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A Novelette by
Alex Malcolm

Excerpted from the novel
JFK—Secrets of Camelot Revealed

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THE SINKING OF PT-109

The darkness hung like a black shroud smothering his boat as Lieutenant Jack Kennedy searched the waters around the vessel. It was a night illuminated neither by the moon nor the stars. Compounding the blackness of the night, his visibility was also impaired by the prevalent haze that floated just above the surface of the water. The water temperature in this part of the South Pacific was quite warm, which resulted in a great amount of humidity evaporating off the surface of the water into the air. Then after dark when the temperature dropped, some of this humidity would condense into particles of haze. These particles were not dense enough to be considered fog, but Kennedy still cursed the havoc they wreaked on his vision.

Kennedy was the commander of Motor Torpedo Boat PT-109. His boat was almost 80 feet long and possessed three 1200-horsepower engines, which were capable of propelling the vessel to speeds over 40 knots per hour. Although it didn't have the armaments to compete head-on with a Japanese destroyer, when its three massive engines were pumping out all their power, he had speed and mobility that would allow him to attack a destroyer and afterwards evade any counter-attack from the destroyer. His ship also had smoke generators that could pump out an enormous smoke screen to prevent the enemy from getting an exact fix on the vessel.

But right now, Kennedy, pursuant to his orders, had the vessel lying idle in the middle of some of the most treacherous waters in the South Pacific. These waters were the raceway down which the Japanese sent their vessels, usually high-speed destroyers, to deliver supplies from their major bases at Rabual and Bougainvillea to their outlying occupied islands. The American forces had dubbed these nightly high-speed runs "The Tokyo Express." In fact, his mission

normally would have been to try to detect and interdict these vessels to disrupt these resupply missions.

Tonight, however, he was on a mission that was even more dangerous, since he was essentially drifting in hostile waters which made his boat an easy target. The PT-109 was virtually helpless when it was sitting idle.

Once the Americans conquered Guadalcanal and reopened Henderson Airfield, it became much too dangerous for the Japanese to have any slow-moving ships on the waters during the day. The American air superiority made any Japanese vessels vulnerable and subject to attack.

Accordingly, the Japanese commander Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto authorized the use of fast-moving destroyers to make all deliveries at night and immediately return to base, so that they would not be exposed during daylight hours.

Jack could only hope they would be able to complete this mission by locating a swimmer and extracting him as quickly as possible so that they could once again be underway.

In addition to being right in the middle of “The Tokyo Express” raceway, PT-109 was also right in the middle of several Japanese-held islands. The largest island to the north was Kolombangara. Jack learned from his daily briefing that this island had a large garrison of Japanese soldiers.

To the south and east were two smaller Japanese-held islands, Arundel and Vonavona. To the west was a somewhat smaller island, Gizo. Although it was smaller geographically, its position made it more strategically valuable because it was closer to the waterways.

This extraction would be the completion of a mission that began about 36 hours earlier. It had begun yesterday in the late afternoon as Kennedy and the members of his crew were cleaning and inspecting the PT-109 to prepare it for their nightly mission.

Kennedy was doing a final inspection of the vessel when he was surprised to hear, “Permission to come aboard, Captain?”

Kennedy looked toward the dock and saw a young man standing there smiling at him. Although Kennedy wasn’t a Captain in rank, he was certainly the captain of the vessel. When Kennedy looked closer at the new arrival, he broke into a wide grin. He knew this guy from when they were both in training back in Rhode Island about a year ago.

Neither of them was properly attired as a naval officer. Jack was shirtless since he had been working in the heat below decks on the vessel, and the new arrival was in just-standard military utilities, without any insignia.

Jack was tall and lean, around six feet tall and about 170 pounds. He usually had a fair complexion, based on his Irish heritage, but now he had a dark tan owing to his several months’ service in the South Pacific. He had his light brown hair parted on the left and hanging down on his forehead. He appeared to be in good overall physical condition, but he had a chronic back problem that no one would suspect by looking at him.

In fact, his back condition had almost kept him out of the Service. He had tried to enlist in the Army, but they had rejected him because of his health problems. Jack was devotedly patriotic, however, and refused to sit out the war. He implored his politically connected father, Joseph P. Kennedy, to use his influence to get him into the Armed Forces.

Joseph P. Kennedy had been Ambassador to England before the war and his Naval Attaché had been Admiral Alan G. Kirk, with whom he had a good relationship. Joseph Kennedy had contacted Admiral Kirk on behalf of Jack.

Admiral Kirk, who was now the head of the Office of Naval Intelligence, had received numerous requests from various politicians seeking a safe assignment or deferment for their sons,

which he abhorred as cowardly and which he denied by silently burying them. This was the first time he had received a request from a father, who was asking for help in getting his son into the Navy! He was so impressed by this patriotism that he arranged for Jack to enlist in the Navy without the normal physical exam. So, Jack was now here in the South Pacific in command of a Motor Torpedo Boat.

The new arrival bore several similarities to Jack. He was about the same height and weight. But his very light brown hair was several shades lighter than Jack's. He had the same Irish heritage as Jack, but since he had only recently arrived in the South Pacific, he had not yet developed a tan. In fact, his face looked rather sunburned as he stood there on the dock.

Jack responded, "Peter, what the heck are you doing here? Of course, please come on board."

Peter responded, "Hi, Jack. I hope you're doing well. I'm sure you're surprised to see me here."

Jack said, "Nothing you do surprises me, Peter, but I'm sure you're going to come aboard and tell me exactly why you're here."

The PT-109 was tied sideways to the dock, so Peter just had to step up onto the gunwale to board the vessel. Jack and Peter shook hands like the old friends they were and moved to the front of the vessel to be away from the rest of the crew so they could talk privately.

Jack said, "I don't suppose this is a social visit, although I wish it were."

Peter said in response, "Well, I wish the same thing, but Jack, I've got our orders here. Why don't you take a quick look at them and then we can talk about what it means."

"Okay," Jack agreed as he took the papers from Peter's hands.

After reading them, Jack said to Peter, “So we’re going to go and drop you off in the middle of nowhere to do something that’s not specified on my copy of the orders, and then I’m expected to return to approximately the same spot 24 hours later so that you can be extracted.”

Peter said, “Yeah, Jack, that’s about it. I can’t tell you exactly where I’m going after you drop me off, but I’m sure you know that it’s important or they wouldn’t have changed your mission from the interdiction of enemy shipping that you usually do.”

Jack said, “Yeah, I know. I’m just kind of worried about where you are going and even more about how the hell I’m going to get you back on board tomorrow night.”

Peter responded, “Jack, you just get your boat back in the same place where you dropped me off and I’ll worry about all the rest.”

Jack smiled, but then he said to Peter, “Well, standard operating procedure means that I need to verify your identity and authorization before I accept these orders.”

“Of course,” Peter said, “Here’s my ID card.”

Peter flipped out his wallet and displayed an ID card for the Office of Naval Intelligence. Jack looked at it and was surprised. He said to Peter, “What, you’re in ONI now? I thought you were in a Construction Battalion.”

“Yeah,” Peter said, “That’s where I started. As you know, back in Rhode Island, I was training to be a member of an underwater demolition team. But when the ONI needed people who could swim and do reconnaissance, they recruited me.”

“Okay, Peter,” Jack said. “You know I would cooperate any way I could anyway, but even more, I do owe a great debt to the ONI. The Army refused my enlistment, so my father called a friend of his, Admiral Alan Kirk, who got me into the Navy because of his influence as Director of Naval Intelligence. Admiral Kirk and my father became friends when the Admiral

served as military attaché when my father was Ambassador to England. Maybe someday I'll tell you more about it."

Peter already had heard during their time back in training in Newport, RI, that Jack came from a wealthy and influential family, but he didn't realize just how powerful Jack's family was until Jack just mentioned that his father had been Ambassador to England. Peter didn't suspect it, because Jack seemed like such a regular guy. Peter didn't want to wait to talk about it "someday."

Instead he questioned Jack, "You mean your father called to help you get into the service, instead of helping you to avoid the draft. I've heard that all the sons of wealthy families have gotten draft deferments or are pulling reserve desk duty in Chicago or somewhere safe in the middle of America. You mean you didn't ask your father to use his influence to help you avoid the service, but instead asked him to get you in?"

"Yeah," Jack responded, "Maybe it sounds nuts. I already had a military rejection from the Army because I've had a bad back for years. It could have kept me out of the fight if I'd wanted to stay safely home. But that's not me, nor my family. I don't fault the Army for keeping me out because my bad back would probably have been a problem on long marches, but it doesn't bother me when I'm swimming. So the Navy is a good fit for me. I don't have to march long distances. And I couldn't have sat at home while my country was being attacked. My father feels the same way I do, so he got me into the Navy."

Peter responded, "Yeah, it does sound like you're nuts, but in a way that I admire. On the other hand, I think your father really just wanted to get you out of Boston so he could avoid having to pay child support for the dozens of bastard children you've probably fathered that might just show up!"

They both laughed and then spread out a map to work on the details of Peter's mission.

* * * * *

Jack was starting to get very worried. They had arrived on station for the extraction about ten minutes ago and had been sitting idle in the middle of the "Tokyo Express" shipping lanes without any sight of the swimmer they were expecting. Each minute they sat there idle just increased the danger to the vessel.

Jack's orders included directions for him to signal to help the swimmer locate his boat. Specifically, the PT-109 was equipped with a small, lighted beacon on a three-foot mast installed near the stern of the vessel. Jack's instructions were to flash the beacon three rapid times every other minute. The beacon had an umbrella-like shield to prevent any light from being detected by enemy planes or vessels that might be searching the horizon. The light was red, which made it harder to detect at distance but which assured that it would not destroy the night vision of either the PT-109 sailors or the swimmer in the water.

While drifting idly in the black current awaiting any sighting of the swimmer, Jack allowed his mind to drift back to the time when he had first met Peter Sharkey.

* * * * *

Jack had been assigned to the Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron Training Center in Melville, Rhode Island. It was early October, 1942 and the weather in that part of Rhode Island was gorgeous and almost summer-like. The daytime temperature at the base hovered from the high sixties to lower seventies and the nights only dropped to the mid-fifties.

During the war, virtually all of the Rhode Island shoreline was owned or controlled by the Navy. Rhode Island is a small state with most of its land area in a sort of horseshoe around Narragansett Bay which protrudes up into the land from the Atlantic Ocean. The Navy

controlled the shoreline on both sides of the bay, as well as most of the islands within the bay. The Army had several shore batteries there to protect the Navy installations. The main base was Naval Base Newport, which was located on the eastern side of Narragansett Bay. The east side of the bay also contained the Naval War College, as well as the PT Boat Training Center at Melville.

The west side of the bay had Naval Air Station, Quonset. This was the main naval air station in the Northeast area. Just north of Quonset on the west side of the bay was the Construction Battalion Base at Davisville, R.I.

The Navy realized they might be confronted with various situations where they would need to construct airfields, demolish enemy fortifications, or construct bases for US forces. So they formed the Construction Battalions. The sailors in the Construction Battalions had been nicknamed Seabees, based on the initials of the unit. They had a logo that was a fearsome looking "Honey Bee" in a Navy cap, holding both a machine gun (to symbolize their fighting ability) and a hammer (to symbolize their construction and demolition mission).

It was to this base where Peter Sharkey had been assigned. As a graduate engineer from the University of Rhode Island, Peter joined the Navy upon graduation and after basic training volunteered to join the Seabees.

Because Peter always loved to swim, having grown up on the Rhode Island shoreline, he next volunteered to train to be an Underwater Demolition Team member. The mission of the UDT members would be to detect and demolish any underwater fortifications that the enemy might have created to impede an amphibious landing. The UDT members were nicknamed "Frogmen." It was known that the Germans had constructed such fortifications along the French

coast, called the Atlantic Wall, to prevent an allied landing. Peter volunteered for the mission and expected to be sent to Europe.

While he was undergoing training at Davisville, however, Peter was given orders to report to the PT boat training base at Melville. Peter was told that his mission would be to practice insertion and extraction from PT boats. From this, they hoped to learn how to best utilize the PT boats on reconnaissance missions.

When Peter arrived at the Melville base, the training center commander brought him to Jack Kennedy's boat. Jack had already prepared his vessel to depart, so he was surprised when the commander waved at him to delay. The commander made the necessary introductions and Peter showed Jack their orders. It included dives from various sides of the boat and retrievals from various sides of the boat. They were trying to determine the most efficient way to insert a "Frogman" into the water and later retrieve him. Obviously in these situations, time was of the essence, so determining the best way to do this could be important someday.

The whole exercise was scheduled to take three days to complete, and during that time Jack and Peter became fairly close. It turned out they had a lot in common since they were both Irish, although they had a lot of dissimilarities also. Jack came from a wealthy Irish family in Boston and had graduated from Harvard University. Peter came from a middle-class Irish family in Rhode Island and had graduated from the University of Rhode Island. They both shared an enormous desire to make a difference during the war, plus they both shared a great sense of humor.

On the weekend after the training exercise concluded, Peter and Jack were granted leave. They decided to spend Friday night together on Thames Street in Newport, which was nicknamed Navy Row. It was a collection of cheap bars, plus some middle-class restaurants.

Some were frequented by prostitutes, some were frequented by USO volunteers, and some were frequented by local women just looking for some companionship during the war. The Navy Shore Patrol (the Police Force of the Navy) kept a major presence on Thames Street, but they couldn't control all of the drunken rowdiness that sometimes occurred when the sailors were released for the weekend.

Neither Jack nor Peter was a big drinker, so their major objective in going to Thames Street was to check out the women. They went to one of the better night spots frequented by officers and enjoyed a great seafood meal. Being right on the ocean, Rhode Island had some of the best seafood available anywhere and it was very inexpensive. Lobsters were abundant in the coastal Rhode Island waters, so they were both able to have lobsters at a very reasonable price. During dinner they challenged each other to a swimming race across the east passage of Narragansett Bay from the naval base side to Jamestown Island in the middle of Narragansett Bay. They would meet tomorrow morning at dawn for the race. The bet was for one dollar.

After that Jack and Peter split up to meet as many women as possible, hoping that they each might meet one with whom to spend the night.

Neither of them was successful in their quest, so they both arrived on time for the race the next morning. Unfortunately when they showed up at the beach near Melville, the winds had thickened from the south and the waves were choppy and irregular, coming northward up Narragansett Bay. Since both Jack and Peter were very experienced swimmers, the wind and chop did not worry them, but it would make the swim much more difficult than they'd anticipated. Neither of them was willing to back out from the race, however, even though it was going to be worse than they had anticipated.

Arriving on the beach, Jack said to Peter, “Where the heck did this storm come from? I thought we were supposed to have clear skies today.”

Peter said, “I don’t know either. I guess it’s just a quick wind squall or something. Are you still ready to do this?”

Jack responded, “Sure, it’s not that far a swim, right? It’s about a mile from here to the island, and then a mile back. So what do you think?”

Peter said, “Yeah, let’s do it. Are you ready?”

Jack nodded okay and they walked together toward the shore and then they stripped down to their swimsuits. They slapped their hands together and ran to the water, and then dived in and headed for the island.

The waves were coming from their left, south to north, as they swam toward Jamestown Island. Jack was pulling ahead of Peter and was pretty sure that he had the advantage. After they landed on Jamestown Island, Jack was way ahead of Peter. They had decided that they would need to slap a rock on dry land to prove they had been there and then jump back into the water for the return trip. Jack had already slapped his rock as he passed Peter still heading toward a rock.

The return swim was much more difficult than the outgoing swim. They were heading into the chop, which now came from right to left. While it had somewhat aided their swim heading toward the island, it now impeded them.

Jack felt the waves slapping against him each time he raised his arms to drive forward. The wind had kicked up and the chop was about one-to-two feet in height. Jack was making progress, but he knew it was much slower than the swim outbound.

He hadn't seen Peter approaching from behind him, so he was quite sure that he was still in the lead on the race. At one point, however, about halfway across the channel, Jack thought he saw Peter bob up to the surface in front of him and immediately go back under water. Jack knew it made sense that if you could swim underwater you would avoid the restraining force of the wind and waves, but he didn't understand how Peter might be able to swim underwater for so long and for such a distance.

When Jack arrived back on the shore at Melville, Peter was already there waiting for him. Peter was sitting on a rock near where they had previously left their clothes and was using a towel to dry himself down.

When Jack emerged from the water, Peter walked over and threw him the other towel.

"Hey, Jack," Peter taunted, "What did you do, stop out there to enjoy the view? I thought we were in a race."

Jack laughed and then asked, "How the hell did you get by me? You were way behind."

Peter said, "Well, I just ducked under the waves a couple of times. You should have done the same."

Jack replied, "How long can you hold your breath, you bastard? You must have been under there for a minute or two at a time."

Peter said, "I don't know, but I guess for a minute or two."

Jack questioned, "I don't understand how you can hold your breath so long while swimming underwater?"

Peter answered, "Well, I grew up here on Narragansett Bay and my friends and I would dive for clams and I could always stay down the longest. That meant I brought up more clams. I always pushed myself to stay down longer and longer."

“Okay,” Jack said, “Well done, buddy. Let’s go back to Thames Street tonight and I’ll pay up for the bet.”

The bet had been for a dollar. Although neither of them was much of a drinker, Jack bought a round of beers that night. They both forgot about the honorary prize of one dollar. They were much more interested in discussing the progress of the war. They also wanted to meet some women!

It was not long afterwards that Peter and Jack finished their training and were sent to other assignments.

* * * * *

And now, here they were, in the South Pacific with Jack searching the water for Peter.

“There’s a light, Lieutenant, over there,” one of his sailors shouted while pointing southeast of the boat. Everyone looked toward where he was pointing and in the sea about 30 feet away from the boat was a small red beacon that had been flashed by a swimmer. They knew it was the extraction that they had been waiting for, but they couldn’t move the boat toward him, since there was a danger that the propellers would suck him under. They had to wait a few moments longer for him to arrive at the boat.

The swimmer got close to the vessel and they dropped him a knotted line to assist him in boarding the boat. Peter was almost to the top of the line and into the vessel when another crewman shouted, “Lieutenant, there’s something coming over there!”

At that, they all looked toward where the sailor was pointing. Out of the inky darkness appeared a huge pointed hull. It was blacker than the night and was traveling so fast that Kennedy had absolutely no chance to engage the engines and move out of its path.

He and his crew had only spotted the enormous hull of the Japanese ship bearing down on them several seconds before it hit. He knew it had to be a Japanese warship because of its size and speed.

Jack's thoughts raced in the few seconds before the impact. He was concerned about his entire ship, including all of his men and Peter Sharkey. He took a quick glance toward the back and saw that Peter was almost into the vessel as he shoved the throttles into forward. He knew it was a futile gesture, because as he looked upward the massive bow of the Japanese vessel was almost to his ship. He could see that the bow of the destroyer was at least 50 or 60 feet high, dwarfing the size of the PT-109 which was probably only about 20 feet above the water at its highest point.

Just ten seconds after they first sighted the Japanese destroyer, the Japanese vessel struck the PT-109. Everyone on board was battered about and most were flung into the water. The hull of the Japanese ship scythed through the PT-109 like a steel ax through wooden kindling. The wooden hull of the PT-109 was no match for the armored Japanese warship. It was sheared completely in half by the impact. Incredibly, both halves were still afloat.

The wooden hull had been so flimsy compared to the steel hull of the destroyer that the other vessel probably never felt the impact. The destroyer continued its high-speed run and didn't stop to help any survivors on the PT-109.

Unfortunately, the impact ignited the fuel that was on-board the PT-109. The flames erupted from both sides of the stricken hull while the Japanese warship barreled on.

PT boats were equipped with Packard engines that had been modified from aviation use. They were fueled by Avgas and were completely different from the diesel engines that powered most other Navy vessels. The gasoline engines gave them considerable horsepower – and thus

speed, an advantage over similar diesel engines, but the Avgas was much more volatile than diesel fuel. It was the Avgas that burst into flame!

The conflagration of flame engulfed both parts of the PT-109.

But luckily, because the Japanese warship kept up its high speed, it had an enormous wake. As soon as the wake hit the remnants of the PT-109, it pushed each part out of the pool of fire. The remains of PT-109 were still perilously close to the flames from the Avgas, but didn't seem to be in any immediate danger. The walls of flames on the waters burned all around them, but seemed to be dying out quickly. Within twenty minutes after the collision, the flames finally died out and the seas were calm and dark.

Jack proceeded to conduct a quick check of his crew to determine who had survived and which ones needed help. There had been three other officers on board: Ensign Ross, Lt. Sharkey and Ensign Thom, plus ten sailors. He began to shout out their names. Quickly Ross and Thom answered, as did eight of the sailors. Two other sailors were missing, as was Peter Sharkey.

Kennedy jumped into the water and helped all the survivors to return to the remains of the aft of the PT-109. Because of the currents, it took a long time to get all the survivors back to the wreck.

As Jack was boosting the last of the survivors onto the floating wreck, Peter Sharkey suddenly swam next to him.

Jack said, "Hey, are you okay?"

Peter responded, "I'm not real sure. I think I was out for a while, but I'm pretty sure nothing's broken. I've just got some pains. How about you, Jack?"

Jack responded, “Yeah, well, I had a bad back before this night, and I guess it won’t be getting any better. It hurts like hell right now. And I’m bleeding from some small cuts, but I don’t think anything’s broken. In any case, I won’t let anything stop me.”

They were all huddled on top of the remains of the aft section of the PT-109 waiting for dawn on August 2nd, as Kennedy assessed the situation. Unfortunately, one sailor was badly burned and another was suffering from minor burns while two members of his crew had probably perished in the collision. When dawn broke, there were no friendly forces anywhere nearby to rescue them.

Even worse, Jack was quite sure that what was left of the PT-109 was about to sink in the next few hours.

He made the decision to abandon it and to head for one of the tiny islands nearby. There were several to choose from, but he decided one of the smaller ones would be less likely to be occupied by the Japanese and they should head there. The last thing any of them wanted was to be captured by the Japanese after this ordeal.

They were an unlikely looking group of swimmers as they hit the water to head for the small island. The badly burned sailor was strapped to a float and Jack took him personally in tow to set out for the island. Another sailor had minor burns and was not a good swimmer anyway, so Peter towed him. Ensigns Thom and Ross followed with the other men. Some of them were good swimmers, but others were either non-swimmers or not good swimmers. They were tied to another float they had rigged from planks which had been part of the 37-millimeter gun turret on the PT-109. They all worked together to tow, push or otherwise get each other to the island.

All of the members of the group had long since shed their shoes, which only slowed them down in the water. Besides being shoeless, the entire group had very few clothes left. Kennedy was dressed only in his skivvies. Sharkey was in his military swimsuit and still had his Ka-Bar knife strapped to his waist. The other men had only their trousers or shorts and maybe a few shirts among them.

They had very little in the way of weaponry. Besides the Ka-Bar knife that Sharkey had, they counted six 45-caliber automatics, one 38-caliber revolver, and a few other knives. They had lost their first-aid kit, so there was nothing that they could do to tend even their minor wounds.

They all made the island intact and were glad to be able to rest on the beach. Unfortunately, it was a very small island; but fortunately it wasn't occupied by the Japanese. They scurried inland, hoping that they wouldn't be detected by any Japanese patrols. Over the next two days, Lt. Sharkey and Lt. Kennedy, as well as Ensigns Ross and Thom, all swam out to attempt to intercept PT boats. Unfortunately, none of them detected any U.S. presence.

Because their only food supply on the small island had been several coconuts, which had long ago been consumed for their milk and meat, Kennedy decided that they needed to move to a different island.

He decided to head for a small islet west of Cross Island, which was closer to the main waterway and which probably had more coconut palms. It was large enough to have more coconuts, but not so large that it was likely to have Japanese troops.

Kennedy decided to leave at noon on August 4th. He came to this conclusion because he knew that most of the enemy patrols occurred either near dawn or dusk. Going right in the middle of the day would probably be something they wouldn't expect. Additionally, leaving at

noon would allow them to land at the new island just before dusk, so they might be able to take refuge in the dark should the island be occupied by the Japanese.

They used essentially the same arrangements that they'd used before to get to this island. Once again, Kennedy, Sharkey, Thom and Ross, as the strongest swimmers, took the lead in pushing and/or pulling everyone else. Some of the weaker swimmers at least held up their own, realizing that they couldn't rely totally on the others.

Jack and Peter were swimming near the front of the makeshift flotilla and were talking about their destination. Jack sought some reassurance about his decision. Jack said, "Peter, what do you think about this island that we're heading toward? Any chances there are Japs there?"

Peter responded, "Jeez, I hope not, Jack, but the ONI didn't share anything with me about all these little islands around here. We do know there are Japs on all the major islands."

Jack responded, "Yeah, who the hell knows? Let's just keep swimming ahead and hope for the best."

Peter agreed and said, "You're right, Jack. Luckily, I don't think it's more than a couple of miles to the island and the current is not that bad right now."

Only a moment later Jack said, "Jesus Christ, what the hell is that?"

He was looking behind them about 100 yards.

Peter's head swiveled around and he saw what Jack was worried about. It looked like five-to-seven sharks' fins. A whole group of sharks had suddenly tracked the group, maybe because of some of their blood in the water.

Peter said to Jack, "I think it would be good if we could speed this up a little bit and get to land pretty soon."

Jack asked, “Shit, Peter, what the hell are we going to do? With all these sharks around, I’m afraid we don’t have much time before they attack. And we’re towing all these guys, so we can’t go much faster. There are no other islands closer than where we are headed, so I don’t think we have any other option than to just keep going.”

Peter said, “You’re right. We’ve got to keep going. . . and maybe pray.”

Then Jack yelled back at everyone, “Move it faster folks. Double time. We have sharks behind us now. Come on. Move it!”

The others looked around and saw the dorsal fins from the sharks starting to approach them and immediately started to kick faster. Jack and Peter had already started to pick up their efforts, but Jack suddenly felt a touch from a shark that had decided to approach him. “Shit,” he said out loud.

Peter said, “What?”

Jack responded, “Well, one of those bastards just came by my leg and nudged me.”

Peter then said, “Well, maybe they’re just fooling with us so that they can attack all at once. Let’s just keep going and see what happens.”

But as Peter looked around, he saw that not only were there shark fins behind them, but there were several on both sides of them. It appeared that the sharks were readying for a massive attack.

They had several virtually helpless sailors in the water and neither Jack nor Peter knew how to rescue them from the imminent shark attack. Although they kept swimming toward the new island, the sharks were coming closer and closer.

Then one of them scraped Peter's leg. Peter knew he had to do something or they were all going to be attacked and killed. Peter said, "Jack, okay, buddy, you've got to start pulling all of these people because I'm not going there with you."

Jack said, "What are you talking about? You can't leave. You can't abandon us. We need your help," as he took the tow rope that Peter handed him.

"Well, Jack, these bastards are going to kill us if we just keep doing what we're doing. So it's time to do something different. This is probably pretty stupid, but it's all I can think of."

Jack said, "But you can't do anything different. What—"

He was cut off as Peter swam away. He could see that Peter had reached down into his sheath and extracted the Ka-Bar knife and was holding it in his mouth. Jack saw him swim right toward the middle of the sharks!

Just before he got there, Peter switched from a fast-forward swim stroke into a butterfly stroke, which was the noisiest and splashiest type of swim stroke. He rattled the water as his arms windmilled forward. He made an enormous amount of noise and splash which obviously attracted the attention of the sharks. He mimicked a wounded and distressed seal; so the sharks diverted their attention from the other swimmers to him. They were looking for the easiest and best opportunity possible for a meal!

Jack kept pushing toward the new island, but he couldn't help but look back to where Peter was now trapped in the middle of the sharks. He saw Peter flapping his arms and kicking his legs in the butterfly stroke. Then suddenly he saw nothing, absolutely nothing of Peter. He was sure that a shark had attacked Peter and dragged him underwater.

Jack really didn't want to turn his head around again, but subconsciously he was compelled to look. He looked back and the surface of the water was a maelstrom of fins and

tails. He knew that the sharks were in a blood frenzy, and he knew Peter was dying in the middle of that mess.

But he also knew he needed to concentrate on saving the other people that depended upon him. So that is exactly what he did. He didn't have time for sorrow.

They kept swimming toward the new island, but Jack sometimes looked back where Peter had gone. He was astonished to see that the sea was still a violent mix of blood, dorsal fins and shark tails.

"Jesus Christ," Jack thought. *"Peter diverted all those frigging sharks from us, but he's gone."* Jack redoubled his swimming effort.

Jack thought again to himself, *"Peter sacrificed himself to save us and I can't let his death be in vain. I've got to get everyone through this."* They were all still swimming as quickly as possible because they had all seen the shark attack.

When they finally reached the new island, Jack was pleased that everyone else had survived without any shark wounds and that the sharks were nowhere to be seen. In his mind he was sickened because he knew that the reason the sharks had gone elsewhere was that they had killed his friend, Peter Sharkey. *"Crap,"* Jack thought, *"Just crap."*

Jack led his crew onto the small islet and got them to hide in the heavy brush. Luckily, this larger island was not occupied by the Japanese and had many more coconuts for them to eat. Jack couldn't eat much because he was nauseated every time he thought back to the death of Peter Sharkey. Without a doubt, Peter had saved all their lives by deflecting the shark attack; but Jack still became nauseated when he thought of the violent death that Peter had suffered in the midst of that swarm of sharks.

Jack knew he had to concentrate on his primary task, however, which was the survival of his crew. The next day, he and Ross swam out together to explore some of the other nearby islands. On one, they found a small Japanese box with 30 odd packs of crackers and candy. There was also a native lean-to there and a canoe with a barrel of fresh water nearby. They decided to take the canoe to head back to the rest of the crew on what turned out to be Nauru Island. Just as they were readying the canoe to leave, two natives were sighted offshore, but they fled rather than coming to the shore when Kennedy and Ross tried to signal to them.

That night Jack took the canoe into the passage, hoping to find a passing PT boat, but was unsuccessful. When he got back to the crew on Nauru Island, he found that the two natives they had seen yesterday had returned and were sitting there with the rest of the group.

Jack retrieved a green coconut from one of the trees and scratched a message into it. That message read, "Eleven alive. Native knows Posit & Reef Nauru Island Kennedy."

Jack handed the coconut to one of the natives and said, "Rendova, Rendova," indicating that he wanted the coconut to be taken to the PT base on Rendova.

The natives left with the coconut and everyone was smiling, but no intelligible words had been exchanged between anyone, since neither knew the other's language. They were all hopeful once the natives left, because they seemed to be friendly; but one never knew. That night the entire crew was extra vigilant, just to be sure that the natives hadn't sold the coconut with the message to the Japanese.

Their fears were dissipated the next morning when the natives returned with food and supplies. They also had a letter from the Coastwatcher commander of the New Zealand camp, Lieutenant Arthur Reginald Evans. The message indicated that the American commander, Kennedy, should return with the natives. Kennedy immediately complied. He was taken

offshore to meet PT-157, which returned with him to the island and finally rescued all of the survivors of his crew.

The Coastwatchers were a group of Australian military personnel that had been positioned on numerous outlying Pacific islands to observe and report on the movement of Japanese troops and vessels in their observation area. Their contribution had already been invaluable to the American victory at Guadalcanal. Some of them lived in primitive conditions with the resident islanders on their posts and they performed with great effectiveness. They also developed a great rapport and trust with the indigenous natives, so the natives decided to return to the Americans on Nauru because they trusted the Coastwatchers.

On the evening of August 8th Kennedy's crew arrived back at Rendova, where the injured survivors finally received medical treatment. Kennedy and the others were greeted like royalty, since their compatriots on Rendova thought they had all been killed when the PT-109 was sunk.

The base commander at Rendova was Captain Willard Field. The captain faced a chronic shortage of qualified crewmen and officers to man his PT boats, so he arranged for the best possible treatment for Kennedy and his crew so that they might rest and rehabilitate and be ready to be returned to service quickly. The captain had no doubt that Kennedy was a capable commander and should be given a new vessel as soon as possible. He soon learned, however, that this would not be possible.

* * * * *

General Douglas MacArthur had transferred his headquarters operation to Brisbane, Australia after he had been forced to evacuate the Philippines by the Japanese invasion. General MacArthur was one of the most competent leaders in the American forces. He possessed a phenomenal memory and an encyclopedic knowledge of people, events and geography. His

most unique gift was his mental ability to assemble all these facts together so that he knew which people were at what location doing exactly what at most any point in time – both friend and foe!

He was also a very politically astute general. He had not been promoted to Supreme Allied Commander South West Pacific Area without knowing how to garner support among the politicians back in Washington, DC. He had a distinct leaning for the Republican Party, since they seemed to be more supportive of the military than the Democrats. But maybe that was just because President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democrat, sometimes had to deny General MacArthur's requests for additional troops or resources.

General MacArthur reviewed all the military dispatches of the entire Pacific area each and every day. Although right now he shared command of the Pacific Theater of Operations with Admiral Chester W. Nimitz (with each controlling half of the area), he wanted to become Supreme Commander of the entire Pacific. Therefore, he looked for any event in the Pacific that would promote his achievements, as well as looking for any events in Admiral Nimitz's region that might diminish Nimitz's influence.

When General MacArthur saw the dispatch reporting the rescue of the crew of the PT-109, he noted that the commander of the vessel had been Lt. John F. Kennedy, whom he knew to be the son of a prominent Democratic politician in Massachusetts. MacArthur had been looking for a chance to court-martial a Navy officer for dereliction of duty to promote better discipline among the naval forces, which he thought were less disciplined than his Army troops. He thought this might be an opportunity to achieve his objective and also discredit the Democrats.

General MacArthur summoned his aide into the room and directed that a dispatch be sent to Rendova. Although MacArthur had no direct command responsibility over that base, any dispatch from MacArthur's headquarters would be taken very seriously.

When Captain Field received the dispatch, he didn't quite know what to make of it. It wasn't an order, but it wasn't something to be ignored either. It had come from MacArthur's headquarters in Brisbane, but was not signed by MacArthur; rather it was signed by an Army Colonel whom he did not recognize. The wire said, "It is suggested that Lieutenant (JG) John F. Kennedy be confined to residence pending investigation into the sinking of PT-109. It would not be advisable to reassign Lieutenant Kennedy to a new vessel before the conclusion of such investigation. More to follow."

Captain Field had already tried to take the best care of Kennedy and his crew. He knew that they needed time to recover from the ordeal that they had been through, but he was deeply troubled by the dispatch he had just received.

Although he feared the wrath of MacArthur, since there were recurring rumors that MacArthur would soon be given command of the entire Pacific region, Captain Field sent off a dispatch of his own. Although the normal military protocol called for Captain Field to respond slowly up the chain of command, he was concerned that MacArthur was planning to court-martial Lieutenant Kennedy. Captain Field, in a bureaucratic effort as courageous as any he had ever made in the field, sent a dispatch directly to Admiral Nimitz.

When Admiral Nimitz saw the dispatch that his aide brought to him, he placed a call to the head of the ONI. He was quite certain that he remembered that the PT-109 was on an ONI mission when it was sunk by the Japanese warship.

Admiral Nimitz thereby confirmed what he already knew. PT-109 was on an intelligence-gathering mission on orders from the ONI when it was sunk by the Japanese warship. The vessel's captain, Lieutenant Kennedy, was following orders exactly as he should have and in no way was guilty of dereliction as MacArthur might be implying.

For months Admiral Nimitz had been engaged in this parody of minor conflicts with General MacArthur. He and MacArthur had a decent professional relationship, with each of them respecting the other's areas of control. But he knew that MacArthur's goal was to be the Supreme Commander of the entire Pacific. Nimitz knew that he didn't have the word "Supreme" in his own title, but he also knew that he was completely in charge in his own region.

He resented MacArthur's efforts to try to overreach his command, and he particularly resented the fact that it appeared that MacArthur wanted to court-martial Kennedy to make an example of the deficiencies in Nimitz's area and embarrass the Navy and the Democrats. Nimitz was apolitical and had no desire for political office after the war, but he had a keen understanding of the political arena and knew that Kennedy's father was a very influential Democrat back in Washington. He was sure this fact had influenced MacArthur's actions.

Admiral Nimitz called Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, the commander of the South Pacific area. Following their discussion, they decided that it would be best if they could preempt any effort by MacArthur to court-martial Kennedy by awarding him a medal. It certainly wouldn't sit well with the American public if a war hero with a newly minted medal were suggested for court-martial by someone (like MacArthur) not directly responsible for his actions.

After the conversation with Admiral Nimitz, Admiral Halsey summoned his aide into his office. Admiral Halsey said, "I need you to draft a citation for the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for Lieutenant (JG) John F. Kennedy immediately. Get all of the relevant information from his file as quickly as you can. Lieutenant Kennedy was the commander of the PT-109, which was sunk by a collision with a Japanese warship. He exhibited extraordinary heroism by leading the survivors through treacherous waters to some safe islands until they could finally be

rescued through his efforts and by natives and Australian Coast Watchers. I need you to draft the award citation immediately and bring it to me for signature.

“Then I want you to personally deliver it to Rendova. I want it there as soon as possible, so I want you to take Dumbo.”

His aide said, “Dumbo, sir? I thought you needed him tomorrow.”

“No, no,” the Admiral said, “This is much more important. I need you to get to Rendova ASAP.” Then the Admiral added as an afterthought, “Take that Lieutenant with you too.”

His aide didn’t need any more instructions. He knew which Lieutenant the Admiral was referring to and he was confident that he could be airborne with him and the citation within an hour.

* * * * *

Jack Kennedy had been lying in his bungalow at Rendova for weeks now. He was growing stir-crazy from the inactivity. Although his back had long bothered him and was quite a bit worse after the injuries he had sustained during the sinking of PT-109, he wanted desperately to return to active duty.

But the base commander had continued to waffle on that issue and repeatedly told Jack that he just needed to rest. Jack had become quite worried that there was something more below the surface that was denying him a new assignment. He wasn’t quite sure what it was, but it worried him more and more each and every day. On the few days when the base commander did come by to check on Jack’s well-being, he was very evasive, which just worried Jack even more.

* * * * *

“Rendova Station, Rendova Station. This is Navy One, Zero, Zero, Two, on final to land immediately.”

The radio operator at Rendova was puzzled by the whole thing since they didn't have an airstrip at Rendova. He responded, "Navy 1002, be advised there is no airstrip on Rendova. We are a Navy base, not Air Force. Divert to Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. Repeat, divert."

The pilot responded, "I'm aware of that. We will be landing offshore. Please be sure that there are no vessels in our landing zone outside of the harbor."

The Rendova operator had never had a transmission like this, so he quickly ran for the radio officer on shift. The officer came back with him and got on the radio and said, "Navy 1002, please advise your intentions."

Navy 1002 responded, "We are on a five-mile final approach to land outside your harbor. Please advise everyone that we are Navy and not hostile. Also, we expect you to get all traffic out of our way."

The officer said, "Navy 1002, I don't have any instructions regarding your landing."

The pilot responded, "You'll receive your orders when we land. This is Admiral Halsey's personal aircraft and we are here on his direct orders. I'm bringing the orders with me. We'll be down very soon. Please make sure there's nobody in our way."

Five minutes later, those closest to the head of the harbor saw an enormous aircraft landing. Although they didn't know the designation at the time, it was a Catalina PBY. This one was the first assigned to the South Pacific theater and had been assigned to Admiral Halsey. As his personal aircraft, it had clearance to go anywhere it wished within the American forces area. After landing, it taxied through the water toward the docks, and then shut down its engines. The pilot requested assistance to moor the aircraft and transport his passengers to shore.

This was such an unusual occurrence that the radio officer had long ago alerted the base commander, Captain Field. Everyone on the shore was in awe of the size of this flying boat. No one had ever seen anything like it before.

A Catalina PBY has two engines and is as big as an Air Force bomber, but it can float! It is about 65 feet long with a wingspan of over 100 feet. It is the largest amphibious plane ever commercially developed. That is why the Admiral and his staff had conferred on it the nickname “Dumbo,” based on the flying elephant of Disney cartoon fame.

The base commander ordered the launch of two small boats. One was directed to tie the aircraft to an existing mooring. The other was directed toward its passenger door so that it could allow the passengers to deplane and come ashore.

The admiral’s aide and his associate did not wait until the aircraft was fully moored. They just jumped aboard the launch and headed to shore.

Captain Field was awaiting them as the launch arrived at the dock.

After they had made the proper salutations, Captain Field asked, “What the hell is that airplane? I’ve never seen anything so big that could both fly and float.”

The admiral’s aide responded, “That’s a Catalina PBY and they’re sure pretty.”

“Not just pretty, but pretty enormous,” Captain Field asked, “So how come you’re here and how can I help you?”

The admiral’s aide said, “Well, there’s some worry about Lieutenant Kennedy after what happened with the PT-109.”

“Yeah,” Captain Field said. “I’m afraid that Kennedy’s going to be skewered for just doing what he was told to do. He’s a good skipper. And he protected his crew.”

The admiral's aide said, "We know that because of your report. Admiral Nimitz wants you to know that he appreciates your informing him directly about this situation. He agrees with your judgment that this situation demands a speedy resolution. I'm here to help out. Can we meet with Lieutenant Kennedy?"

"Of course," Captain Field said, enormously relieved that he wasn't in trouble for circumventing the chain of command and going directly to the top. He was proud to hear that the Admiral agreed with his judgment.

Captain Field said, "He's in his residence right now, I think. I was told by MacArthur's office not to let him go too far."

"Yeah, we know," the admiral's aide said. "But we Navy always need to protect our own, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Captain Field said. "Just jump in this jeep and we'll be there in a couple of minutes."

Soon thereafter, they arrived at the tent city that comprised all of the residences of both the officers and enlisted men on Rendova. The officers had wooden floors in their tents and some better accommodations than the enlisted men, but basically nothing was very palatial.

Captain Field pushed aside the tent flap and walked into Kennedy's tent. Jack Kennedy had been lying on a bunk resting his back. He jumped up when he saw the base commander.

Jack saluted and said, "Welcome to my humble abode. How are you, sir?"

Captain Field responded, "I'm very well, Jack. There are some folks here that I brought to see you."

Jack said, "Folks? I was hoping you brought me a new boat. I'm sort of dying here of boredom. I really want to get back into the fight."

Captain Field said, “Yeah, I know, but maybe this will resolve that problem.”

Jack looked beyond him and saw the admiral’s aide. The admiral’s aide wore insignia to indicate he was the aide of an admiral and a Navy Captain.

The aide said to Jack, “Are you Lieutenant John F. Kennedy?” in a very official voice.

Jack stood up even more rigid, saluted and said, “Yes, Sir. Lieutenant John Fitzgerald Kennedy at your service.”

The admiral’s aide said to him, “Well, I’m here to recognize your role in saving the lives of several of your crew and performing a great service to your country when you were obeying all your orders with the PT-109.”

The aide continued, “We are in possession of information that you fulfilled all of your orders, which included the secret extraction of an ONI operative who had been assigned to gather information regarding the Japanese positions on several nearby islands. It’s apparent that because of this fulfillment of your duties, your vessel was in the line of harm and was sunk. Your performance afterwards to protect and preserve the lives of the survivors of your crew was worthy of the medal for which you are now being recommended. Before I give you the official citation, I thought you might like to meet the ONI operative you were assigned to extract.”

The man behind the admiral’s aide then moved into view.

Jack was astonished when Peter Sharkey moved toward him. Jack thought he was looking at a ghost, or that he was hallucinating because of the tropical heat. Jack almost fell back onto his bunk from the shock!

Peter moved forward and clasped Jack’s hand in a vigorous handshake. Then Peter and Jack embraced each other, which they did quickly and then pulled apart; both kind of embarrassed because men didn’t usually embrace each other, especially naval officers.

“Holy Mother of God,” Jack said to Peter. “I thought you were dead.”

“Yeah,” Peter responded, “I was pretty worried about that myself. I’ve never been in the middle of a bunch of hungry sharks before. But it wasn’t as bad as I feared. Hey, I’m still here.”

The admiral’s aide said, “Lieutenant Kennedy, Admiral Halsey has decided to recommend you for the Navy and Marine Corps Medal. This is being given to you because of meritorious service in protecting and saving the lives of your crew after the horrible sinking of your vessel, the PT-109. I’m going to give you this citation now and then I’m going to step out for a few minutes, so that you might visit with Lt. Sharkey. Please keep it brief because Lt. Sharkey needs to join me on my return trip back to Admiral Halsey’s headquarters.”

The admiral’s aide read verbatim from the text of a wire that he held in his hand:

To Admiral C. W. Nimitz

From Admiral W. F. Halsey

C.C. Flag Officers Pacific Theater, Pentagon Distribution

Subject: Navy and Marine Corps Medal

Lieutenant, Junior Grade, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, United States Navy is recommended for the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for heroism in the rescue of three men following the ramming and sinking of his motor torpedo boat while attempting a torpedo attack on a Japanese destroyer in the Solomon Islands area on the night of August 1-2, 1943. Lieutenant Kennedy, in command of the boat, directed the rescue of the crew and personally rescued three men, one of whom

was seriously injured. During the following six days, he succeeded in getting his crew ashore; and after swimming many hours, attempting to secure aid and food, finally effected the rescue of the men. His courage, endurance and excellent leadership contributed to the saving of several lives and was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

With that the aide stuck out his hand to congratulate Jack, and Jack immediately shook it. He accepted the citation with his left hand and quite frankly didn't know how else to respond, so he just remained silent. The aide turned around and headed for the door, and left Jack looking at Peter.

Jack said, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I thought you were dead."

Peter said, "Yeah, I came close. I have never been so scared in all my life."

"So what happened?" Jack asked, "How the hell did you get out of there? I saw the wild frenzy the sharks were in. I thought they were ripping you to shreds."

"Well," Peter said, "I had my Ka-bar in my mouth and after doing the butterfly stroke to attract their attention and get them away from you guys, I just held my breath when they got close and dropped down. On the way down, I caught one of those shark bastards with my knife right in the belly, and I saw him start to gush blood and guts. So it attracted all the other sharks. I think I cut a couple more as they went by, and then I just held my breath and went down further. I don't know how long I was down, but I remember thinking the longer the better. When I finally surfaced, I was pretty much away from the frenzy while the sharks were feeding on each other. I hoped that you'd escaped toward the island and were onshore by then, but I

couldn't tell. I tried to head back in your direction, but the current pushed me way out in the channel. Luckily, just before morning, I was able to find a passing PT boat heading back to headquarters. So I jumped on board, told them you guys were still alive somewhere, but I didn't know where. And then they sent me back to deliver the information that I had been sent to find when you dropped me off."

"Jesus," Jack said, "What the hell were you doing that you couldn't tell me about?"

"Hey, sorry, Jack," Peter said. "I still can't tell you about it. But I believe it was important."

"Okay," Jack said. "I knew you weren't there just to go for a swim. Thanks for everything. I don't know what the hell has been going on here, but the captain's been silent and no one has given me any info."

Peter said, "Jack, I don't really know what's going on either. I'm not that high up enough to know; but I think, or at least the rumor is that MacArthur wanted to court-martial you to make an example of the ineptness of the Navy. And in response Nimitz decided to get you a medal as soon as possible. I'm not saying you don't deserve it, buddy, but I think that most officers don't get their medal citation personally delivered by an Admiral's aide in a Catalina PBY in a war zone."

Jack thought about that for a moment and then said, "Yeah Peter, I think you got that right. I don't know what's going on either, but I sure hope now I finally get a new boat. Lying here on this cot is just hell for my back and even worse for my mind."

Then the door opened and one of the aircraft crewmen signaled to Peter that it was time to leave. He and Jack shook hands and gave a brief hug to each other. They vowed to keep in touch after the war.

Within ten minutes Peter was back on the launch headed for the PBY, which soon departed for Admiral Halsey's headquarters. Everyone watching the PBY's lift-off marveled that such a huge "boat" could actually take off and fly.

Jack lay back in his cot and thought that things had finally been clarified for him. Even in the midst of war, there were still divisions over politics and even Army versus Navy. He had heard that MacArthur might want to run for political office after the war as a Republican, so this was possibly a way to advance his political base. Jack learned he needed to look for a political purpose behind everything. Since he and his family were staunch Democrats, he had to consider the possibility that MacArthur wanted to attack him for a political purpose. It was an important lesson for him, one which he remembered for the rest of his life.

Back in Brisbane, General MacArthur was furious when he read the dispatch from Admiral Halsey announcing that he had recommended Lieutenant Kennedy for the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, and that the citation had already been delivered to him at Rendova.

That effectively ended MacArthur's plans to court-martial Kennedy since there was no way that the American public would tolerate the court-martial of an American hero who had already been recommended for a prestigious honor like the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

He made a mental note to exact revenge when he was made Supreme Commander of the entire Pacific. When that happened, the commander at Rendova, Captain Field, would see his career demolished.

MacArthur was absolutely sure that he would get appointed Supreme Commander, but in fact, that never happened.

Plus if Lieutenant Kennedy ever screwed up again, MacArthur was determined to nail him to the wall even if he didn't yet have direct responsibility over that area of the Pacific. If there were a second mistake by Kennedy, MacArthur would take it as high up as necessary.

But for now, MacArthur realized that his plans had been thwarted by Admirals Nimitz and Halsey, and he decided to let this issue pass and move on.

* * * * *

Unbeknownst to either Peter or Jack, on August 27th the U.S. 172nd Infantry landed on Arundel Island. That was the island Peter had been sent to recon, but he couldn't tell Jack that. Because the American forces had attacked from an unexpected direction that was undefended by the Japanese, the Americans enjoyed a huge element of surprise and crushed the Japanese defenders. Apparently, somehow the Americans had discovered a deep-water channel for their invasion craft in the midst of a swampy area on the south side of the island that the Japanese didn't know existed. Since a visual examination of the surface waters from the shore led one to believe it was all swampy shoals, only a swimmer actually in the water could have determined the true depths. The Japanese knew invasion craft couldn't move through swamps. But – surprise!

Only Peter would ever know how that channel was discovered.

On September 5th, the 27th Infantry arrived to reinforce the 172nd. By September 21st, Japanese General Sasaki withdrew all his remaining forces from Arundel in defeat, and even abandoned the neighboring island of Gizo, which had presented a more menacing threat to naval traffic in the area. Without Arundel, he knew he couldn't defend Gizo. The Japanese suffered 345 killed and about 500 wounded – a massive defeat, while the Americans had only minor losses. Such was the result of the element of surprise.

* * * * *

In early October, Jack was appointed commander of a new vessel, PT-59, shortly after he'd received the citation from Admiral Halsey. So, apparently, his time in Purgatory was over!

Several weeks later, he received a mailed envelope that bore no return address. Inside, there was no letter, just part of a page torn from the *New York Times*, which was dated September 23rd. It read:

“Americans Destroy Last of Enemy on Arundel.” It went on to detail the complete destruction of the Japanese garrison at Arundel. It was a massive victory for the Americans!

Jack knew this had to be from Peter, and realized that Peter's information must have been instrumental in such a successful attack on Arundel. Peter most likely found an undefended approach to the island that allowed the American forces to surprise and overwhelm the Japanese forces.

He finally felt that his former crewmembers' deaths had not been in vain. So he would be able to sleep better, no longer troubled that their deaths might have been for naught. And, he had to admit to himself, he felt a certain amount of pride in his contribution to the mission.

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