

SUICIDE RUN TO ARCHANGEL

A World War II Novel Based on a True Story

CAPT. MICHAEL J. DODD

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SUICIDE RUN TO ARCHANGEL

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Author's Note

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC was the longest continuous campaign of World War II, stretching from 1939 to the end of the war in Europe in May 1945. The battle pitted Allied merchant ships and their Navy defenders against the German U-boats, naval ships, and the Luftwaffe. The critical job of the merchant ships was to deliver war materiel and supplies from the United States to England and Russia in their battle against the Nazis. For much of the conflict, the outcome was in doubt. Early on, Allied merchant ships were sunk at a rate faster than they could be replaced. At one point, England was reduced to only a few months' supply of food and fuel. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared "...the U-boat menace was the only thing I really worried about during the war."

The tide finally turned in the spring of 1943 with several epic convoy battles. How did the Allies achieve this victory? It hinged on the US conversion of its enormous industrial capacity to a war footing. Huge numbers of merchant Liberty Ships along with destroyers, battleships, and long-range bombers, were produced and gradually turned the tide.

The Liberty Ship was a 440-foot vessel which was standardized and manufactured rapidly at eighteen shipyards along the east and west coasts and the Gulf of Mexico. The average time to construct a Liberty Ship was reduced from 150 days to forty days. Some 2,700 were produced by the end of the war. In addition, thousands of long-range bombers were manufactured. These could track and protect the convoys.

The other game changer was new technology developed to locate the illusive U-boats. SONAR was improved to detect U-boats while underwater. RADAR was developed for surface tracking, and High Frequency Direction Finding (Huff-Duff) was invented to detect U-boat radio communications and pinpoint a vessel's location. Finally, the German secret code (ENIGMA) was cracked by the British. This breakthrough allowed analysis of the enemy battle plans and locations of U-boat wolfpacks.

The cost of the Battle of the Atlantic for both sides was horrendous. On the Allied ledger, some 35,000 merchant mariners and navy armed guards lost their lives. More than 3,000 Allied merchant ships were sunk.

The Germans lost 783 U-boats out of a fleet of about 900. During the last months of the war, a German crewmember boarding a U-boat had only a 5% chance of returning home. Some 30,000 submariners lost their lives. This was the highest loss-rate of any service of any combatant in World War II.

This historical novel is based on actual events that occurred during the war. The Liberty Ship *Esek Hopkins* delivered vital cargo to various international ports throughout the conflict. Its first voyage was from New Jersey to Archangel, Russia. The *Esek Hopkins* was one of forty merchant marine ships in a convoy which was given the code name PQ 18. The horrific attacks on PQ 18 by the German *U 408*, and other U-boats on September 13, 1942 were real, as were the ships struck by torpedoes. Following the U-boat attacks, persistent bombing of the convoy by the Luftwaffe terrorized the sailors on board and sank more ships. The harrowing journey during the last leg of the voyage to Archangel resulted in hundreds of casualties and enormous loss of vessels and supplies. All true. Remarkably, the *Esek Hopkins* made it to Archangel and back to Baltimore with no casualties.

The central character, Jack Dodd, was my uncle, and served on the *Esek Hopkins* as a deck cadet during that voyage to Russia

in Convoy PQ 18 during the summer of 1942. The sequence of events outlined in this book is accurate and is drawn from my uncle's diary and letters home. After Jack's death in 1990, my cousin, also named Michael (but with middle initial "H"), pulled the data together and wrote a short private manuscript based on his father's notes and recollections. The manuscript was circulated only among family members. My thanks to Michael for giving me a copy, and for granting me permission to use his father's information to create this historical novel.

Jack Dodd and other family members named in this book were real people, as were the captains of *U-408*, and the Russian ship *Stalingrad*. Other characters, personal events and conversations are fiction. Based on my research, the events surrounding the attack on PQ-18 on September 13, 1942 are accurate.

The story that follows offers a view through a tiny window into the lives of some of the men who fought in the Battle of the Atlantic. This book is dedicated to all those who served in that prolonged nightmare.

Prologue

THE GERMAN SUBMARINE *UNTERSEEBOOT-408* jolted for a moment as a gush of compressed air forced a slender, smooth twenty-three-foot torpedo into the North Atlantic. The twin counterrotating props had begun spinning on command before the torpedo left tube number one. The generally reliable G7a TI torpedo carried six hundred twenty pounds of high explosives for a distance up to five thousand yards. The torpedo could propel itself at a remarkable speed of forty knots (about forty-five miles per hour). In addition, it was programmed to travel at a specific distance below the surface. In this case, the depth was set at fifteen feet. German navy men referred to torpedoes as “eels.” Americans called them “tin fish.”

On this Sunday morning in September 1942, the air was cold and the sky overcast in the North Atlantic. The U-boat target was a cargo ship in an Allied convoy of forty merchant vessels. The Germans had learned through their spy network that the convoy was given the code name PQ 18. The convoy had departed from Iceland with a destination of the port city of Archangel, Russia. Before Iceland, the convoy had come from the Scottish coast. It originated in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Prior to Halifax, the individual ships had loaded cargo from several ports on the East Coast of the United States. The journey from Iceland to Archangel was the last and most dangerous segment of the long and treacherous voyage of Convoy PQ 18.

Even though most of the ships in the convoy were American, the particular ship targeted by *U-408* happened to be a Russian

cargo vessel named *Stalingrad*. She squatted deeply in the cold, choppy sea with her cargo of coal, fuel oil and military supplies. The depth of her hull was twenty-five feet below the churning waves. The German eel had a high probability of a strike.

But any good U-boat captain would not rely on a single torpedo. Captain Reinhard von Hymmen leaned against the periscope frame with a stopwatch in his hand. His crew remained perfectly silent in the cramped, smelly, two-hundred-twenty-foot steel tube, which carved its way silently through the frigid water some twenty feet below the surface.

A few moments earlier, Captain Hymmen had gazed through the monocular periscope and inspected the Allied convoy. He had picked out one ship at the edge of the convoy, recited to his officers the speed and distance, and ordered the scope down as the calculation was performed. An officer loaded the data into the torpedo gyroscope as the eel rested peacefully in its tube. Captain Hymmen had noted the target ship did not have the outline of a typical American Liberty Ship. He speculated that it looked like a Russian commercial vessel. So much the better. He detested the Russians.

Now it was time to launch the second eel. As he gazed at his stopwatch, the tiny, rotating secondhand arrow arrived at number three and the captain uttered, "*Rohr zwei los*" (tube two loose). The submarine gently jolted a second time. The bow of the U-boat lifted slightly as the three-thousand-three-hundred-ninety-pound eel departed from tube two. The U-boat elevator fins were adjusted to keep the vessel level underwater. Several crew members looked at each other and each gave a silent, subtle grin. They knew their captain rarely missed. This torpedo was set at a depth of eighteen feet. Hymmen glanced at his first mate as the secondhand continued its journey around the face of his watch. After another fifteen seconds, he said with conviction, "*Drei*." A third torpedo shot into the sea. These were the first three torpedoes launched by *U-408* on this mission. Captain Hymmen had eleven torpedoes remaining.

Captain Hymmen knew there were risks of launching G7a TI

torpedoes at 10:00 a.m. on an overcast day. But he was no wilting flower. In this situation, the risk was worth it. Too many targets were cruising at a pokey nine knots directly before him. Things could change for the worse before dusk. He would take his chances now despite the fact that his torpedoes would leave a bubble trail from the chemical reaction that propelled them. And in his favor, he had seen no escort ships on this side of the convoy. In addition, the other captains in the wolf pack were all taking the same risk with their torpedoes.

The three G7a TI torpedoes raced toward the *Stalingrad* at a high speed. Captain Hymmen determined the distance the torpedoes must travel to detonation was fifteen hundred yards. At the given speed, the first torpedo should strike its target in one minute, ten seconds. The second should detonate in one minute, twenty-five seconds, and the third in one minute, forty seconds. The captain waited patiently to raise the periscope. He looked at the stopwatch in his right hand. After a thirty-second interval following the launch of the last torpedo, his voice broke the silence, and he ordered the periscope up. He rotated the scope and gazed with his right eye into the single ocular. To no one in particular, he instructed *U-408* to slow to three knots.

On the bridge of the *Stalingrad*, the second mate, Dimitri Novolov and Captain Alexi Sakharov had just finished a quick breakfast in the officers' quarters. The captain was surveying the starboard horizon with binoculars.

Suddenly he screamed in Russian, "Oh, Christ!" Then, "Stop engines! Full Reverse! Hard to port!"

None of these efforts would change the final outcome. Dimitri complied with the captain's orders, then gazed to the right. Even without binoculars, he could see the trail of bubbles projecting a line toward the midsection of the *Stalingrad*. The torpedo was traveling twenty-two yards every second.

The captain pushed the general alarm button to sound the klaxon as the ship grudgingly, incrementally began to slow; too late. Several deck hands also had seen the torpedo and were donning life jackets and running toward the port side lifeboats. On the bridge, Dimitri estimated he had first spotted the torpedo at about two hundred yards from the *Stalingrad*. He had practiced the math during his training. He quickly surmised the ship would be struck in nine seconds. The math was accurate.

The first torpedo from *U-408* passed twenty yards in front of the *Stalingrad*. It also missed other ships in the convoy and likely drifted to the ocean floor when all its fuel was expended. The second torpedo was on target to strike the midsection of the *Stalingrad*. The third torpedo missed its target completely due to a malfunction in the propellant. It traveled straight, but at a slower speed of thirty-five knots. It continued on its journey until it struck the steel hull of an American Liberty Ship, the *Oliver Ellsworth*. This ship was about four hundred yards behind the *Stalingrad*. It was an “accidental” hit. In a few short moments, two merchant ships were struck out of three shots from *U-408*.

Hymmen could not resist smiling as he observed the first explosion through the periscope. He calmly announced the strike to his men without moving his eye away from the ocular. Moments later, the dulled sound of the explosion on the *Stalingrad* carried under water and the tearing and screeching of steel was audible to all in the U-boat. The crew softly clapped and congratulated one another. There were still two torpedoes loose. Within fifteen seconds a second explosion occurred in the captain’s left field of view through the periscope. It was an American Liberty Ship. He announced in German, “We have struck a second ship!” This time, just as the underwater explosive sound arrived at the U-boat, the crew let out a loud cheer, which the captain tolerated. It was not often that two ships were struck in such rapid succession. Not bad.

Since the first explosion was about fifteen seconds late, Captain Hymmen realized it was the second torpedo which struck the Russ-

ian ship. He concluded the first torpedo missed completely. And he correctly deduced that the third eel had defective propulsion since it missed the primary target and hit the ship behind the Russian freighter. It was a lucky hit of the American ship. But to all the crew, he had bracketed the underwater bombs nicely. To them, he was a genius, their genius.

Hymmen continued watching as fire consumed the *Stalingrad* and it began listing to starboard amidst thick black smoke. Clearly, the blow was mortal. The American ship was smoking, but not listing. Three torpedoes, two hits. One ship sinking for sure. He knew when they returned to the submarine pens on the French coast, he would be celebrated as a hero. In the distance, on the far side of the convoy, he could detect several other black clouds rising from the ocean surface. This day marked a successful attack by the wolf pack.

Thoughts drifted through Hymmen's mind as he gazed at the destruction before his eye.

It was nasty business. "My crew may appropriately be happy," he thought, "but there is incomprehensible terror on board those two ships." He did not allow himself to dwell on the topic. A little voice reminded him that one day the positions may be reversed.

Captain Hymmen's *U-408* was one of ten German submarines participating in the attack on PQ 18. This wolf pack had a title: *Tragertod*, or Tragic Death. The tracking of Convoy PQ 18 by German air and sea reconnaissance began on September 12. On this day, Sunday, September 13, 1942, the U-boats began picking targets and launching their deadly weapons.

On the *Stalingrad*, Captain Sakharov could not take his terror-filled eyes off the speeding torpedo. He could no longer speak. Dimitri had donned a life jacket and handed one to the captain just as the ship groaned with a huge, violent explosive shudder. The percussion knocked both men off their feet. The windows on the starboard side of the bridge shattered. An intense, bright flash had

briefly illuminated the interior. Almost immediately, the ship began to list to starboard. Dimitri stood and inspected himself. He appeared to be in one piece. He helped the captain stand.

“Captain, we must get down to the lifeboats. There is no hope; the ship is sinking, and we do not have much time.” Black, foul-smelling smoke filled the air. A powerful rumble deep in the bowels of the ship made the doomed vessel shudder again. Shouts and screams were audible from below and from the smoke-filled deck.

“Captain, the boilers have ruptured. There is no hope. We must save ourselves!” Captain Sakharov said nothing. The seconds peeled by. Dimitri helped him put on the life jacket. It was becoming difficult to stand on the bridge. The list to starboard was already about fifteen degrees. The second mate tried to pull him along, but Sakharov would not budge.

Finally, he said to the captain, “I will go down now. Follow me. We can go to the port side. I see the men lowering the lifeboats. Come.” The captain shook his head and gazed into oblivion.

Dimitri left the captain and scampered down the steel stairs into the smoky confusion of the main deck and crashed into the first mate, Oleg. He had a bloody nose and deep cuts with glass shards poking from his skin. “Where is the captain?”

Dimitri coughed and gasped between breaths as he took in the mayhem and horror on deck. “He’s in shock-on the bridge-he would not join me! I’m not sure you can help.”

“So be it,” Oleg shouted as he grabbed Dimitri’s arm and they both struggled to walk up the steepening grade amidst the hideous smoke and chaos to find a lifeboat on the port side.

The scene below the waterline in the hull of the *Stalingrad* was horrifying. The G7a T I torpedo had operated perfectly. The torpedo exploded on contact with the steel hull and the six hundred and twenty pounds of high explosives erupted with extreme violence eighteen feet below the waterline. A ragged irregular hole ten feet in diameter was created through the one-inch steel hull. Coal bunkers were present near the explosion and caught fire immediately.

Within a few seconds, the third deck level was engulfed in flames. The fire soon reached the boilers one deck below, resulting in a second explosion, even as thousands of gallons of frigid North Atlantic water gushed through the gaping hole. Most of the bulk-head doors were not latched and the water passed forward and aft unimpeded.

Eight crew members below were killed immediately. Those who survived the blast were struggling toward the nearest ladder to get as high as they could, as quickly as possible. The boiler men always knew they would be the first to go when a torpedo hit. They were most anxious during the night when the risk of attack was greatest. This attack during daylight was a surprise and stunned them. Some searched for their colleagues in murky, freezing water, screaming names in vain. A few drowned while looking in desperation. Others were scalded with the flames and heat and could barely move. It was a scene re-created from Dante's *Inferno* in this tiny, unholy spot in the middle of the vast ocean.

The *Stalingrad*, a ship of 3,500 tons, sank below the surface in four minutes, her bow descending slowly, finally. Oil slicks clung to the surface, with some splotches catching fire. Anything capable of floating freely popped up, as screaming men struggled through the muck toward lifeboats and flotsam. Water swirled in little maelstroms, and demonic shattering and screeching sounds of steel fracturing in the dying ship echoed frighteningly to the surface.

Through his periscope, Captain Hymmen of *U-408* passively watched the carnage before him. It was traditional for German captains to observe the actual sinking of an enemy ship before they could count the success in their logs. In addition to the length of the ship, he estimated the tonnage—which often was exaggerated by German captains. If possible, the captains would attempt to confirm the name of the ship and its port of origin. Hymmen was a bit too far to make out the name *Stalingrad* on the descending, gasping bow of the ship.

Amazingly, of the eighty-seven crew and passengers on the Russian collier, sixty-six were eventually rescued. Captain A. Sakharov was the last man to leave the *Stalingrad*. He floated in the frigid ocean for nearly forty minutes. When his shivering, oil-coated body was fished up by a British minesweeper, he was the last pulled from the water on that horrible day. He survived the unforgiving cold and, remarkably, continued his career in the Russian navy.

The American Liberty Ship, *Oliver Ellsworth*, had been the victim of *U-408*'s third torpedo. She was built in Baltimore and had been launched only three months prior. On this trip, her eight-thousand-ton capacity was maxed out with ammunition and aircraft. She sustained a direct hit on her starboard side and quickly filled with water. Since most of her below-deck hatches and doors had been secured, the water did not fill the ship completely and she did not list or sink. Her eight officers, thirty-four Merchant Marine crewmen, and twenty-eight Navy Armed Guards quickly got into lifeboats. There was considerable fear that the large quantity of ammunition on board would explode. But it did not. All the crew, except one Navy Armed Guard, were rescued. She sat forlornly in the ocean, stricken, and alone, but not dead. The water line was three-quarters up her freeboard. After an hour, she had drifted far behind the convoy. The British Admiralty determined she could not be recovered. Once her crew was rescued, the *Oliver Ellsworth* was fired upon by an Allied escort ship until she sank.

Slightly over one mile away, toward the center of Convoy PQ 18, cruised the Liberty Ship *Esek Hopkins*. Most of her crew gathered along the starboard side gazing in the distance as swirling, black smoke filled the air above the two stricken vessels. The men stood in silence.

They were mesmerized, stunned and angry. This was their first taste of war, and it was here, it was now, and it was clearly visible right before them. The powerful and violent destruction was all too real. Some of the men murmured a prayer as they contemplated their mortality and their insignificance in this massive global conflict.

Deck cadet Jack Dodd was among those who stared from the deck of the *Esek Hopkins* at the distant carnage. His body unwillingly shivered for a moment. A recurring thought twirled through his head, “Why, why am I doing this?” No one on that deck needed to be told the *Esek Hopkins* could be next.

Dinner that evening was somber. The officers came to the mess and tried to reassure the crew that every man on those ships who survived the blast was rescued. Yes, those who survived the blast. How many was that? The officers talked about the life vests, the fire drills, the lifeboat-launching techniques, and survival techniques in the water. Everything except how to deal with the deep, corrosive fear that inhabited their hearts with pounding, unending, unbearable horror.

All the men, including the officers, struggled with sleep that night. Jack finally dozed off after imagining those huge powerful, mortally-wounded ships rolling over repeatedly on their long journey to the bottom of the sea, with struggling, suffering men in states of panic, eyes wide open under water, trying to determine “up” in total blackness, as they used all their strength to escape, to gasp for one more breath, as their last thoughts contemplated their life’s end, their loved ones, their meager existence. No one deserved to die like that. And yet...

Jack Dodd moved with a sudden jolt. The space he occupied rolled and swayed randomly. His clothes were damp with perspiration. He knew his eyes were open, but he could see nothing. Finally, his thoughts came into focus. He was on board the Liberty Ship *Esek Hopkins* as it moaned and groaned somewhere in the North Atlantic, rolling like a barrel in heavy seas. He had been sleeping deeply on the lower bunk. The room was dark with the portholes securely covered and all lights out. Irregular snoring noises emanated from his three roommates. This was reassuring. The nightmare of that horrific day was still frighteningly real. He

could not get it out of his mind. He took a deep breath and tried to calm himself. He would never be able to get back to sleep. Somehow, when he started on this idyllic journey, he did not anticipate how close to death he would truly be.

Yes, Sunday, September 13, 1942, was indeed a bad day for the Allies. The crew of *Esek Hopkins* would never forget the shock and horror of that mournful day.

And that was just the beginning.

CHAPTER 1

A Decision

JOHAN D. DODD, KNOWN AS “Jack” to friends and family, was a reliable son, a good brother, a fun uncle. All his nieces and nephews liked him. When children were first exposed to him, they withdrew somewhat into shyness, most likely because he presented a somewhat ominous appearance with his bushy, black, heavy eyebrows. But that was a family trait. His father and both brothers had the same bushy eyebrows. Once his nieces and nephews got to know his friendly personality and his interest in their own affairs and activities, they accepted the eyebrows and they quickly warmed to him. And with considerable irony, his nephews grew up to develop the identical trait.

Jack had a sense of humor that tickled the children. He sometimes carried a little toy or special coin in his pocket that revealed some magic or gag. One time, there was a rumor about his behavior after obtaining his driver’s license that intrigued the children. Usually, no family member brought it up, but one during one Thanksgiving dinner, his brother Howard dropped it suspiciously, surreptitiously into the conversation. Out of nowhere, Howard offered up, “What was the name of that nasty neighborhood kid who went home with a bloody nose, Jack?

Remember? After he was pestering Gladys.”

Jack bent over his plate and pushed his peas around, as a slight rubescent change come over his complexion, noticed even by the

children. They perked up. This clearly was something interesting they did not know about Uncle Jack.

Mary Hogan Dodd, the clan's perceptive mother, said, "Now, Howard, why bring that up? Never mind."

Gladys, Jack's favorite sister, was never shy and picked up the thread. "His name was Freddie Wilson. He was one of the neighborhood bullies. Jack had just gotten his driver's license and was going to take me for a ride around town. Freddie spied us getting into the car and invited himself to join us. Jack grumbled, but how could he say no? Anyway, he wanted to show off his driving skills. Freddie seemed to like me, and he tried to squeeze into the front seat next to me, but I locked the door. Jack told him he had to ride in the back if he wanted the thrill of seeing Jack drive. We had gone only a few blocks when Freddie got rude and started using some...impolite language. Jack told him to knock it off, but, being the bully Freddie was, he persisted. He referred to Jack as a little punk. That did it. Jack pulled the car off to the side, got out, opened the back door and grabbed Freddie's arm and yanked him out. Freddie was a year older and a little bigger than Jack, but," Gladys paused dramatically, as she scanned the attentive faces of the nieces and nephews, "Uncle Jack did not like being called a punk."

Jack was uncomfortable and looked up. "Do we really need to go on? It's not that interesting."

Gladys ignored him. "So your uncle yelled at Freddie, 'No need to use language like that around my sister,' and he pushed Freddie hard. He fell to the ground after stumbling over some tree roots. Then Freddie jumped up and mumbled something like, 'You asked for it, punk,' and hit Uncle Jack on the side of his face. I wanted to get out of the car to see if Jack was hurt but I was afraid and watched with the door securely locked."

"What did you do, Uncle Jack?" asked Billy, the oldest nephew at the table.

Jack was chewing on a fragment of turkey meat. As all eyes stared at him, he muttered, "I took a swing and got a lucky hit on

his nose. He took a swing, I ducked, then I hit him three times real quick, boom, boom, boom.”

Gladys jumped in, “You should have seen the look on Freddie’s face. He could not believe Jack Dodd was so full of fire. He turned and ran home with a bloody nose. And he never bothered us again.” The children gazed now at their Uncle Jack with a new sense of awe and respect.

Jack and his siblings grew up on a peaceful street, in the quiet, southern port town of Baltimore on the Patapsco River, in the beautiful, majestic state of Maryland. Jack had always felt some attachment, some orientation toward the water. Its beauty, its calmness, its serenity somehow enticed him, seduced him. His brother, Bill, felt a similar attraction. This feeling made little sense and was difficult to explain to the unenlightened. Jack had a friend from high school with a small fourteen-foot sailboat—a model known as a Snipe—and they would, during the warm breezy months, go out for sails on the busy Patapsco River, the deep, blue River which oriented the city toward the outside world.

In 1940, as the war in Europe began to infect the world, Jack decided to volunteer for sea duty. After much deliberation and discussions with his brothers and friends, he elected to join the Merchant Marine, largely because it was a shorter route to get to sea compared to joining the US Navy. Six months of studies were required at the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. Graduates were given impressive pairs of khaki fatigues and blue dress uniforms nearly identical to the US Navy outfits. The look was popular with the ladies.

By now, Jack was a handsome young man with his still bushy, black eyebrows, and thick, dark hair that glistened in combed-back waves. He stood at five foot seven and had friendly, sincere brown eyes. His face gleamed with nicely aligned white teeth that promoted a friendly smile, which he used to his advantage whenever required.

Jack’s father, William J. Dodd, had been a horseman and had

run the stables for the wealthy stockbroker, Alexander Brown, who established the first American brokerage house in Baltimore. William was a risk-taker and enjoyed gambling and was good at cards. He owned an assortment of fighting roosters to supplement the family income.

Jack's mother, Mary Hogan Dodd, was a second-generation Irish woman eleven years younger than her husband. The family lived in a large, three-story home on Ithaca Street in a middle-class Baltimore neighborhood known as Gwynn Oak. Jack had two older brothers and five older sisters. His oldest sister, May, was old enough to care for Jack as if she were his mother. Jack had a comfortable and enjoyable childhood despite the fact that his father died when Jack was twelve years old.

After attending a Catholic high school, Jack took on several jobs, most recently at a brick plant, to help with the family expenses. He considered college, but with no father to support that effort, he worked instead. Jack was the youngest of the brood and his mother was very protective of her "baby." Little did Jack know how rapidly and profoundly his life would change after he made his decision to jump into the fray.

Jack wrestled with the method and timing of informing his mother of his decision to participate in the war effort. First, he elected to discuss it with the oldest sibling, Howard. Jack held him in high esteem and valued his opinion. He invited Howard to come over on a Sunday morning while their mother was at church with the sisters still living at home.

Howard knew about Jack's decision to join the war effort and was glad he sought advice regarding notification to their mother. Howard was always neatly coiffured and wore a coat, tie, and vest during most of his waking hours. Howard bore a striking resemblance to the famous airman, Howard Hughes, and occasionally had been accosted in public by mistake.

Howard raised his familial bushy eyebrows and threw out some ideas.

“Well, I think you’re doing the right thing joining the Merchant Marine,” Howard offered. “If Dad were alive, he would be very impressed. And if I were not forty-five years old, I might join you,” he said with a chuckle. He continued, “Mother, of course is another story.

She’ll be quite upset. The idea of her youngest son going to war will tear her up. And the absence of your income to household expenses...well, you can imagine. She may not bring that up, but you know she will worry.”

Jack noted, “The Merchant Marine salary is not bad. It’s sixty-five dollars per month. A little less than I bring in now at the brick plant. So, I still can help with household expenses.”

“I can chip in a little,” Howard suggested. “Bill is still in medical training and with his new baby, he can’t help much. But don’t worry, we won’t let Mother starve.”

Jack asked, “Do you think I should present my plans to everyone at the same time or to Mother alone?”

“Don’t present it to everyone together,” Howard offered. “Our sisters will have a fit in front of Mother. I would find some time alone with Mother and present it to her first. Later, you can discuss it with the sisters. And you had better expect resistance. Think of convincing arguments ahead of time, both for Mother and the girls. I will support you.”

“I’ve got the arguments laid out already,” Jack replied.

Howard sat down on the comfortable sofa, crossed his legs, and said, “Okay, let’s hear them.”

Jack began slowly pacing around the carpeted living room, practicing how he might present the arguments to his mother.

He started, “So, the Merchant Marine is not a war-making service branch, like the Navy or the Army. The merchant mariners work for the owners of the private commercial ships and are just ‘delivery boys.’ They may get attacked, but they only defend themselves. And Mother knows I’ve always liked the sea, so it makes sense to get involved in something I enjoy.”