAT IS NEEDED FOR OPERATION OF RENDERING PLANT STOP SEAL OIL VITAL IN MAKING EXPLOSIVES STOP

What the hell did we know about what was needed in sealing operations or for a reduction plant to turn out the oil?

I encoded a reply:

ALL ARMY PERSONNEL THIS STATION STOP WE KNOW NOTHING ABOUT SEALING OR REDUCTION PLANT OPERATION STOP IMAGINE MAIN REQUIREMENTS FUEL OIL GASOLINE AND FOOD FOR NATIVES STOP

Never at a loss for words, back came Dutch Harbor:

HOW MANY WOODEN BARGES DO YOU HAVE THERE STOP

Reply:

TWO 100 FOOT BARGES STOP THREE 70 FOOT BARGES STOP ALL DRAWN UP OUT OF WATER STOP

Next they wanted to know if we had sufficient personnel to put the barges in the water. I replied that we had the personnel but that the island was iced in at the present time.

WILL NOTIFY YOU IN ADVANCE OF ARRIVAL OF CIVILIAN PERSONNEL STOP.

I sent down another message:

IMPERATIVE WATER TOWER BE REPLACED HERE STOP REQUIREMENTS OF CIVILIAN PERSONNEL WILL DEMAND MORE WATER THAN WE HAVE AVAILABLE STOP

To this they replied that a detachment of Army engineers would arrive on the same ship to replace the burned water tower.

All this exchange created quite a hubbub. We wondered if the engineers would be staying. Consensus: probably they would beat it at the earliest possible moment!

Something told us to make the most of the time before the influx. Nice weather was becoming less of a rarity. Flowers were beginning to burst into bloom here and there around the island. One morning several of us went out on a nature expedition. Dunn fixed us a big lunch, and we took our rifles. Berkeley suggested that we head for Lake Hill. In that area there were a number of natural springs and—surprise!—also a lake. We figured there ought to be quite a bit to see around there.

We left the jeep and walked up the slope. We expected to see some flowers but not so many. The hill was covered with a patchwork quilt of them; every species and color to be found in the Arctic. The place blazed with yellow Arctic poppies, rose-red Pedicularis, sapphire monkshood, lupine—not blue but a silvery green—and beautiful white milfoil.

Berkeley was astonished; he said he had expected to see just one or two kinds, rather skimpy and pinched up. Swede's brother-in-law had told him that the native wives on St. Paul brewed a medicine out of milfoil, used it for coughs and colds. The natives never got colds in the winter months, only when the first boats arrived in spring. Germs courtesy of civilization!

In a small ravine near Lake Hill we found luxuriant masses of tall ferns. And everywhere "Eskimo potato"; Swede said the tuberous roots were a favorite food with the Eskimos and Aleuts.

Being the unofficial naturalist of the detachment, Berkeley busied himself with a lot of little notes for future reference. Though he'd never been in the Arctic before, he seemed to know a lot of the flowers when he came to them.

We discovered—for future reference too—that a large number of ducks, three species, made their home at the lake, and were preparing to nest. Just as we were ready to turn back to the village two big sand-hill cranes came planing in, landing at the edge of the lake. It was the first time I had ever seen a crane on this island. We watched them several minutes; they must be annual residents because they acted thoroughly at home.

We still had no definite date of arrival for the newcomers, but I decided we'd better begin to get ready. Number one on the inspection list had better be the motor launch, which had been out of water all winter.

A damned good thing we checked on it too! In a lot of places the canvas tarpaulin was cracked. Though the weather was moderating now, we were still getting rain squalls that turned rapidly to ice. The ice had frozen the launch bilges up to a thickness of about three feet. This could be bad; the calking might freeze out of the launch under ice pres-

sure. We'd better find out—fast!—if any damage had been done.

Once again we hastily rigged an improvised boiler out of three gasoline drums and turned live steam into the launch bilges. It took a whole day to thaw the ice out. We found that the launch itself was all right, which was a relief.

To the north of the island the ice pack had been getting thinner and thinner. We woke up one morning in late April to find the harbor clear of ice, although the main ice pack still lingered a couple of miles offshore.

Berkeley suggested a fishing trip. We thought there should be gray cod around here, maybe a few halibut. We rounded up gear and got the boat launched.

Scarcely had we pushed out from the dock when there was a loud noise and we felt the keel grate on something. Now what the hell was this, I wondered. Swede peered over the bow into the water.

He reported that there was a whole nest of boulders. We looked at each other. How come? They hadn't been there in the fall. We decided that the ice pack must have picked them up from an offshore reef and brought them in.

It posed a question. How did we get out of the harbor now?

The answer was simple: we wouldn't go out now anyway; we'd better get the launch up out of the water and see if we had punched a hole in her. We had hit hard enough!

In record time we hauled her out. Swede was full of admiration for the man who put that iron keel on her. It had taken the whole force of the blow, without damage to the boat. If the keel had been wood, the whole works would have been torn out.

We decided to put out in the rowboat and have a look at the rock pile. The boulders were festooned all around in front of the dock. Some of them were very hefty. It looked to

me as though the only way we'd be able to get out of the harbor would be to blast.

Berkeley didn't quite see how we could do that. Blasting on land was easy. But in water...

I reminded him that we had plenty of TNT and a lot of electric blasting caps. We could make different-sized bundles to fit in among the rock clumps, putting them in sacks; sink the sacks weighted with a few beach rocks, lower one bundle at a time from the rowboat; then row back to the dock, and touch off the charges.

Swede groaned at the prospect of so much hard work.

There was nothing else to do. We were lucky that we had time to get the job done before the ship arrived. If we had a ship standing offshore yelling for transportation in, we would be in a pickle.

It was a lot of work all right. The first shot we placed in a big nest of the boulders; we used up a whole case of TNT for that one charge. We set it off from the dock. Though the dock was concrete the terrific underwater concussion shook the devil out of it. Pieces of boulder rained all around us; some even flew up on the dock. Dodging rocks, Berkeley hollered that it was damned near as bad as being under an artillery barrage Swede complained that a hunk missed his ear by an inch.

I decided that it was too close for comfort, and we'd better hook up longer wiring, do the rest of the blasting from a safer distance.

It took three days of long, laborious work to blast a passage through that deposit of boulders.

The day after we finished the job was one of the finest days we'd seen in all the time since arriving on the island. We rated a little relaxation, so once again we decided to go fishing. We threw a jug of brandy and a case of C rations into the boat, and our gear, and set out. I asked Swede where

he thought would be the best place to try because he had fished around up north.

"Out on the edge of the ice pack," he said promptly. "The ice is about four miles offshore by now—that should be our best bet." Well, we'd find out how good his judgment was as a fisherman.

We hove to about a hundred yards from the edge of the ice pack and tossed our hand lines overboard. Berkeley and Swede were using pieces of tin for spoons, above hooks baited with reindeer meat. They hit in no time at all. Swede got his bite first. He let out a bloodcurdling yell and started hauling in his line. A fine big gray cod flopped on deck.

Berkeley wasn't far behind him. Then, for a little while, it seemed that everyone had fish at the same instant. Fish came aboard so fast for about an hour that you couldn't keep count. Suddenly they just quit biting.

We kept on trying. It was a beaut' of a day, a pleasure just to be on the water.

Suddenly Van Meter gave a yell too. "I gotta whale on here—bear a hand!"

It took the combined efforts of three men to haul the huge gray shape near enough to the surface to get a look at it. "The biggest God-damned halibut I ever saw!" screeched Swede. "We'll never land him in this boat—we don't have the gaff." Swede had some commercial fishing experience.

It seemed a shame to turn him loose, I thought, watching the huge form thrash around. Swede thought maybe we could tow him ashore. Van Meter was like a kid with his first string line. He was all for trying a tow—he couldn't stand letting him get away.

I said I would nudge the boat along real easy, and he might stay on the hook till we got in. Swede said we had to let out enough line so he'd be trailing alongside the boat but not enough so he'd get tangled up in the propeller. It looked

as if we had a good hold on him; the hook must be down in his stomach.

Slowly the boat headed for shore. As Swede instructed, the line was lengthened out. The fish stayed, all the way in. A few of those who weren't much interested in doing any fishing themselves came down to the dock to see what we brought in. With pulling and tugging by all hands we managed to slide the critter ashore, up the marine railway. He thrashed around until Swede picked up a two-by-four and gave him a couple of belts over the skull.

Van brought a rule from the hotel to measure him. Seven feet long, four feet wide! For a week after he was caught, halibut steaks for all. A pleasant change, everybody said, from reindeer steaks.

Van wondered if you could make much money fishing up around here after the war. That tickled Swede. "One fish, and the guy wants to go into the business!" he cried. "Boy, don't you know beginner's luck when it hits you?"

Van said stubbornly, Well, he was just wondering.

Dunn appeared at Van's elbow. "Here, Corporal, have a piece of fish!" he snickered, pushing another smoking hot steak off onto Van's plate. Everybody laughed. They felt good, and it was good to laugh.

On the second day of May we saw our first fur seals of the new breeding season, Berkeley and I. The bulls, largest of the herd, in the finest condition, were making their way through open leads in the ice pack to shore. With big lusty cries they hauled up out of the water, clambering up to vantage points where they would wait now for the arrival of the harems.

We began going out each day to watch the spectacle. Each day a few more bulls would show up. Soon the beach was dotted over with these lordly behemoths.

A week after the first of the bulls appeared, the main herd showed up. It was a camp meeting of the animal world. The noise was deafening. Flurries of squabbling, a few short, vicious fights, attended the settling down for the breeding season.

In a few days the lines were clearly drawn. Each beach master let his domain be known. The bachelors were pushed off to one side. The harems gathered around the beach masters, flirting, nuzzling, coyly advancing and retreating.

The ancient pageant was under way. All over again we felt impressed by the working of nature's inscrutable and perfect plans.

Chapter Sixteen

EACH day the ice pack drew a little farther off from the island. Using the caterpillar tractor, we put the wooden barges in the water, anchoring them in the salt lagoon behind the native warehouse.

Something that had fascinated the men ever since our arrival on St. Paul was the sight of Walrus and Otter Islands. Otter, lying about four miles off the mouth of Village Cove, was explained in the Island's diary as the location of the jail for St. Paul's serious criminals.

One morning six of us set out in the motor launch to look around. As the rubber life raft would be easier to handle than the clumsy rowboat, we took it along.

The day was nice, no wind, and a beautiful blue sky. Nowadays the sun got far enough above the horizon so we could feel its warmth; that added to our sense of well-being.

It took us a little over an hour to get across and ashore on Otter Island. Its one building was a dilapidated affair, with one door and two windows. Inside was a rusty old stove, cracked in many places; two bunks, a table, a variety of rusty pots and chipped dishes. With a battered coffeepot and a rusted frying pan these constituted the equipment of the erstwhile jailhouse. Swede commented that it must have been almost as pleasant as Alcatraz.

In the diary it said it was reserved for the worst offenders. It seems some of the natives had a habit of brewing up a drink made of flour and sugar; they called it "hootch-nahoo." It must have been pretty lethal stuff—the diary said the natives went hog-wild on a few drinks.

It didn't take long to see all there was to see. I decided to go up to the volcano. Swede and Berkeley decided to do a bit of beachcombing; the rest of us climbed up the side of the volcano.

We found a perfectly round borehole, extending into the earth at an angle of about sixty degrees. Fires must still be simmering underground; there was a rank, sulphurous odor from the hole. The strength varied while we were there, which made us think that below ground the pressure was active.

On the beach Swede and Berkeley got very excited. They headed west along the beach from where the launch was anchored. When they came to the end of the beach, they followed the cliff along. When they looked over the edge they found a wholesale walrus graveyard, biggest pile of bones they'd ever seen.

I asked them if there were any tusks. Tusks! Enough to make the whole crowd happy! The cliff was too steep to get down, they said, but they could run the motor launch around and go ashore with the life raft.

Van Meter thought they were kidding again. Just the same we piled into the launch and transferred to the life raft. As we reached the spot Swede exclaimed, "Now—are we kidding?"

They certainly were not. You never would have thought so many walruses could have met their death in one place. Like a backdrop in some prehistoric drama, directly beyond the mass of bone and ivory, was the mouth of a huge cave. I thought it must be the blowhole of some ancient volcano.

Van wondered if the volcano had blown and killed the whole damned herd at one swipe.

Berkeley thought it very possible. He figured that probably they'd remained buried for a long time, and gradually the tides and the ice uncovered them.

I suggested that when they were hit—by whatever it was—they must have been all huddled together, like the herd we observed at Polovina Point. Swede put in that walrus usually herd up when they sleep.

We stared awhile at the mass of bones. Here and there a big tusk stuck out. This was sure the biggest find we had made. If we had time before our replacements came we could bring over picks and shovels, dig around some. On the other hand, if we only wanted enough ivory to go around, just the top of the heap would yield that.

Swede laughed; by the time we got through picking over this bone yard we'd all qualify for expert ivory pickers.

We couldn't resist digging right in. By using pieces of bone for picks and shovels, in no time we had pried loose thirty-nine tusks.

I speculated on how far back the cave ran. We could smell sulphur too— probably the cave stretched down to where the fires were still burning. The sulphur smell wasn't as strong here as it was at the borehole on top of the hill; but it was there. Berkeley remarked that one of these days Otter Island would probably blow up again. Maybe even St. Paul would blow up some time, if the volcanic action we believed produced all the smoke we saw to the south should spread northward. A thought struck Berkeley. "Lord, if it should ever blow while the seal herd is here—good-by, herd!"

"Good-by natives too!" Speaking of the natives made me remember we had things to do back in the village. Also we'd been gone some time. "They'll think we struck a reef and sank if we don't get back," I said.

As long as we had excavated some ivory we might as well take it along. Ferrying it out to the launch proved to be quite a trick. Some of the tusks were very fine, though none were as large as the pair on the bull walrus I'd bagged at North East Point. I mentioned this to Swede, bragging a little.

"Didn't I tell you before that they were the biggest I ever saw? We'll probably never find another pair as big." I noted that he said it admiringly, not enviously.

Back in the village the rest of the detachment were agape at sight of the thirty-nine tusks. Up to that time their own particular discoveries had been relatively mediocre, one or two tusks at a time, only soso in quality. The idea of a treasure ground where good tusks were to be had in heaps merely for the taking had never even entered our heads. Naturally everyone wanted a tusk to send home for a souvenir. We divided up what we had brought in, talked about how to proceed when we returned to the graveyard.

The day after our trip out to Otter Island a message arrived from Dutch Harbor:

> USAT THOMPSON LEAVING FOR YOUR STATION 1000 TODAY STOP LT 199 WITH TOW OF THREE BTLS LEFT HERE FOR ST PAUL YESTERDAY STOP

Translated into English the Army Transport *Thompson* was coming, also a large tug with three tank landing barges. These latter were self-propelled and would certainly come in handy for unloading the *Thompson.*

By now the ice pack was completely gone to the south, though from high ground at the north end of the island we could still distinguish it.

It was now May 14. Five weeks since Dutch Harbor had first notified us that we were going to have a visitation.

The morning of the fifteenth the man on guard at the Village Hill outpost reported a tug and tow standing in toward St. Paul and about six miles offshore.

We launched the motorboat, and most of the detachment piled in to go out and meet it.

It was quite an aggregation. In addition to the tug crew there were five men to operate the landing barges, fine seventy-foot steel ones, with twin Diesel engines. Swede was jubilant, being a Diesel man.

Crewmen for the landing barges were all Alaskan natives, excellent boatmen, especially trained at the Army transportation school at Seattle in their operation.

I asked the n.c.o. in charge of the barge detachment, a Sergeant Muir, if he had any spare parts along for them. Hell, no, he exploded; not that he hadn't tried to get some, because the barges had been giving quite a bit of trouble. He had told the colonel in charge that in an out-of-the-way place like St. Paul they'd better have some spare parts, but it was the old snafu; if they needed spare parts, they'd be sent up later.

I remarked meaningly on the way we got our mail; now if they got spare parts that same way—

The Sergeant gave us a rundown on things in Seattle. Things were fine there, he said, just fine; everybody was making a lot of dough, having a hell of a fine time. Everybody yelled about shortages, and rationing; G.I.'s had a good racket, selling cigarettes to the civilians—a guy could make his whisky money that way. The sergeant gave a laugh.

I remarked that it sounded lovely, adding bitterly that up here this winter we had run out of cigarettes. Quickly he offered us some; he had plenty. But I told him we had plenty now too. The Army had got bighearted, flown a lot of stuff in to us—including our mail.

Just then the captain of the tug called me aside and invited me below to his cabin. He broke out some excellent whisky. We had a few stiff ones. He apologized for not asking the whole detachment down for a drink too, but said he didn't have too much whisky with him and God knew how long it would be before he could get to a place where he could buy more without coughing up a year's pay for it.

"Think nothing of it, sir," I said grandly; "we probably have more liquor ashore this minute than you've got on your tug anyhow. First time you come ashore I'll give you a gallon to take along with you." I appreciated his stare of astonishment. I took pleasure in explaining how we more or less had to have a liquor supply on this island because of the stresses and strains. So—necessity being the mother of—we had made it right here on the island. I rubbed my hands together. "If I do say it, it's pretty good stuff for—er—bootleg."

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed heartily. "I must say this is a bit of good news. You know they might send me down on the Aleutians when I get back to Dutch Harbor. A gallon of your sterling brew would certainly come in handy in that case."

We took care of another small libation, and I explained that I had better get back on the job. "Don't forget, Captain, I'll return the compliment ashore."

"Catch me forgetting, Sergeant!"

It turned out that Swede's brother-in-law was the engineer of the tug. They were uproarious. I suggested that Swede would need to show him the—er—sights. In pantomine Swede did some elbowing-bending.

I began to feel very good indeed. The arrivals had brought us a lot of hard work to be done, but a good and welcome change too—from each other, from hearing the same jokes over again, from the general feeling that we were the U.S. Army's forgotten guys, parked on an ice cake, out of sight, out of mind.

Chapter Seventeen

THE L.T. 199 and the *Thompson* anchored within six hours of each other, about a mile offshore. The *Thompson* was heavily loaded and, being bigger than the tug, drew more water. She was accompanied by the *Atalanta,* a Coast Guard cutter.

When we drew up to them in the launch, the number of people aboard was a big surprise to us. It was quite a mixture too; Aleuts, white civilians, soldiers. I wondered if this meant that Dutch Harbor was going to let the detachment off St. Paul soon. We were about ready for it.

A rope ladder came over the side of the *Thompson,* and I turned over the controls of the launch so I could go aboard and find out the score. I scrambled up the ladder telling Swede to ease back a little distance and let the engine idle.

I landed on deck in front of a little group of Army officers. A major stepped forward and asked if I was Sergeant Ellsworth. His name was Becknow, from G-2 Headquarters; Colonel Cushing had sent him out here.

"For the next few months there is going to be quite an Army contingent on St. Paul; it hasn't been quite decided what to do about this station." He added, "You've been here for some time now, haven't you, Sergeant?"

Ever since the civilians were evacuated, I told him.

Well, for the time being he was taking over command. It was his belief that our detachment was shortly going to be relieved. It had been decided at Headquarters, however, that we would stay at least until the new troops were oriented.

They would need us to show them the ropes, acquaint them with the setup.

"Glad to be of help, Major. May I ask, sir, did you pick our mail up at Dutch Harbor?"

The Major grinned. "Colonel Cushing gave me explicit instructions not to leave Dutch Harbor without it." He said that he had an Army paymaster with him too—he thought we'd probably be glad to see him! A short, chunky second lieutenant stepped forward. Lieutenant Hawthorne grinned, saying he'd been hearing about us all winter. "Pleased to meet you, Sergeant," he said, shaking hands.

I asked him if what they'd heard was all bad. No, he said, on the contrary it was very good. They had heard rumors that we had given a certain second lieutenant a rather bad time up here. The Lieutenant added reassuringly that they understood from a very reliable source also that the officer in question had it coming to him.

I laughed, remarking that it hadn't been too bad. I had noticed that there was a platoon of engineers aboard, and I asked the Major about it. Was the Army going to install a small garrison on the island?

Well, yes and no. The Air Corps was going to install a direction-finder station for locating lost planes. There would also be some infantry and field artillery. They might not stay very long, but Headquarters had decided they were a necessary protection to the sealing operation. We were much in need of seal oil to make TNT and other explosives. Incidentally, he wanted to know, had we removed the mines from the village yet?

Why no, we hadn't.

"Why is that, Sergeant? We figured you'd have done that as soon as you were notified that the natives were being returned. They can't very well live here with mines under them."

I explained that I had thought of it. Then I decided that Headquarters would have given me a directive if they wanted them removed.

The Major grinned ruefully, saying he guessed I was right. To tell the truth he should have sent the directive himself and had overlooked it. How long did I estimate it would take to clear the buildings of mines?

I took a squint at the light. We had a few hours of daylight left. I figured we could start the job as soon as we could get ashore, finish it tomorrow. One full day would probably take care of it.

The Major suggested that I send the launch ashore with instructions to begin the work; meantime he'd like me to stay aboard a couple of hours; there were quite a few details to discuss.

I went over to the rail and yelled across to Swede. He was to go in and pass the word to get the de-mining started—I'd be in later.

Major Becknow led the way down to his cabin. He asked the other officers to come along. He made some introductions—Lieutenant Murray, in the engineers; Lieutenant Parker, in charge of the field-artillery section. Murray was short and burly, a second lieutenant; Parker was a tall, lanky first lieutenant. I remarked that I certainly wished the field artillery had been here for moral support in the fall when the Jap sub was around plaguing us. He said he wished so too; it must have been quite an experience.

The Major chimed in. He'd like to get the details on that. He had read all the radiograms sent from here. "Incidentally, let me introduce Lieutenant Heinz, infantry, Lieutenant Strom, Army Air Corps radio-direction-finder group. I guess all this must impress you as quite a garrison after being such a small group here all winter."

It struck me that after the handshaking everybody seemed

to settle back with a kind of anticipatory expression. I didn't have to wait long to learn why. Major Becknow inquired briskly, "Sergeant, do you drink?"

I countered. "Major, did you read the diary I submitted last winter to Headquarters?"

He certainly did! He added that we wouldn't go into the contents at this time. "What these gentlemen don't know won't hurt them." However, it was his opinion that I would not be—ah—averse to a little liquid refreshment now and then.

I agreed that he was right.

He reached down and came up with a bottle of Hudson's Bay Rum, also some Coca-Cola and paper cups. He said he wouldn't go so far as to say that this blend would cut the dust from my throat; let us just say it might thin out the fog. Pouring a drink for me and one for himself, he set the bottle down, remarking "Gentlemen, help yourselves."

Grinning, Lieutenant Strom offered a toast; it must have been a long, dry winter on St. Paul—in a manner of speaking—so let's drink the first one to Sergeant Ellsworth and his detachment.

I admitted that the winter had been long, and sometimes damned tough. A few things had gone wrong. A funny thing. I realized I was beginning to feel somehow that it hadn't been so bad.

The Major said genially that, more than once, Colonel Cushing had told him that he, personally, was glad Sergeant Ellsworth was in charge up here. "He showed implicit confidence in your ability to handle things."

I mumbled that it was very kind of the Colonel but there had been plenty of times, to tell the truth, when I wished someone else had the job. It really got rough when Godfrey went off his head and we couldn't get Dutch Harbor to transport him out.

The Major remarked that he believed he could clear that

up for me now. There had been a reason for not helping us out with it. All up and down the Aleutians there had been an epidemic of men wanting to get out. Most of them were used to city life; the loneliness and isolation ate into them; some even faked insanity to get sent back to the States.

"Godfrey wasn't faking!" I said sharply.

"I judge not, Sergeant, but Dutch Harbor wasn't taking any chances."

"By the way," I said, "we haven't heard anything more; did Godfrey snap out of it?"

The last the Major had heard he hadn't. He turned to pleasanter subjects. Not only did he believe that our detachment would shortly be relieved, he had an idea we'd get a furlough. "I'd say you rate it."

It sounded wonderful. I sure hoped he knew what he was talking about. I wasn't accepting any hearsay. Dutch Harbor might know what they were about but they could sure be slow.

One of the things the Major wanted to discuss was this Pribilof setup; the officers needed to know all they could about the area. I explained the seal rookeries, and about the reindeer, the air strip, and so on. It wasn't long before the Major's bottle was empty. I grinned and remarked, "Well, Major, now that we've distributed all your rum, if there're no more questions at the moment I'd better get ashore and find out how the de-mining job's going." The natives couldn't go ashore until their houses were ready for use. The Major said the troops would pitch tents to live in. He wanted to know what the accommodations of our detachment were.

I explained the hotel. Probably it would be necessary for us to move out now. Not immediately, the Major said; only as a last resort.

"Well, thanks again, Major, for the rum; and for the company, gentlemen." I turned to leave.

The Major made a gesture. "Not so fast, Sergeant, I have a package and a letter for you." He laughed. "Colonel Cushing warned me particularly to see that it wasn't—ah—lost in transit." He cocked his head, placing an ear to the package. "Sounds emanating therefrom lead me to believe you might be in a position to—er—offer us a drink, when we come ashore."

I was sure surprised. I took it, grinning. I said I would certainly let the Major know more about this when he came ashore. Anyway, thanks for making sure it didn't get—ah—lost in transit. It was very easy indeed for things that—ah—had a tendency to gurgle, to get lost in wartime. . . .

The Major said that, as it was pretty late in the day for them to get anything done, they would come in the first thing in the morning.

Lieutenant Murray and Lieutenant Parker seemed quite eager to go ashore though. "We'd like to have a look around," they explained.

Two B.L.T.'s were tied up alongside. I yelled down to ask whether they could take a party ashore. Sure, O.K. The lieutenants and I clambered down; the B.L.T. headed for shore. The weather was still fine. The breaker wall wasn't half bad although, the boat being of light draft, its bow leaped in the air as we went through. The officers hadn't had much acquaintance with water, I gathered. They remarked shakily that it was pretty rough.

I said this wasn't bad. They were going to be on the island awhile, they might as well know. This was about the calmest day we'd had in some time; when the wind really blew the breaker wall boiled over, the waves rolled right over the concrete dock.

Lieutenant Parker, hanging on for dear life, wanted to know how we got freight unloaded, that being the case.

I explained that when the wind blew directly into Village

Cove we moved operations over to East Landing, across on the easterly side of the island; or we stopped operations altogether. I pointed to the skeletons of two barges, resting about two hundred feet back from the water's edge, as an example of what could happen when the wind was high, adding that if it started when you happened to be tied up at the dock, there wasn't much to be done about it either.

Parker asked if this region hadn't been occupied a long time? Yes, it had; before the Americans bought Alaska from them, the Russians conducted sealing operations here. Why under the sun, he wanted to know, hadn't a weatherproof dock been built? Couldn't piling have been driven, a harbor dredged out? He thought it was an awful waste of money to have to unload everything with barges.

I explained to the Lieutenant a fact that had become Bible to our detachment, namely that up here you were living in a separate world, entirely different from what you were used to. As for building a dock on piling, the ice pack would take the piling out quick enough. Dredging a harbor might not work either; in front of the harbor there was a big reef. I mentioned the day this spring too when we'd started to launch our motorboat only to discover that the ice pack had rolled in all those boulders and we couldn't even leave the dock until we blasted a passage through them. Took us three days to do it.

The Lieutenant was impressed. It was incredible, he said. I assured him that after he'd been here awhile nothing that happened would seem incredible.

As we climbed out of the B.T.L. I asked the pilot if he had picked out a place to tie up for the night. He jerked his head in the direction of the salt lagoon, said he thought they'd just run the craft back in there. I cautioned him to watch it or they might hang up. Smack in the entrance to the lagoon there was a big rock. The tides here were relatively small but

at low tide you could notice a slight ripple, marking a reef. Also, if the wind should come up from the south, it would drive the craft up on the beach; there was sandy bottom, the anchor would drag easily.

All in all I'd suggested that, instead of the salt lagoon, I would tie up alongside the L.T. 199. At least then if it should come on to blow he'd have plenty of sea room. But he decided he'd look around a little first. "These high-sided, shallow draft B.T.L.'s blow sidewise if there's a stiff breeze; they handle damned hard."

I urged him to watch himself; with the harbor full of reefs he could pile up pretty easily. O.K., he would pass the word around; he would also run back out, tell the others what I had said, and also find out when they wanted to start unloading. I thought it was going to be tomorrow, but he'd better get in touch with the Major, to find out, because he was in charge now.

As he cast off and headed seaward Lieutenant Parker inquired how the devil the ice pack could bring boulders into the harbor. I could see that he thought the ice pack was some little coating of ice, a fairly thick skating rink, maybe.

"Have you ever seen an ice pack at close range?" I said. "You'd be surprised what it can do."

They had seen a lot of floating ice on the way up, but not the main pack.

His education was incomplete, I remarked, at least as far as the Arctic was concerned. There was simply no way to figure how much pressure the ice pack could or would bring to bear on anything, once it started to move with a stiff breeze at its back. Ice cakes a hundred feet thick would roll over, sweeping everything before them. If one happened to ground, it would pick up tremendous boulders and take them right along. Often piles of ice two hundred feet deep were found at least a hundred yards back from the beach. I suggested

that when he had a minute he should take a look at East Landing; during the winter a stiff breeze had driven the ice pack ashore, and now you couldn't even find the dock; it was buried somewhere under fifty feet or so of ice.

The Lieutenant muttered that he guessed I was right, this was a different world all right. I said he wouldn't fully realize how different till he spent a winter here. The Arctic still lived by a mighty basic law—survival of the fittest. In these latitudes the winters could play hell with the minds of average men and they would react in ways that were unknown in the temperate zone.

Lieutenant Parker remarked stoutly that a winter up here ought to be a fine experience; in the States everything was too cut and dried. Where could you find anything new in it, challenging?

Well, he might call it fine experience, but probably very few of our detachment would tell him they enjoyed our winter here. In fact they'd be glad to see the last of the place at the earliest possible minute.

"Is this the hotel you spoke of?" he said. I invited them in to have a look around. They'd like to spend the night on shore, wouldn't they?

Sure. The sooner they got acquainted with the setup the better. The men in their sections would use tents for quarters; they had brought along the lumber to put a floor under each tent. Lieutenant Murray remarked casually that tents weren't half bad so long as they had a floor.

In summertime that might be so, I agreed. But if they spent next winter here they'd better plan to dig the tents in more than half way. Otherwise, some stormy night the men would wake up and find the tents had blown out to sea. I let it go at that. You couldn't really tell anybody about the wind; it was impossible to describe, it had to be experienced.

Lieutenant Parker wanted to know if there would be room

enough in the hotel for the officers? I smiled, getting the impression that the "fine experience" was already subject to some modification.

I opened up the Colonel's letter, which read:

SERGEANT ELLSWORTH AND DETACHMENT:

Am taking this opportunity of sending a few tokens of the appreciation we all have, here in G-2, for the fine work you men did on St. Paul Island this last winter. A detail of the type you men have had for the past few months can be very wearing on the spirit. Hope all of you will remember, when you sample this whisky, that it has been some time since you had any good liquor. Believe you will all be relieved shortly.

Sincerely,

COLONEL L. D. CUSHING, G-2 ADC

I busted out laughing and handed the letters over to the lieutenants to read. I called to their attention the underlining of the word good.

They wanted to know what the point was.

Colonel Cushing was aware, I said, that we'd been making our own liquor up here—this was his way of kidding us about it.

The lieutenants gaped at me. "You've been making liquor up here?" That was enough of a shock, but they also wanted to know where in hell we would find the makings, way off up here.

I told them, in detail, how the native warehouse was as good as having an A. & P. around the corner. Of course the stock of dried fruit there now wasn't as big as it had been, a while back. I described how we had leaned to dried apricots. Speaking of that, would they care to sample some apricot brandy?

Well, said Lieutenant Murray, looking dazed, if it hadn't killed our men it probably wouldn't kill him. He sounded a little dubious.

Reaching under the bed, I pulled out a gallon jug of the Detachment's Own, our St. Paul Special, and poured each a tumblerful. They glanced at each other apprehensively and took small swallows. Quickly the apprehension was replaced by surprised grins. I remembered that that particular jug had been drawn from the first lot we made on the island; by now it was well aged.

They smacked their lips. One of them asked if by any chance I'd been a moonshiner in civilian life. This was a hell of a lot smoother than some of the legal stuff being put out nowadays. Lieutenant Parker emphasized that what he'd been buying at the Officers' Club at Dutch Harbor was rotgut.

I disclaimed any history of moonshining. Everybody here had just pooled their knowledge on the subject of liquor manufacturing. We had aged our brew in a charred keg by tossing it in the sea and letting it roll around awhile, anchored they could be sure, so it wouldn't get away from us! Maybe they noticed the slight charcoal flavor?

They hadn't. To them it just seemed smooth as velvet, potent as sin. Lieutenant Parker expressed the earnest hope that we wouldn't feel compelled to turn our still over to the enlisted men when they came ashore; he and Murray could do without that kind of potential trouble.

I said they had nothing to worry about; that particular still was now a thing of the past. I suggested that they remember, though, that what men had done, men could do; if the men wanted a still badly enough they could rig one easily. I got up, saying I had to leave now. I suggested that they make themselves at home, though. They could drink all they wanted out of the jug, but until Major Becknow came ashore I was still in command on the island, and I was directing them not

to touch the liquor Colonel Cushing had sent up to us; it was for our detachment and if anyone else got to it they'd yell their heads off.

Eying the jug with enthusiasm, they laughed. "We'll look around too and pick out a room for the night," Murray remarked.

"I'll leave you, then. I have to go up on the hill and find out how the de-mining job is progressing."

Walking up the hill I broke out one of the Colonel's cigars. Swede was the one who spotted me first. Raising his nose and sniffing the air like a houn' dog in the moonlight, he yelled out eagerly, "Hey, Sarge, got enough heaters to go around? If not I hosey seconds on the butt."

I pulled out a double handful of the cigars and passed them around. Someone wanted to know what was the occasion? Had I made second looie so quick?

Fat chance! These were compliments of Colonel Cushing to the detachment. Also he had sent up three quarts of good—repeat, good—whisky.

Eee-eee-eeow! I added, "And some candy and three boxes of these cigars. He also sent up a letter; you will find it posted on the bulletin board." I took in the fine aroma of my cigar, remarking that, along with being a good officer, the Colonel was one fine gentleman. It hadn't taken an act of Congress to make him one.

Swede wanted to know if the Colonel said anything in the letter about the liquor detail he was going to fix up for him.

Van Meter chimed in. "Swede! What liquor detail?"

Swede reminded us that at the time he'd told us he had a long talk with the Colonel, at the air strip. The Colonel showed an interest in who was making booze on St. Paul—Swede modestly accepted the impeachment. The Colonel said if that was the case, and the stuff was any good, he'd see

about a soft job at Headquarters, making booze for the brass. That, said Swede, was what he had told us.

Van Meter hollered like a stuck pig. "You big sneak—tryin' to get my job away from me! You don't know one damned thing in hell about making booze. I made every ounce we had. *I* get that soft job!"

The "Sez you," "Sez me," stage ensued. Back and forth they kidded each other; gladly the others egged them on. It occurred to me that, though there was nothing definite, it was in the air that our days on St. Paul were numbered. Everybody was feeling fine.

After awhile I estimated that the de-mining job could be finished by noon the next day, so I suggested that we knock off and go back and divide up the stuff sent by the Colonel. Everybody was in favor. All of a sudden it was an awfully long time since any of us had a snort of good whisky, though it was known that several of the men had a bottle or two hidden away, where only they knew.

The Colonel's letter drew some applause. Swede pretended to be scared that the first garrison we hit we'd have a guard stuck on us to make sure we didn't start right in making booze for the outfit. Van laughed derisively; the hell they would, he said; more likely they'd try to get us for their particular outfits so that they could corner our talents.

Before supper it occurred to me that probably this was going to be the last evening we would spend as a detachment on the island. I figured we ought to have a party; something really memorable.

I encouraged the others but, knowing tomorrow would be a heavy day, took it a little easy myself. I noted that it was quite early when the two lieutenants went up to the room they'd selected, taking the gallon jug I'd given them.

Around eleven o'clock Swede went upstairs to get a couple

of the cigars he'd squirreled away. In a minute he came roaring downstairs, grinning broadly. "If you wanta see something funny, come along with me!" he shouted.

We trooped upstairs after him. He led us to one of the bathrooms. On the floor both lieutenants were contentedly groaning and grumbling in their sleep. Suddenly Swede proposed that we should make them more comfortable; put them in the bathtub to sleep it off.

Something told me not to take a hand in this questionable arrangement, but I stepped back to watch. I didn't say anything; if the officers woke up feeling under the weather the tub might be the most practical place for them.

When I went to bed the party was still on.

Bright and early in the morning I rolled out. The thought occurred to me to check, make sure the officers were in shape to go aboard. The bathroom door was closed. I tried it cautiously, peeked inside. They must have made it to bed; the tub was empty.

The door to their room was closed. I knocked. No response. I pounded. A sickly voice mumbled something unintelligible.

I said it was Sergeant Ellsworth, and I was checking to find out if they wanted to go out to the ship on the first launch trip.

"You drunk, Sergeant? We're a'ready on the *Thompson.* Must be rough out—my bunk's rolling."

At that point a voice I recognized as Murray's disputed the point. The *Thompson* must've been torpedoed—remember, they found themselves wallowing around in slush? They must be in sick bay, on some other ship. "Oh, God, I feel awful," groaned Murray earnestly.

I felt a touch of panic. Things must have got rougher than I expected when I left the officers at Swede's mercy last night. I hustled to Berkeley's room.

He was asleep. I shook him, telling him to snap out of it,

there was something I had to know. He lurched up on one elbow, giving me a surly squint. I told him to hurry up and brief me on what had happened after I went to bed. Suddenly he was wide awake. He began roaring with laughter. I reminded him that I was due out at the *Thompson* this minute. I tried to wake up those shavetails so they could go too, but all they did was mumble and groan about having been torpedoed and winding up in the slush somewhere. What was the story?

When I said "torpedoed," he howled so he nearly fell out of bed. Finally he managed to describe what had gone on. When they saw what a mess the lieutenants had made out of the bathroom they held a kangaroo court, to fix punishment.

"You mean you and Swede and the others got so drunk that you had two officers up before a kangaroo court? Oh, no!" I clapped a hand to my head. It wasn't at its best this morning either. Visions of a court-martial for the entire detachment swam before my eyes.

Oh, said Berkeley, they tried them *in absentia*. Since the officers weren't present he, Berkeley, volunteered to defend them. I was going nearly crazy, but he wouldn't be hurried.

It seems that Swede was the prosecuting attorney. His case was that undoubtedly these shavetails had caused a lot of grief to many G.I's. Berkeley jumped up and said there was no evidence before the court to that effect, but the detachment howled him down. Anyway, Swede pressed his advantage. These shavetails, he said, had been on St. Paul Island only a few hours, and already they had puked all over the bathroom, thereby causing us G.I.'s a lot of extra work. Berkeley eyed me. Did he have any chance to combat that argument, he wanted to know. He did not!

Since it was the consensus they had tried to agree on an adequate and worthwhile form of punishment. Finally Swede had come up with a combined punishment and rather weird

honor. In fact it should go down in the history of the eternal struggle between G.I. and officers. They decided, Berkeley said, eying me brightly, to make the two looies charter members of the Polar Bear Club.

I groaned. What the hell was the Polar Bear Club?

Precisely, said Berkeley, what everybody else wanted to know. It only added to the interest. Swede explained that it was a brand-new club—in fact he had just that minute founded it! Berkeley heaved himself up out of the bedclothes and swung his feet over the side, warming to the rest of his recital. By a strange coincidence, lying in the bathtub the two officers were in the exact right position to be initiated into the club.

Everybody kept clamoring to know what the Polar Bear Club was. Swede kept telling them not to be in such a God-damn' hurry, they'd know all in good time.

Berkeley reminded me of the fifty-foot wall of ice, pushed up over at East Landing by the ice pack. We had found that it broke up easily. Swede sent the truck over with a couple of men. They filled gunny sacks with ice and brought it back. They dumped it in the bathtub, mushed it all up by adding a few buckets of water, then they packed into it their two candidates, these convicted criminals! The tub contained real pack ice and water—well known to be favored by polar bears for swimming. In no time they were full-fledged members of the Polar Bear Club! Berkeley surveyed me proudly.

I stared at him. He looked consumed with admiration for Swede's ingenuity and wit. He remarked that Swede was the man of the hour—everybody thought this was the finest idea they'd heard of in a long time. As for Berkeley, he laughed so hard that he could hardly stand up—of course the brandy was a factor! When there was just room enough left in the tub to displace the two bodies they lifted them in and smoothed the ice all around them, cozy as blankets. Then the initiating

committee withdrew a little way down the hall, to await developments.

To tell the truth they were a little surprised at the time it took for anything to happen. They'd expected them to come flying out in about thirty seconds—the fact was they snoozed on for quite a little while.

The thought came to me, how in hell could I have missed all this benighted insanity!

"When did they wake up?" I asked, shrinking from hearing the answer.

"Oh, after a while," said Berkeley airily. Parker woke up first. He was flailing around in the slush, hollerin', "Murray, we been torpedoed in the middle of the ice pack! Wake up—we gotta get out!"

"How did they get out of the tub? Didn't they discover it was the bathtub?"

"Too drunk. Parker was on the outside—he hauled himself over the edge and began slipping and sliding around the floor. He fell down and began trying to swim free of the slush! Boy, was it funny! Parker being out of the tub left more room inside for Murray. He tried swimming in there. Pretty soon he scrambled over the edge and lay there, half on top of Parker, both of 'em flopping like tired mackerel."

Holy Moses, if we didn't all get court-martialed for this it would be a miracle. Still, I began to see the funny side of it. I asked Berkeley what happened then. It occurred to me that I'd better have the whole picture pretty complete in my mind. . . .

Well, a joke was a joke, but they didn't want the officers to go getting pneumonia. So they "rescued" them, took them to their room, got them out of their wet clothes, stuffed them into bed under a lot of extra covers. They were still drunk as skunks and didn't catch on to a thing. Suddenly Berkeley beamed. It was then that Swede had had his real inspiration.

"Oh, God, not more!" I bleated.

"Yeh. Y'see he wanted this thing to stick. If they found their clothes all wet in the morning, it'd give the thing away. So Swede sent their clothes over to the powerhouse, had them dried out and pressed—they are waiting there now for someone to pick them up. I certainly hope to God the guy there was on the job!"

I leaned against the wall and laughed helplessly, gasping that that was what I called organization! I said I'd skip over to the powerhouse and get the uniforms—we'd better cross our fingers that they were ready—then I'd sneak into the officers' room, arrange their clothes neatly, and wake them up. "In the meanwhile," I said, crisply, "you and the rest of the detachment roll yourselves out and get at the rest of the de-mining job. The Major's going to expect it to be done by this noon."

"Sure will," said Berkeley affably, standing up, scratching his stomach and back reflectively. "Oh, me!" he added, happy as a fool.

The uniforms were dry, neatly pressed, ready, and waiting, thank God. Appleton grinned appreciatively, remarking that last night had been some party; he wouldn't have missed it; too bad I turned in too early to enjoy it—it was the most fun he'd had since we landed here.

"Maybe it's a good thing I wasn't there. I might have sobered up enough to try and stop it."

I took the clothes back to the hotel. It would be a hell of a note if I was too late, if they'd waked up and found their clothes gone.

The lieutenants were still sawing it off. Carefully I disposed their uniforms over two chair backs, rumpling them just enough to make everything look right and natural. Then, with some care, I woke them up. I said I was going out to the

Thompson now. It was getting a little late. Did they want to go with me?

"Oh, God," mumbled Parker vaguely. Then, with a groan, "Ain't this sick bay? What ship is it? The *Thompson* got torpedoed. I remember bein' in the ice. How'd I get out?"

"No, Lieutenant, you're on St. Paul Island. The *Thompson* is—er—all right. I'm going out to her now."

Murray raised up a little groaning too. "You must be mistaken." He peered through half-shut eyes. "I remember all about it. After we were torpedoed we swam around awhile in the ice floes. I never thought they were slushy. Were the others saved too?"

"Everybody's fine," I laughed. "I'd suggest, Lieutenant, that it's time to rise and shine. The Major'll be worried. I have to go out right away. Of course if you don't care to go—just yet—well, I'll take off."

Murray spoke up sternly. "I guess I know when I've been torpedoed. I swam as hard as I could for shore. Gosh, it was cold—that slush ice everywhere—I must've got picked up."

"You must've been having a nightmare, Lieutenant. You're right here in this hotel on St. Paul. See, your clothes are hanging right there over the back of the chair. Do they look as if you'd been in any water?"

Both of them stared at their clothes, then at each other. Suddenly they howled, "That booze! Oh, my God, what was in it?" But they still weren't convinced. They'd been swimming—burrr-rrr—it was cold—they could still feel it. And if it hadn't happened how was it that both remembered the same things happening? They eyed me suspiciously. Hastily I reminded them that I had gone to bed early. I suggested that perhaps on the way up from Dutch Harbor they had been talking about chances of being torpedoed, could have retained the idea in their subconscious minds. As God is my witness, I said it with a straight face.

"Say, that might be it," said Parker, shaking his head; it had all become too much for him. He added morosely, "God, what a headache. I think I'll wait a bit before coping with the ship. Murray, how about you?"

"You bet. Sergeant, tell Major Becknow we have a few things to look after—we'll be out later; will you do that?"

"Certainly, sir. I'll look you up this afternoon, then. I'll take off—if I don't get out there Major Becknow may come ashore to see—us. . . ."

"Don't let him do that, Sergeant; get on out there, will you? Oh, God, what a head!" Both of them covered their faces, rolling their heads from side to side. I beat it before I should bust out laughing.

I stopped a few minutes in the library to pull myself together. Berkeley came in from the kitchen, with several biscuits all stuck up with jam. He wanted to know if they remembered anything about last night.

Well, they did and they didn't. They can't believe they weren't torpedoed. They remember swimming, and a lot of slush. . . .

"It's my observation, Sergeant," said Berkeley sagely, "that you can be torpedoed in more than one way."

The men filtered into the library, Swede last. I asked him if he realized fully that in the end he was probably going to get us all hanged. If this prank ever got out we'd be cooked. In fairness I had to add that it had turned out to be about the best gag I'd ever heard of.

"Yes, sir," gloated Swede, with the innocent expression of a good baby, "those officers-and-gentlemen had quite an honor conferred on them last night. Just think—*charter* members of the Polar Bear Club."

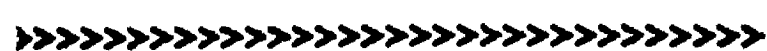
"You think—I don't dare. And for God's sake don't go letting it leak out while we're still on this island. At least give

us a chance to escape. If it gets out, we can figure that our next stop will be Fort Leavenworth."

Everyone insisted that the secret was safe as a church.

I told Swede to come along out to the *Thompson* with me; the rest of them better get on the ball and get the de-mining job done, or we'd be hearing from the Major.

"O.K., Sarge," they said; "we'll make it by noon sure. Sure we will, Sarge." They were like kids who had thrown all the stones, broken all the windows, and could afford now to be good.



Chapter Eighteen

SWEDE and I headed for the dock, chuckling over the plight of the lieutenants. Suddenly I noticed one of the B.T.L.'s, lying motionless, halfway into the salt lagoon. They must have run aground on the reef at the mouth of the lagoon!

We launched a rowboat and went out to take a look. As we nudged the side of the barge the pilot popped up out of the engine room. It was the same man who had brought me ashore last night. I asked him what the trouble was.

Ruefully he reported that the lagoon had looked pretty good to him—there was a north wind too—so he'd figured he would anchor inside for the night. He had looked the water over carefully, not seen any rocks, come in slow on one engine. "But hell, I ran aground anyway!"

I advised him to hop in with us; we would take him out to the tug and he could get one of the other B.T.L.'s to haul him off.

Two other B.T.L.'s were tied up alongside the *Thompson*, and the freighter crew was preparing to discharge cargo into one of them. Swede immediately found something of deep personal interest. "Lookit—women!" he croaked like a love-sick crow. Sure enough, a group of women, Aleuts, were standing on the deck of the *Thompson*.

Now, now, I kidded him; in a day or two they would be ashore, then he'd have a chance to look them over.

He wasn't so sure they were Aleuts. In fact they looked damn' near white to him. In mock surprise I said I didn't know he was a squaw man. He disclaimed it indignantly. He wasn't, he wasn't! He'd just been here too long, that was all.

There was some excuse for him. The Aleuts of the Pribilofs were far different from those scattered elsewhere through the Aleutian chain. Having intermarried with whites for so many years, the Aleuts' blood had been considerably diluted. We observed as one result that many of these women were quite beautiful.

All the Army and ship's officers were in conference in Major Becknow's quarters. I went to check with him on the day's program. The mines would be out by around noon. One of our seventy-foot barges might be of help with the cargo.

"Fine. Murray and Parker come out with you, did they?"

"They'll be out around noon, sir." As casually as possible I changed the subject. "I have a bit of bad news—one of the B.T.L.'s ran aground on a reef at the mouth of the salt lagoon. It's a thing we have to watch here. There are rocks scattered all over the bay. I suggest you direct everyone to observe caution—it would be easy to wreck equipment before we get unloaded."

The Major was annoyed. I told him we could have hit the reef ourselves—and we were used to the place. What the pilot had hit was hard to see.

How badly off was the B.T.L.?

Well, it was hard to say because at the moment she was just sitting there. We'd better use another of the B.T.L.'s and pull her off.

It only confirmed his impression, the Major said, that what was needed was someone thoroughly familiar with the characteristics of the island, and the best methods of unloading too. "You're elected; from now on you're in full charge of all unloading operations."

I groaned inwardly at this neat job of buck-passing. But there was nothing I could do.

I asked for a detachment to be sent ashore to handle cargo

as it was landed. We had three island trucks in running condition; they should be adequate to handle everything.

"Lieutenant Heinz, how about sending in your men to handle the shore end?" Perhaps the Major caught some look on Heinz's face because he observed, "I realize that it's irregular, putting a noncom in charge when officers are available. But I guess we all recognize the advisability of having an experienced man in charge. I therefore suggest that all officers make Sergeant Ellsworth acquainted with the noncoms in charge of the various sections and instruct them that he is in charge of all operations, at least for the present. This ought to get things done smoothly."

Lieutenant Heinz mumbled O.K. He remarked something about the poor old infantry getting it in the neck again. You couldn't tell whether he was sore or only kidding. I thought it was probably just routine bitching; the Major didn't pay any attention to it.

There was something else on my mind. I asked the Major if he could send a couple of cooks ashore. I had told Dunn to have dinner for a large group, but if he could spare any cooks it would be a good idea—might, in fact, keep us from finding ourselves eating more C rations than we would care for.

A good suggestion, the Major said. All detachments included cooks; he would arrange to get some ashore promptly.

One of the men sitting in on the meeting was Mr. Miller, supervisor of the Pribilofs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He put in that he would like to get the natives and the white personnel ashore as soon as possible. As some men would have to get the houses ready as soon as the de-mining was done, I said I would come out for them as soon as we got the infantry ashore.

These seemed to be about all the things there were to discuss at that time, and the meeting broke up. On deck Lieutenant Strom, in charge of the radio-direction-finder section,

asked me what I thought was the best place for their station. "I think it should be at least a mile out of town, to be as free as possible of electrical interference."

It seemed to me that Telegraph Hill was their best bet. The top of the hill was about a mile and a half from town.

We arranged that I would take Strom and eight men on the first trip ashore.

That trip we took in seventy-six. The sea was calm, the trip through the breakers was good—at least to Swede and me. We tried not to laugh at the comical expressions on a few faces at the ponderous swing through the wall of water.

I drove Tech. Sergeant Moore in my jeep to the truck garage. He was acting first sergeant of the infantry section and brought along three drivers. The men were surprised at the number of houses in the village and the amount of equipment maintained there by the Fish and Wildlife Service. They could afford it, I explained; every year the government made plenty of dinero off the fur seals; it was the only government project I'd heard of that consistently made money.

Sergeant Moore assumed that the Territory of Alaska received a good part of the money.

I scratched my head; in the records of transactions that were in the administration office I couldn't recall seeing any mention of Alaska receiving any revenue from the seal business.

The sergeant gaped at me. "But they'd have to—this is one of Alaska's most important natural resources, isn't it?"

I guessed he was right in theory, all right. But the impression I'd got from what I knew of the history of Alaska was that neither the State-side government nor private industry had any hankering to spend any more dough in the Territory than they had to. In fact it looked as though it had been treated as a big warehouse, to draw from inexhaustibly, without the necessity of replenishment. Of course that wouldn't

build up any country; it hadn't built up Alaska, as far as I could see.

The sergeant remarked that he'd been thinking about maybe homesteading in Alaska after the war. As I seemed to know more or less about the place, did I think he could make it?

I asked him where he hailed from. New York City, he said.

Did he know anything about farming, and roughing it in general?

Well no, not about farming, though he sure thought he could learn. As for roughing it—the Army was a pretty good teacher.

I shook my head. My advice to him, I said, would be to learn something about farming somewhere else, first. If he liked it, then he should figure that he would have to work about twice as hard in Alaska as anywhere else, to clear and work farm land. If he could still stand the idea after making up his mind to that, then by all means he should take up a homestead. *But*—he should take it up somewhere near a town, where he would have a market. And another thing; don't come north on any shoestring. He should make sure he had plenty of money to give himself a decent chance to make a go of it.

"I was thinking I might trap enough animals to get by on," he said hopefully.

"Any place you'd be homesteading you'd starve to death trapping," I assured him. "People have an entirely wrong idea about Alaska. I've seen most of the towns in the Territory—and not one yet where you can pick gold up in the streets."

"But there is a lot of gold in Alaska, isn't there?"

Oh, sure there was. The trouble was most of it was well planted, hard to dig out. It took big capital in most areas to make any money gold mining.

I puzzled the sergeant. He said I was more pessimistic about opportunities in Alaska than anyone he'd ever met. He was a little tart about it.

I didn't mean to be needlessly pessimistic, I said. He asked me for information; I was giving what I had on the basis of personal observation and study. He could expect big returns on any business that was essential and well planned. But to get a business going in Alaska took more capital expenditure than in the States. Many factors here were not factors Stateside. For instance, as transportation here was mainly by water and/or air, it was a costly factor.

I could see the idea of settling in the Territory after the war was firmly in his mind. He wanted to get together sometime soon and have me give him the real low-down on everything up here. I reminded him that it was a pretty big country; nobody knew all the real low-down on it. I'd be glad to go into any knowledge I had.

I arranged with the sergeant to borrow a couple of his men to help out on K.P., and he went back to the dock to get things moving.

Back at the hotel I found Dunn preparing a stew of gigantic proportions. Steaming away on the stove were two wash boilers, full to the brim. "I put in a whole reindeer!" he announced happily. "And as we don't have fresh spuds I decided to give 'em dumplings; I'm gonna have a washtub o' them too. That'll help to fill 'em up!" Dunn was a great satisfaction to me. It gave him a good feeling to do his job the way it was supposed to be.

I disclosed the information that he'd have some more help shortly—the cooks from the *Thompson* and a couple of men from the infantry section for K.P. I guess I expected he would be exuberant. He took the news casually. "By the way," I said, "you seen anything of the two young lieutenants this

morning?" By now they should have made considerable demands on him for black coffee.

"Nope," he guffawed. He commented on how comical the whole thing had been. He sure couldn't figure what kind of guys they were. He thought that ice water and slush would have sobered them up in a hurry—didn't seem to at all.

I remarked sternly that all I knew was how lucky we all were not to be in jail. Setting on a couple of officers their first day on the island—at any time, for that matter!—and running them through the wringer! I had to laugh, though. The more I thought about it the more I wished I could have seen it.

Back at the dock I picked up Swede again, and we returned to the *Thompson*. This time we towed the hundred-foot barge. The landing party was ready for us; we made a fast turnabout.

The stranded barge was hauled off on a towline by another of the B.T.L.'s. We watched while she slid slowly backward into deep water. I was interested in knowing what shape she was in.

She was leaking pretty badly through the tail shafts, but the Diesels weren't out of commission. I thought the best place to put her was on the beach back of the warehouse. Otherwise she was apt to sink. They could make the beach all right; once inside, the bottom was sandy; if he kept to the right of the reef he had hit, he would be O.K. He was kind of nervous about it now, but said he'd give it a try.

He started up one Diesel. The vibration from the twisted tail shaft was terrific. He managed to get her inside and onto the beach. By putting down a couple of heavy timbers Swede and I got her hauled out with the cat.

Swede commented that she sure was a mess. The propeller shafts were twisted all out of shape; the stuffing boxes were

split too. No spare parts were available; it looked to me as if she was done for.

Back at the dock we found we had some more trouble. The B.T.L. that had hauled her off the reef had taken a lot of sand into her motor through the cooling system. All these Diesels were cooled by salt water taken from the sea direct, and the intake was on the flat bottom. The propellers had been set so close to the bottom that they stirred up a sludge of sand. This, mixed with water, entered the water jackets; the result here was that both motors were plugged so full of sand that water for cooling couldn't enter.

I asked one of the men how long it would take to flush out the sand. With an oath he said they would have to rip her down to get it all out; it would take quite awhile. Swede remarked that this was a hell of a note. Soon we'd be down to just our own motor launch. I told him to take over anyway; I had some business to tend to.

Murray and Parker now appeared on the dock. I must say they looked the worse for wear. They kept looking at me rather closely. I had to keep my wits about me, not to bust out laughing.

Lieutenant Parker ventured that he seemed to remember quite a party last night. His face was brick red.

I commented on the fact that, as I had to get out early this morning, I had gone to bed early myself; but I had heard that things were quite gay and happy.

Parker went on with an uneasy laugh. They still thought they'd nearly got drowned. Did I know anything about it? Who had saved them?

"I told you—you two must have had bad dreams. The only way I know that you could have come near drowning would have been if you wandered down to the dock and fell overboard? But in that case your uniforms would have been wet—unless, of course, you were out and about, naked. Were you?"

I asked the question with a show of grave interest. "You saw for yourselves—your uniforms were hanging over the chairs, perfectly dry."

Murray gave a sigh. It beat him what had gone on. One thing was sure, he was pie-eyed. If Major Becknow ever got hold of that fact, there would be hell to pay. The Lieutenant would take it as a personal favor if the Sergeant would continue to—er—know as little about the night's activities as he—er—seemed to know.

"Lieutenant," I said pleasantly, "I make it a rule never to discuss matters that are none of my business."

"How about the rest of your detachment? Do you think they'll talk?"

Suddenly I recalled the incident of the fight between Luciano and Keyes. My system then had worked pretty well. "Lieutenant, what would there be *for* my detachment to talk about?" I paused, frowning thoughtfully. "Of course—if you were holding back something, I suggest that now is the time to tell me. I just might be able to fix it if it's anything—er—troublesome."

Parker gave a groan. "That's the hell of it, Sergeant. I have a vague recollection—call it impression, we both have, just to make it more cockeyed—of seeing a lot of men around us, and of our being awfully wet and awfully cold—but so help us God that's as much as we can remember!"

"My knees and elbows are all skinned up," Murray complained. "I must have been bangin' around somewhere, all right!"

I said that it was true, the booze they were drinking was made right here in the Arctic, but this was the first time I'd ever heard of anybody seeing icebergs or thinking they'd almost drowned, after a few drinks of it. My advice was to stop trying to figure it out; forget the whole thing.

Parker mumbled that probably I was right.

Murray wanted to know when the next boat was going out to the *Thompson;* they'd better take it. I said it would be about an hour; Lieutenant Strom would be going out too.

Just then he came by. He would like me to take a trip with him out to Telegraph Hill—show him the site I had in mind for their station.

We went out in my jeep. He was satisfied with the site. Back in the village we ran into a scene of utter confusion.

The Coast Guard cutter *Atalanta,* being equipped with radar, had spotted something in the direction of North East Point. Judging from the blips, it was the superstructure of a submarine.

No American vessels were known to be unaccounted for in this area. With the *Thompson,* the *Atalanta,* and the L.T. 199 all lying at anchor off Village Cove there would be a covey of sitting ducks for any hostile sub! Our ships had better scatter fast, until the mystery could be cleared up. The order was passed; they all slid off to seaward.

I dashed to the radio station and called the outpost our detachment was still maintaining at North East. Did they see anything resembling a sub?

Appleton was on duty. No. Why?

How far off the Point could he see today?

Only about a mile. Visibility wasn't so hot, on account of a thick fog.

Well, the Coast Guard cutter had picked up something on her radar screen; he'd better keep his eye peeled out there.

I beat it for the hotel in the jeep. It was a madhouse! The artillery was ashore—minus guns and ammunition. Major Becknow had come in with the last trip of the motor launch and was attempting to bring some semblance of order out of the mess. The engineers were still on board the *Thompson;* the infantry was unloading barges. If there was an attack,

supplies would be needed. As for ammunition, all that was available belonged to our original detachment.

Demanding to know where I had been keeping myself, Major Becknow wanted to know how much ammunition we had available. I said twenty-four cases of .30-caliber; two cases of revolver ammo., two hundred rounds for the 37-mm.

"Well," he remarked grimly, "that'll spread rather thin among all the troops we have here now, won't it?"

I agreed. But when this report came in, wasn't there some available ammo. on the *Thompson?*

The Major snorted. According to the manifest some lunkhead at Dutch Harbor had loaded the ammo. in No. 4 hold and then, for God's sake, dumped lumber in on it! There was simply no damned way to get it out in a hurry.

Oh, fine! Anyhow, if the Major concurred, I would take a couple of our men on the run out to the north side of the island, since the radar located the question mark near North East Point. "There's heavy fog offshore there now," I said. "The north shore of this island is the ideal place for a landing attempt; sand dunes everywhere, splendid cover for a landing party; also sandy beaches for landing barges. A reconnaissance of that beach area on foot at this time might pay big dividends."

The Major concurred. In case I spotted a landing party, what did I intend doing?

I figured we'd take our Browning automatic rifle with us, and of course our regular rifles. If we did sight a landing party, one man would be sent back in the jeep for reinforcements—his withdrawal being covered by us. If there should be a landing attempt, no doubt they would hear our rifle fire anyway.

The Major approved and told me to get going right away. And for God's sake to get back as soon as possible too. By now

the natives were just about going crazy. Some of them hadn't been any too keen on coming back here yet anyhow.

I had noticed the Aleuts scurrying around. They made up small parties and scuttled around lugging about every type of gun they had been able to get their hands on, from .22-caliber rifles to shotguns and the .30-caliber Lee-Enfields.

I felt sorry for them. It must be quite a blow, returning to what they called home, only to be greeted right off the bat with a rumored enemy invasion.

Hustling over to the hotel, I found most of the original detachment in the library, waiting for me. I arranged for Van Meter to pass out what ammunition could be spared to the new men. Swede and Berkeley were to get their gear together and come with me, on reconnaissance out at the north end.

Swede was jubilant. "About time we got some action; I sure am sick o' sittin' around on my can waitin' for something interestin' to happen!"

Berkeley pulled his revolver out of his belt to examine the cylinder; nodded at his rifle, leaning against the wall.

Out at the Point I asked Appleton and Jorgensen, who had the duty, if they had heard or seen anything since I called up. But the fog was still so thick you could slice it with a dull knife. As for hearing anything, the seals at Polovina were restless, and you couldn't hear anything but their din. If the whole Jap fleet was out there, you wouldn't hear a thing!

I said we would make a patrol on foot, from North East over to Rush Hill. We would leave the jeep behind. When we go to Rush Hill we'd call them back; then one of them could drive out in the jeep and pick us up.

We headed down the beach. When we came to the broken, sand-dune country, we left the beach, keeping two or three hundred feet back from the water. This was the stretch any-

one at all familiar with the island would pick to attempt a landing.

Creeping along, we came to a point at the top of a dune where we could look down and survey the beach. We nearly jumped out of our skins. Spread out along the beach was a party of Jap sailors! They hadn't even posted guards. They were armed with heavy clubs. Jesus!

Indiscriminately, they were killing seals as fast as they could. Young and old, big and little, right and left, any seal they could get close enough to was falling, wounded or dead, under the deadly thump! thump! of their long wooden clubs.

Farther up the beach another Jap detail, about a half a dozen of them, were busily skinning the seals. You could tell from the way they worked, they were experienced at the job.

Swede wanted to move to where we could get a closer look. I stopped him. There were only three of us. We'd better get reinforcements before we took any chances. The Japs that were doing the killing were only a couple of hundred feet away from us, those doing the skinning a few hundred feet more than that.

It puzzled me that there didn't seem to be any rowboat or other means of their getting ashore. Swede whispered that maybe they'd come in a rubber boat and hidden it somewhere.

Swede thought we'd better give the situation a closer look. I was interested in estimating how many poachers could be knocked off with rapid-fire guns. Swede patted the M-l, reminding me that it held ten shots and the clips went in very fast. He ought to be able to pick off at least a dozen quickly. I said we'd look the situation over some more, and there was to be no firing until I gave the word.

We crawled closer to the top of another dune and peered over. The slaughtering continued; the beach was marked with windrows of dead seals. Swede glared at the carnage, remark-

ing that they must want the whole herd. At the rate they were going they'd need a freighter to haul the pelts away. He muttered, "Let's put a stop to it right now!" and began inching his rifle into position. I stopped him. Before we started any fireworks, we had to agree on exactly what we were going to try for. I assigned to Berkeley the six up the beach doing the skinning. Swede and I would take the gang with the clubs. I directed Swede to move a little farther along. Berkeley and I would wait till he got set. I sized up the picture once more. Singling out one bandy-legged monkey who was yapping out the orders, I figured he must be an officer. I chose him, whispering, "I'll take the first shot."

Propelling himself with elbows and knees, Swede bellied himself across the sand. He whispered over his shoulder, chuckling, "This is gonna pay for a good many God-damn' lonely nights on this son-of-a-bitchin' island." In position he cuddled his rifle to his shoulder, squinting down the sights.

I said let's all shoot for the belly; any Nip shot in the gut sure wasn't going to give us any more trouble—besides it was a lot bigger target! Swede called across that this was going to be as good as ground-sluicing ducks—nothing to it! I got a good elbow rest. Berkeley was settled in too. Swede asked unexpectedly if we ought to give them warning, a chance to surrender. I felt my scalp tingle with rage. Hell, no! Had they given the boys at Pearl, and Dutch Harbor, any warning?

"O.K., didn't think you would. I'm all set—'you may fire when ready, Gridley!' "

I pulled two more clips of ammo. out of my belt, laying them on the ground within easy reach. I snuggled my rifle firmly against my shoulder, took careful aim at my selected target, eased back on the trigger.

The first shot rang out. The fusillade followed merrily along. Stunned by the suddenness of the attack, the quarry couldn't get their bearings or collect themselves to return

the fire, even if they were armed. They milled around, yelling hysterically. We kept the deadly fire pouring straight down on them.

Out of the tail of my eye I noticed something. Their rifles were all stacked together—far down the beach! As soon as they got their wits together, they began running. We kept tickling their heels so only four of them managed to get as far as the rifles. We polished off two of them right there. The other two made it to a huge pile of driftwood. They burrowed in like beavers, and in a few seconds they were beginning to return our fire.

Swede called out that he sure wished we had the 37-mm. here. A bullet sprayed a cloud of sand up into his face. Digging it out of his eyes, he snapped, "One o' these bastards is likely to hurt us. Who says Japs can't shoot straight? Twice a'ready they missed me by a whisker. They're as good as in a fort, in that pile o' wood!"

I wished we had the 37-mm. too. It would get them out of the lumber! I couldn't get over the way they hit the ground and vanished—regular snakes!

I had an idea. Send Berkeley back to the village for the gun. We could plant it on a knoll out of range of their fire and really give the driftwood pile a working over. We decided to do it. We hadn't seen hide or hair of the Japs since they squirmed into the woodpile, but their fire was too close for comfort. I directed Berkeley to have the 37-mm. hauled out as fast as he could, and bring mostly canister. That would be the most effective for the operation.

Berkeley slid off down the back side of the dune and headed across the tundra at a fast dogtrot. Swede and I decided to fire just often enough while he was gone to keep the Nips pinned down. Also, we would change position after each shot so they couldn't pin-point our fire. If Swede sneaked around to Berkeley's position, we would have them

flanked on two sides. I thought we ought to keep an eye on those scattered around in the open too; they looked dead enough, but there might be a few possums. Swede said he'd seen one of them move a few minutes ago. He'd been keeping an eye on him; he seemed to have quieted down—in fact, expired. With mock grief Swede remarked, "Poor fellow!"

The beach looked like a slaughterhouse—dead seals and dead Japs in a terrible litter. Swede asked if I'd considered the possibility that all the firing might bring another party ashore to help their buddies.

I had. I hoped it would. With them coming in from the sea, with us planted where we were, it would be a field day for us. Swede reminded me that they were apt to play it smart—another landing place might be way down the beach, with the idea of sneaking up on us from the rear. Then whose field day would it be? We decided to remain close together; one of us to watch the rear, the other the two in the driftwood.

The time dragged interminably. We expected momentarily to see reinforcements arrive from seaward. Our ammunition was running low. The Japs fired occasionally. We couldn't hear anything else except the pounding of breakers hitting the sandy beach, the terrified bellowing and bleating of the sadly decimated seal herd.

What seemed to me a couple of days passed, and our ears picked up a new sound across the tundra. The motors of the jeeps!

The first came into view. It was loaded down with men, in charge of Lieutenant Heinz the infantry C.O. The second was close behind, towing the 37-mm. And did she look to me like a sweetheart!

"Japs still in that driftwood pile, Sergeant?" said the Lieutenant, crawling up to my position. He was excited, spoiling for some real action. I said they were, and that if he didn't stop sticking his head up over the edge of the dune they

would undoubtedly give him a bullet to prove it. His face got red, and he took a clumsy roll part way down the dune.

What did I think was the best location for the 37-mm.?

About a mile down the beach—there was no sense in taking chances, and we knew that they couldn't hit anybody with a rifle at that range. After we planted three or four canister shells in the driftwood, I didn't think we'd have to worry any more about its occupants. The Lieutenant trotted off down the back side of the dune to give the instructions.

Berkeley crawled up to my position. He began complaining about how he'd nearly got killed on the trip. The outpost had heard our firing and phoned Becknow in the village. The Major had patrols out on all the roads. One of them saw Berkeley running cross-lots, and without bothering to ascertain who he was, began firing. "Just blazin' away!" Berkeley reported indignantly.

"Be thankful they're poor shots, boy!" I advised him. But how had he got them to stop shooting at him?

"God, I hit the dirt an' stuck my handkerchief on the muzzle of my rifle and waved it like hell till they quit!" He sensed that I was snickering at the picture he'd presented, and remarked with an aggrieved air that it wasn't very funny; for awhile he thought sure he was going to be a dead duck.

Well, I soothed him, it had come out all right.

In the distance we could see the 37-mm. in position. Swede observed that the Sons of Heaven sure were headed for hell now. We'd see what kind of shots they were when the canister started hitting their cover.

His words were caught up by the loud crack of the gun, the racket when the shell went off—fifty feet short of the target! The next shot burst about equidistant on the other side of the pile. No show from the Nips.

If the Japs knew they were going to die right where they were, the next shot had better be plunk on the target.

Oh, brother! It landed square in the middle. Pieces of driftwood flew in all directions. One, two, three, the infantrymen planted more shots at the same exact spot. When the fire let up, there was an eerie sort of quiet. We went down to have a look.

On the beach the scene of carnage looked even worse than it had from up above. Hundreds of slaughtered seals and, scattered among them, the bodies of twenty-two Japs. Of the two in the woodpile one of them was blown almost in two by the force of the canister; the other had a neat hole drilled in his head. At least one of our rifle bullets had found the mark among the driftwood.

We found out why their shooting was so accurate. Their rifles were equipped with telescope sights. If we hadn't got the jump on them, if they had had more men, they would have been able to clean us out before we could be reinforced.

The men who had been serving the 37-mm. came up in the jeep for a look. Lieutenant Heinz paid us a compliment. "I see you men just about finished the house cleaning before we got here."

I said we had been lucky; as a matter of fact we'd almost walked right past them. Well, the Lieutenant said, who would have anticipated that the Japs would take time in wartime to poach seals?

I remembered something. The tin cans, in the summer, the cartridge cases, the few seals Godfrey and Towne had discovered while patrolling the beach—could this bunch here have been part of the same outfit? Well, we'd probably never know. Lieutenant Heinz remarked that, as nearly as he could make out, we must have had quite a year. I admitted that he might be right.

The men were busy gathering souvenirs off the dead Japs. Quickly I put in a claim for the dead officer's binoculars. The Lieutenant laughed, saying he guessed Americans were natu-

ral-born souvenir hunters. He hurried off to collect a few for himself.

We bounced back across the tundra in the jeeps. On the way into the village we stopped to fill the patrols in on the excitement.

Major Becknow was waiting in the library for us. "Well, Sergeant, I see you have everything under control," he said cheerfully. I replied that Lieutenant Heinz and his men had given us a hand with the last two that had holed up in the woodpile. He wanted to know the final score; how many Japs were in the party? Twenty-four. We had been lucky to nail all but the two before they had a chance to take cover. The Major said in his opinion it was good shooting rather than luck. He laughed wryly. "I'd sure hate like hell to have you three men after me with rifles!" Swede explained that "we Alaskans" learn to shoot in a tough school. The men of our detachment grinned, recognizing Swede's usual fictional touch.

How come, the Major wanted to know. Swede pointed out that it was this way; a lot of times in the bush, if a man wasn't a good shot he would go hungry. Yes, the Major could see where that would sharpen up a man's eye. He laughed.

Changing the subject, he said he was worried about how they were going to get the Aleuts rounded up. As soon as word got around the island that there were Japs ashore, the Aleuts had scattered like quail, and he hadn't seen a single one of them since. Of course the women were still aboard the *Thompson*, but the men had really disappeared!

I said he needn't worry; when they got hungry, he'd see them come drifting back. The Major looked relieved at such a simple prospect. And, speaking of food, weren't we pretty hungry? Chow must be ready.

"We sure are!" Berkeley answered for us. Again the detachment yawped. The Major looked puzzled. "It's a local

joke, Major," I explained. "Berkeley here has a theory, about part of his Army pay being in the form of chow."

"Dammit!" complained Berkeley. "I work hard—I get hungry. Any crime in that?"

The extra cooks and K.P.'s were ashore; Dunn's stupendous reindeer stew and dumplings went to the spot. "Never ate reindeer stew in my life before," crowed the Major happily.

Fortunately the pyramidal tents for the new garrison had been carried as deck cargo on the *Thompson*, so they were brought ashore without delay. Artillery and infantry detachments pitched theirs on the flat before the village. By the next day the area looked like a conventional military camp, even quite homelike with the streamers of coal smoke drifting from the stovepipes sticking up out of the tent roofs.

The *Thompson* and the L.T. 199 took up their assigned anchorage while the *Atalanta* combed the area around the island systematically, on the watch for any enemy vessel, submarine or surface. They didn't see a sign of anything.

Several times when men in my detachment had a little time on their hands, they would go out and poke around to see if they could find a rubber life raft that had brought the seal poachers ashore. The Japs were funny people to figure; any way you looked at it, they couldn't have expected to stay long, so why would they hide whatever it was they came ashore in, and why couldn't we find it? We kept speculating, but that's as far as we ever got on it.

A much more rewarding development was the arrival in the village of Lieutenant Hawthorne, the paymaster from Dutch Harbor. It was the first time we'd been paid in ten months. Swede went around chortling that it sure did feel good to have a few packets in your pocket again. Tenderly he patted not just one but several of his pockets.

Van Meter wanted to know if he was planning on taking

his girl to the movies tonight. "I hear they have a simply *elegant* Robert Taylor pitcher."

"Funny, funny man!" remarked Swede, sticking out his foot and neatly tripping Van as he left the room.

Chapter Nineteen

A NEW source of trouble made its appearance.

By habit the natives of the Pribilofs were very friendly. In part this had developed out of long association with the white employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the men employees of the fur company holding the contract to process the seal hides. The natives loved fun; many were musically inclined and exceptionally talented, too, in the carving of ivory.

Prior to the evacuation it had been customary to have dances once or twice a week in the community hall. Now that they had returned to take up normal life on the island, one of the first steps was the revival of the dances.

Trouble cast its shadow when the native women began showing partiality to white men, an inclination to scatter their favors among them freely. The G.I.'s were quick to take advantage of this. The native men were angry, and friction began to show between the two groups.

It was no coincidence when the island priest stopped me on the road one morning and asked if the men and I would care to attend church the following Sunday. "You've become pretty well acquainted with conditions of life here. Perhaps you've wondered what sort of religious activity the people have."

I said I would speak to the others. For myself, I would enjoy attending.

The little priest smiled gently. He said he thought it might surprise me to find that there was still a type of religious expression here that was considerably vanishing

from the world outside. "Many times I hear the phrase 'simple faith'; it strikes me that it takes simple, plain people to have truly simple faith. Over most of the world today people seem too busy 'keeping up with the Joneses' for simple faith."

I said he might be right. Without knowing much about it, of course, I'd always had the impression that religion practiced by people in remote places must come pretty direct from the heart. You got the lip service in more civilized areas.

Saying he hoped we'd find it possible to come to church on Sunday, he smiled engagingly. "We'll put on our best service for you."

I remembered, now that it looked as though we'd be leaving the island soon, that I'd wanted to see a service in the village church. But the natives were evacuated before there was any opportunity. From reading about the island, I knew that the Russian conquerors of the primitive Aleuts had long ago forced their religion on them, and that after awhile the Aleuts accepted the creed of the Russian Orthodox Church, integrating it in their native life.

On Sunday Berkeley and I went to the church. We broke out our best uniforms and went in the jeep.

Inside the church it seemed as if we had been dropped down into medieval days. The altar twinkled with candles and, here and there in the fittings, shining jewels too. At the front door some of the native women were clustered, a few with small babies in their arms. The men had the seats farther forward. And in front of the altar was my friend the little priest. His cope was real cloth of gold; it shone like the sun. His crown and turban were jeweled with large stones, fine and brilliant, gleaming and shining in the light that danced from the ceremonial candles. Nearby a number

of little boys sat as still as statues, their eyes feasting on the altar and the priest in his beautiful vestments.

As we were a minute or two late, the priest was already intoning the ritual in a voice that seemed much deeper and richer than in casual conversation. The responses were sung by a native choir, both men and women; it seemed hard to believe we were way off here in the Arctic wilds, instead of listening to a city choir trained by a professional musician.

One of the native men showed us to seats. You could see that he felt proud that we were there.

The service was long and formal, and I couldn't follow the ritual too well, but you felt that you could almost see the ghostly procession of Russia's great crusading priests, marching in the flickering candlelight....

I whispered to Berkeley; did he know what language the priest was using?

Slavonic, he thought; the old Russian Bibles were printed in it. I had read something about Russian priests always accompanying the early Russian fur traders to Alaska.

You could understand why the little priest wanted us to see his people at church. I felt as if he were saying to me as the service went on, "Oh, sometimes they're naughty children; but at heart this is what they really are."

You believed it when you observed the rapt expressions on the faces of the congregation as they followed the beautiful ritual. Every word uttered by the priest, every worshipful gesture, they followed as if in the very presence of God. The church building was small, like the village, and the deep, rich voice of the priest rolled into every corner, filling it. I noticed the way even the children followed every bit of the long service. Remembering the way children back in the States nodded off to sleep or squirmed in the pews, it made me smile.

The singing reached a marvelous climax of beauty and

pure melody. Some of the women remained on their knees all through the service. At its climax they went to the altar, many carrying small children in their arms, presenting themselves to receive the holy water from the golden vessel held by the priest. The older children kissed the crucifix respectfully when he held it out to them. The ending of the service reminded them of escape; they snatched the sacred wafer he held out and galloped off down the aisle, barely waiting to cross the threshold before bursting into shouts of gaiety.

When he had completed his duties at the altar, the priest hastened down the aisle to welcome Berkeley and me. He seized the occasion to show us a few of their church treasures: the beautiful Bible, bound in crimson velvet, with gold medallions at each corner. He explained that it was over two hundred years old; it was well worn but obviously lovingly cared for. The chalice was pure gold; he touched the embroidery of the altar cloths with delicacy and pride.

We expressed our appreciation of his invitation, and he smiled on us benignly. He made no further reference to the antics of the natives, but we got the idea all right. In effect he was saying to us, "Next time there are any incidents, my friends, remember my children as you have seen them today, for these are their real, their better, selves."

Much as we might wish to believe him, it didn't make matters any easier to handle when a couple of angry native husbands turned up in the next few days with complaints against two men of our detachment. Their names? It seemed we had a couple of Don Juans among us—Jorgensen and Van Meter.

Our detachment had been relieved of all our former duties. To some extent all of us were finding a steady diet of loafing rather boring. This pair had set out to vary the monotony by playing around with some of the local femmes. In a

village this size it couldn't be expected to go long unnoticed. There were a few unmarried women around, but, oh, no! Jorgensen and Van had to go after some of the marrieds.

There was some question as to how the angry husbands settled on the identity of Jorgensen. But very convincing proof was offered with respect to Van Meter, in the form of a G.I. field jacket stenciled with his name and serial number. The angry husband flung it down in front of me. "When I come home last night I hear noise. Somebody run out back door. I look around in house. I find this!"

"Your wife? What does she say?"

"She not say anything. She just get mad." Women! Women! And why in hell couldn't these guys have taken it easy, accepted the rumors that we were going to be relieved of duty soon and get out of here, back to civilization!

"What do you want me to do?" I asked the husbands.

That was simple. "Tell your men they not fool around our wives—we know the women flirt, they do it before—but you tell the men they should stay away."

"O.K., I'll be glad to do that." I hoped my smile was reassuring. "Soon you won't have anything to worry about anyhow—my detachment is leaving." The husbands gave me a look indicating that it couldn't be too soon to suit them. As I watched them leave, I wondered if they would have any infantry and artillery enthusiasts to cope with.

Thinking it over, I decided the chances of shaming Jorgensen and Van Meter into behaving themselves were rather slim. Gradually I worked around to the idea of enlisting Swede and Berkeley in a bit of byplay that might unnerve them sufficiently to produced the desired result.

At supper that evening Berkeley spoke up, according to prearranged plan. He said that last night he had seen the best foot race he'd seen in years.

Swede inquired idly who was doing the running. And where?

Well, it seemed that Berkeley happened to be on the hill, near where the new water tower was being built. It was just after dark. All of a sudden he heard someone give a terrific screech. Then some woman started yelling at the top of her lungs. Berkeley related how he stopped in the middle of the road. And all of a sudden some guy tore down the hill—damned near ran over him!—but he must have seen Berkeley because he jumped to one side, caroming off the nearby fence like a billiard ball! He kept right on going down the hill, as if the devil had him by the tail—a stop watch would undoubtedly have shown he was breaking all existing records for the distance!

"Who was it?" inquired Swede casually. Too casually.

It was too dark to tell—exactly. Anyhow, then another guy—the one doing all the yelling—came roaring down the road too. He was waving something and hollering something fierce. When he saw Berkeley, he stopped and demanded to know if his name was Van Meter. Berkeley asked him what he wanted to know for? The guy yelled in his face. He had a pair of pants with the name Van Meter on them, and if he—

"It's a damned lie—it's no such a thing," hollered Van Meter from down the table. "It wasn't my pants, it was my field jacket—" He caught himself—fatally late. Roaring, the detachment hugged itself with glee.

Berkeley gave it as his opinion that it must have been Van Meter's pants, because no guy could run like that without being stripped for action. He turned a lean eye on Van. "Wearing spiked shoes too, were you Van?"

"Go to hell!" muttered Van Meter furiously. A grin edged his mouth crookedly. "Anyhow," he said doggedly, "you're all just jealous 'cause I was makin' some time."

It had its funny side, all right, but it couldn't be ignored. That afternoon I had a talk with the Major. The upshot was that he thought it would be a good thing if our detachment took over the outpost duty at North East Point again, until such time as we left the island. At worst he didn't believe it would be very long.

I called the detachment together and announced that the hotel was to be taken over for other sections, and Major Becknow had decided also that we were to take over the duty at North East for the remainder of our time here. As I saw it we could borrow a few pyramidal tents and be as comfortable as we would anywhere on the island. To make doubly sure I already had a few jugs of our St. Paul Special buried out around the Point. I didn't know where the rest of them had cached any liquor that they had, but we could plan on having a couple of good benders out there without any interference—which we certainly couldn't reasonably expect if we stayed on in the village.

Berkeley pointed out that we would still be able to come in for the dances and baseball games. It had come as quite a surprise to us that the natives had an exceptionally fine baseball team. The village diamond was right in front of the hotel. It had become quite a busy center. Every evening when the weather allowed there was a game between units. Everyone turned out to do the rooting. Sealing operations had begun; the natives were working very hard; the baseball games were a needed as well as welcome recreation.

A few in the detachment did not take to the idea of our moving out to North East Point, but we moved out the next day anyhow. Swede thoroughly approved. He had two jugs cached out there, he revealed; couldn't let them go to waste.

Two days after we settled in, Major Becknow came out to pay us a visit. He said things in the village were slowing down a bit; he had an idea he would like to present to me.

By the way, how long had I lived in Alaska. I said it was about ten years, not all in one locality but quite widely over the territory.

Then this was his idea. All the soldiers who had come in on the *Thompson* were from the States. None of them had seen the Alaska mainland; they were curious to know what it was like. A few of them were talking about the possibility of settling in Alaska after the war. He had been thinking of a sort of forum, in the community hall, with me to answer questions about Alaska. What did I think? Would I be willing?

I said I'd be glad to. As soon as he was gone, I told the rest of the detachment. Swede had Alaskan experience and could help answer the questions. Everyone seemed to think the meeting was a good idea. Funny, but I was beginning to wonder if it was. Someone pointed out that I had agreed to. What changed my mind?

Major Becknow had a regular poker face, I'd often noticed it. Now that I thought about it, I got the impression that his idea was leading up to some sort of gag. In a mild way I didn't quite trust this.

The rest of them laughed. The Sarge must be getting a touch of cabin fever, imagining things, they said. The Major probably was interested, too, in finding out what Alaska's like in peacetime.

The session raised a lot of legitimate questions about Alaska all right. In fact, at the outset the Major stressed that "legitimate." He announced: "Sergeant Ellsworth and members of his detachment can probably answer any questions you may have about Alaska. Please keep it clean. Ask any legitimate questions—but no wisecracks!"

I told them all I knew about the homesteading requirements; living on your land for three years, building a good house or cabin on it, putting a certain percentage under

cultivation, fees for filing and patent services, which were the good sections—Kenai Peninsula, Matanuska Valley, or Tanana Valley; means of transporting produce to market; things like that. And then, by jeekus, came proof of what I suspected!

The Major stood up, saying, "Well, Sergeant, it's getting late, and I think we'd better terminate the meeting. However, before we do, I have one question."

"Yes, sir; what is that?"

"You being an old Alaska hand—just what is the 'Polar Bear Club'?"

My jaw dropped open. Honest, I couldn't help it. The Major must have picked up the story of the two lieutenants' first night ashore, their initiation as "charter members"! My mind raced in circles. What was I going to say to the guy! Out of the corner of my eye I shot him a look, trying to pick up a clue. Nothing. The Major looked as bland as a well-fed baby.

"Well, Major," I said slowly, "I judge it must be some kind of Arctic club, from the name. I never heard of it in peacetime though." I was careful not to let any of the detachment catch my eye.

"I tell you, Sergeant," the Major followed up, "the thing kind of captures my imagination. How would it be if you look into it a little—perhaps do some research—let me know what you find out?"

"I—I guess I could do that, Major. If I find out anything I'll certainly let you know." Whew!

The meeting broke up, not a minute too soon for me. For no visible reason the hall resounded with sudden shouts of laughter. I thought I'd bust before I got out of the place.

Right outside Swede, Berkeley, and I ran into each other. "That Major is smart as a fox!" I whispered. "Now who in hell d'you suppose let it get out?"

Probably somebody got drunk and talked too much, they thought. Swede looked downright worried, for the carefree Swede. He gave his opinion that hell was sure going to pop yet for us; he wished we were leaving the first thing in the morning. Berkeley and I said we did too.

We walked along the road together. All around us we could hear yawping. Swede said anxiously that the Major couldn't do anything to us without making trouble for Murray and Parker too; they were the ones that got drunk as hoot owls; if they hadn't been drunk we'd never have got the idea.

"*We*, Swede?" This was one time I was none too eager to stand with the men. Anyway, I hoped he was right.

We discussed the possibility that by now the lieutenants had pieced together what happened to them, if they hadn't before. Doubtless some of the other officers knew; it would have been too good to keep; they would have started kidding Murray and Parker and finally the whole story would have come out. . . .

Time dragged for us. A day seemed like a month. We whiled it away somewhat by going out to watch the natives at the sealing operation. The seals killed for hides were the four- to six-year-old bachelors. Since the beach masters forced them to herd by themselves, they were easy to round up.

Swede called attention to the contrast between the way the natives killed the animals and the butchering done by the Nips. Instead of laying about them wildly with clubs, half the time only maiming the poor things, the natives walked quietly up behind them and hit them one stroke at the base of the skull with the club. The seal was dead before it hurt.

We were astonished at the speed with which they skinned

the carcasses. A few quick strokes with a knife removed the flippers, a slash up the belly and two or three quick jerks peeled off the hide like skin from a banana. They scraped the hides then, to remove surplus fat, so oil could not run out, ruining the pelt. The hide, sprinkled with salt, was packed into a barrel for shipment; the carcasses were tossed into the trucks, taken to the rendering plant, emerging finally in the form of oil and seal meal.

With sealing operations running full blast, the rendering plant thumping away day and night, the engineers busy with their building, St. Paul Island was a very busy place except for North East Point, which, on the contrary, was pretty dull. Every once in a while someone would remember to ask me how I was coming along with the research on—"What was the name of that organization again? Snow Ball Club—Polar Ice Club? Something like that, did the Major say?"

"The hell with it!" I would say, but the fact was the idea haunted me. The Major wasn't the kind of guy to ask a question and then just let it drop. When he asked me what I'd found out, what was I going to tell him?

One morning there was a little welcome diversion. Most of us were just hanging around our tents, smoking and reading, when Berkeley came roaring in from the beach. He had something to show us down there. We went along; we didn't have anything more interesting to do.

A small group of Aleut children were there, playing at the water edge. Berkeley pointed to one and told us to watch him.

He was busily pounding something between two stones. I walked over for a closer look. He was smashing one of the green, spiny sea urchins that were numerous along the shore. He split open the shell, disclosing a mass of bright yellow eggs. With a great big grin at me he ducked back his

head and threw the eggs down his throat, chewing enthusiastically, rolling his eyes with pleasure.

"He's eatin' those damn' things raw!" Swede exclaimed, horrified. It was what all the rest were doing; they were combing the beach for the sea urchins, making a feast of them. It looked as though each shell contained about a tablespoonful of eggs. Ugh, they could have them!

About a week later an Army Special Services ship arrived with a few items left behind by the *Thompson*. That night I got a call from the Major. "Sergeant, you and your detachment can pack up."

We'd expected it for so long that, at that minute, I had to think twice to catch what he meant. "You mean—we're actually goin' out, Major?" I realized I was hollering.

"Tomorrow morning, Sergeant, that's it."

I got my voice down to where it ought to be. "Fine, sir, just fine. When do we go aboard?"

"I'll send the truck out for you about seven in the morning."

"We'll sure be ready, sir."

"Don't tell me I've treated you that badly, Sergeant," the Major chuckled.

"No, sir, nothing like that. You've treated us fine. The point is, we've been here a long time. . . ."

He understood that. He added that they understood it down at Headquarters, too. That was why we were leaving.

You would be surprised at the number of jugs that emerged from hiding that night around North East Point. The roundup began as soon as I turned away from the telephone and gave the word. With assorted yowls and screeches over our leaving this island paradise in the morning, men scattered to spread the news. All over North East Point it sounded like a conclave of hyenas. Soon the men began

coming in, and it looked like a convention of hillbilly moonshiners, every man jack carrying a jug, held with affection, toted with care—prayerful care! Tonight we were going to celebrate for sure. Our biggest binge on the island—our fondest farewell.

A practical thought occurred to me. "If you lap up all this booze you'll have to be poured on the ship."

Swede stared at me suspiciously. "If *we* lap it up? You thinking of staying dry tonight, Sarge? The way you was the night the lieutenants got—er—torpedoed?"

I reassured him on the score of taking my share of ballast. I was only making an observation.

The hell with observation, Swede remarked. When we got back, they would probably split the detachment up among a dozen units. We had to make this party one for every guy's memory book.

All of a sudden I felt sorry to see it coming. I said so. This was one damned outfit that had worked well together.

Dunn mused that he was going to miss Berkeley. Him and his snacks! He recalled the night Berkeley took the Roquefort cheese and then happened to notice some jam and lugged that along too. It still gave us the shivers to think of it.

Berkeley said stoutly, "Hell, it was all those snacks kept me in good condition. I guess I know what my system requires."

The party that night was a blur. I remember that along about daybreak Dunn boiled up several gallons of black coffee, which I managed to help him infuse into our companions. At intervals Dunn stated morosely, "Sarge, drink is a snare and a delusion—but such a God-damned nishe shnare an' delushun, Sharge, shush a nishe—nishe. . . ."

Doubtless the Major had a vision. Anyway he sent the truck out half an hour ahead of schedule. There was a good

deal of fumbling and stumbling around after gear, a tendency to fall over things that weren't there. On the way in the truck driver tactfully omitted talk, I heard later.

I drove my jeep in, taking Swede and Berkeley. We didn't talk except that once Swede muttered, "Can y'imagine?"

Imagine what, I asked.

Imagine this was the last time we would rattle over his road. Remember, Sarge, when he chopped it out with the bulldozer?

I did. It was a job I would remember a long time. I would remember how Swede always said a thing could be done, then went and did it, whether it could or not.

I left Swede and Berkeley on the dock and went to find Major Becknow. He looked me over keenly. Well, how did it feel to be leaving?

It felt fine—no offense to the Major, of course. Oh, he understood. He guessed I had had my share of headaches. He had that dead-pan look on his face. Doubtless he was including this morning's headache.

"I've had a fine bunch with me all the way," I said. That was more important than the headaches anyhow.

"Well, you've done a fine job here. I say it again—and I believe Headquarters will also say it when you get back to Dutch Harbor."

"Thank you, sir." I added that I had brought my jeep to turn over to him. I appreciated his allowing me to keep it after they arrived here.

"Think nothing of it, Sergeant, you rated it." He said he would go along down to the dock and see us off.

All the original detachment was in the launch. Jumping out of the jeep, I saluted, saying "Good luck, Major."

"Same to you, Sergeant," he said, putting out his hand. He was a nice guy, not rank-happy. Then I remembered. "By

the way, sir, you asked me to investigate a club—I believe it was called the 'Polar Bear Club'?"

"I remember, Sergeant." His expression was impossible to read.

"If you still care about it—I believe I dug up a few facts."

"Why, certainly. I guess the—er—name sort of fascinated me. What can you tell me about it?"

I was in for it now. I had to try to get by with it. It seemed, I said, feeling my way, that it must be a very exclusive-type club; as far as I could learn there were now only two members. The thing that was peculiar was that both members happened to be on St. Paul Island at the moment. I understood they were both—er—officers.

"Any other data on the matter?" The Major asked it crisply. The fact was—well, it just might be—under certain circumstances he might like to join, himself. From what I knew would I say that was in the realm of possibility?

I threw in the sponge. I repeated that from what I could gather the intiation was damned—er—unusually—rugged. I wouldn't know if it would be the kind of thing he'd care for. But I felt sure he'd be in—er—a position to decide.

He remarked that we'd see, we'd see. And thanks anyway for the—er—information. I shot him a look. His expression seemed casual enough. It seemed to me, though that there was something, at the back of his eyes. "Well, Sergeant," he dismissed me, "again, luck to you and your men."

I got up a last salute, walked rapidly across the dock, and hopped into the launch. It cast off quickly and headed out for the ship.

Nobody talked much. This was the trip we'd dreamed of taking; the peak of wishing was to go out of Village Cove in the launch for the last time, to get away from St. Paul for good and all. The time had come. We hardly gave St. Paul Island a backward glance.

When we were through the breakers Swede asked me what all that was with the Major. Did I tell him?

Tell him? Tell him what?

You know! Take a look.

The Major was still on the dock, sitting in the jeep. He was laughing so hard you'd think he would fall out of the jeep. The men around him were laughing too—all except two. Murray and Parker were just standing there, looking queer, uncertain. They couldn't seem to decide whether they were expected to join in the laughter or not.

Swede said gloomily, "My God, I bet you told him—about the Polar Bear Club, I mean."

I reminded him that the Major had asked for information—it was practically an order. I'd told him only that as far as I had been able to learn it had two members, officers; they happened to be on St. Paul; I believed the initiation was rugged. The Major wanted to know if I thought he could get into the Club.

Swede groaned, muttering that if the Major wanted to, he could still haul us all off this scow, throw us in the can.

From my diminishing view the Major didn't look to me to be contemplating any drastic action. It was Swede's idea that the quicker we got aboard ship and on the way, the better.

Bound at last for Dutch Harbor we were making about twenty knots. We had a nice day for it; blue sky, warm sun, only thin haze.

We loafed around on deck. One man, then another, made tentative references to what he was going to do first, back in civilization. Dunn was emphatic about his plans. First thing, he was going to get a nice new uniform. Then he was going to find him a restaurant and eat himself the biggest

meal he could buy. Dunn gave out with a happy yip. "Cooked by some other poor slob!"

The things we were going to do began running through the group like a merry little fire. "I'm gonna—" "Nuts to that, now you take me—" "Aw, you guys ain't got no imagination—" "Me, I got the best idea of all—"

Glancing around, I happened to notice Van Meter, standing by himself, a little apart, those long arms and bony hands relaxed, dangling idly on the rail. He was looking quietly off into the distance. Way, way off. . . .

It occurred to me that Van had been almost meek, ever since that incident of the downhill race and the forgotten field jacket. I called over to him. Nobody had heard anything from him, I said, on the subject of what he was planning to do first when he got back to God's country. How about telling us?

For a few seconds he kept on staring over the water.

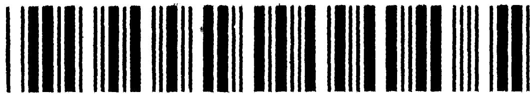
Slowly he looked around. I noted in those Regular Army, hawk eyes of his a look of certainty—the expression of a man who's asked himself all the questions, got from himself all the right answers.

A thin, contented grin played around his mouth. "Heard of a guy once," he observed quietly, "went into a restaurant, said all he wanted to eat was a big steak, smothered in lamb chops." Van Meter paused, his jaw working comfortably as he watched beautiful white shavings cut off the green water.

"Me?" he said, looking around the detachment. "All I'm gonna do is get me a redhead, smothered in blondes."

There has rarely been a story so replete with drama, pathos, terror, and hilarious good humor compressed within the covers of one book. And every word of this is true and told by the G.I. in command who, by direct orders from the Commander in Chief of the Alaska Defense Command, had "full authority over all military personnel, permanent and temporary," in the Pribilof Islands. This was quite a shocker to several visiting lieutenants who thought they would take over, and the initiation of same into the "Polar Bear Club" is reminiscent of some of the finest scenes in *Mister Roberts* or *The Caine Mutiny.* If the brass did not fare well at the hands of these rugged individualists (volunteers all to this loneliest outpost of the war), neither did the enemy. But beyond being a wonderful tale of adventure against the elements and the enemy, it is a fascinating study in human psychology of a group of men cut off from civilization and women—at least until the Aleut squaws were brought back for the summer sealing.

As you read the story you will mourn with these men over the death of their comrades lost in the blizzard; you will experience the horror they felt when one of the group went raving mad; you will savor the apricot brandy they distilled in the powerhouse and aged in a charred cask in the surf; and you will gain a new admiration for how average Americans left to their own resources can triumph over the most defeating obstacles of nature and the military bureaucracy.


UNIVERSAL LIBRARY
120 963
UNIVERSAL LIBRARY