

A Tiny Little Job

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by [Aleкто](#)

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Author's note:

This is a two part cross-over story. The characters from the Guns of Navarone are written following their descriptions in the book rather than from the later film of the same name. Throughout I've used the correct historical rank titles as far as possible. In the case of the German army this can become quite confusing as the rank titles used by the SS were completely different from those used by the regular army - the Wehrmacht. In Britain, the RAF still uses different rank titles to the army even today. (In the show, Hogan's Heroes, Col. Crittendon became a Colonel because of concerns that American viewers would be unfamiliar with the RAF equivalent: Group Captain.) Apart from the familiar Hogan's Heroes characters, and Mallory, Miller, Andrea and Jensen from Guns of Navarone, all other major characters are mine. Ask before borrowing.

I've included a glossary of the abbreviations I've used as well as a chart showing how the various countries' ranks equate at the end of this story. In addition, there are some brief historical details for anyone who is interested in such things.

Rating:

PG-13 for violence and occasional language.

Nor dread nor hope attend
A dying animal;
A man awaits his end
Dreading and hoping all;
Many times he died,
Many times rose again.
A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone-
Man has created death.

W.B. Yeats,
"Death"

Part 1

Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, East London, 27th February 1944

Dan Bowman was coming to the end of another shift. The flow of injured into the hospital from the night's air raid had finally stopped. In his youth, Bowman had served in the trenches back in the first war. Too old now to be drafted, he took his current job as air raid warden with a characteristic seriousness. The 'all clear' had sounded two hours ago and he had made

his way to the hospital as he had on other days to check on things, praying that the night's missing would be there. After four years of the war, Bowman was a well known visitor. Older than most, he took an almost paternal interest in the well being of the hospital volunteer staff after his own family had been killed in the blitz back in 1940.

He spotted a woman trudging down the corridor towards him. She smiled in greeting as she saw him. He forced a smile in return, shocked by her pallor and red rimmed eyes. She, like most of the medical staff, looked permanently exhausted. Taking charge, Bowman gently steered her into the nearby Doctors' lounge. "'Ere, Mum, 'ave yerself a cuppa tea before y'fall down. You look all done in."

Dr Edith de Momerie Windermere had been born in South Africa and even after working in London's East End for three years it still took her a few moments to comprehend the thick cockney accent.

"Thank you," she replied, gratefully collapsing into a sagging armchair, "exactly what I need." It had been another long night of bombing on London. Even though she had long ago become inured to the sight of the horrific injuries she had to deal with on a regular basis, it still repelled her that children were so often casualties in this war.

"You'll be wantin' to go 'ome an' get some kip. Beggin' yer pardon, Mum, but you won't be doin' no-one no good if you fall asleep when yer operatin'."

Edith glanced upwards, really noticing the speaker for the first time: an old man, face streaked with dirt, clad in a tatty workman's jacket with an ARP helmet on his head - Bowman. "G'wan, Mum, you go 'n' get yer 'ead down. We'll all be 'ere when Jerry comes visitin' again this evenin'."

Too tired to argue, Edith wearily pulled herself out of the chair. "I think I might just do that. If you or the hospital need me, you know where I'll be, assuming my lodgings have survived the night," she could not help adding dryly.

She walked out of the imposing Victorian hospital which had so far survived the bombing raids largely intact to make her way to the tube station. The early morning light was hazy with smoke and brick dust, casting a deceptively unreal aura on the destruction that nearly four years of bombing had wrought on London. People walked purposefully to and fro on

their way to work, ignoring the devastation as if it was no more an inconvenience than snow or smog. Double decker buses manoeuvred carefully around rubble still lying on the road. The general air of insouciance had surprised Edith when she had first arrived in London back in 1941, before she realised that it was London's way of telling Hitler that they would not be intimidated.

Edith headed west into the centre of London. She had taken rooms in Bloomsbury as the use of the huge house in fashionable Belgravia had been donated to the war office as accommodation. With most of the family in uniform, it would have been virtually empty otherwise. Leaving the tube at Russell Square station she trudged homewards. The debris cloud from the fires still burning in the East End lent a twilight murkiness to the old garden square that had been dug up to build a bomb shelter. Few cars were around. Fuel rationing had curtailed most non-essential driving.

Idly she noticed an ambulance driving around the square. A few moments later it pulled up beside her. A medical orderly leaned out of the window, waving to attract her attention. "Excuse me, Miss, but do you know where 17, Gordon Square is?"

"Certainly," Edith responded, "It's not too far from here."

As Edith turned away to gesture in the appropriate direction, the ambulance door opened behind her. A sweet smelling pad was clamped over her mouth. Chloroform. She had used it herself in surgery enough times to recognise it. Unable to resist, she felt herself being dragged backwards into the ambulance and the surge of acceleration as it pulled away. As the world began to drift away, she heard the man who was holding her speak to the driver: something about a transfer point and an approaching deadline. With a distant lack of surprise she realised that her kidnappers had been speaking German.

German transport plane, 15 000' over Germany, 2nd March 1944, 1500 hrs.

Flight Lieutenant Bradley checked the course and altitude for the seventh time that hour. Not that he was nervous, mind you. After all, he reflected wryly, here he was transporting three clearly important passengers in a German Junkers Ju-52 transport which had been 'acquired' by the RAF, across the heart of Germany in broad daylight. He had already landed for

refuelling at Innsbruck using forged papers. The Ju-52 was the workhorse of the German transport fleet but it did not have the range to fly directly from the Mediterranean to England on a single tank of fuel. Bradley had had to refuel at German occupied Innsbruck often enough that his German alter ego, Leutnant Baum, was on a first name basis with some of the ground crew.

Bradley had been selected for this project as he spoke perfectly the Austrian dialect of German, having grown up in Vienna. He was dressed in Luftwaffe uniform carrying papers that identified him as Leutnant Karl Baum. He had been seconded to the SOE for nearly four months, flying supplies and agents into occupied Europe right under Jerry's nose. His current passengers though were something else.

For a start they were old. He guessed them to be in their forties though their evident exhaustion made them seem older. In his squadron where Bradley was one of the oldest at twenty-seven. His current co-pilot Tom Jenkins was only nineteen. The three men in the back of the plane were like no soldiers he had yet carried.

Their apparent leader was a Captain Keith Mallory, a New Zealander, allegedly of the Long Range Desert Group, but he looked like no captain Bradley had ever seen. There again, from what he had heard the Long Range Desert Group was scarcely the Coldstream Guards. They were one of those behind-enemy-lines outfits that people often talked about but seldom actually saw. He figured that would go some way to explaining the captain's unusual appearance. He wore no uniform but instead a poorly fitting mixture of khaki battledress and civvies carrying no rank insignia. He was lithe and rangy, with dark, slightly greying hair and pale eyes peering intently from a lean, tired face. Before they had taken off they had chatted awhile in the officers' mess, the three men eating as if they had not eaten well for days. Mallory had been courteous and soft-spoken, but there was something about him that made Bradley feel uncomfortable for reasons he could not quite explain.

Of his two colleagues, one was a lugubrious American, Corporal Miller. You could see in his face the cynicism of a man who had been around the block too many times and seen enough that he had no illusions left. If he had been uncomfortable being in the officers' mess he hid it well. He was also the least military corporal Bradley had come across. Listening to him complain in his sarcastic mid-western drawl, he could not help but wonder how he had had not been court-martialled for insubordination long ago. The other man had contributed nothing more than a snort of amusement to the conversation following some comment of Miller's. He had sat down, leaning back against the wall, smoking a pipe and nursing a glass of brandy.

Gazing back into the passenger section of the plane Bradley noted Miller sprawled on one of the uncomfortable benches that ran the length of the hold, seemingly asleep despite the deafening drone of the engines. The case he had brought on board with him was tucked protectively under his legs. Mallory too was stretched out, though not asleep. As Bradley had turned to look at him, his eyes had flickered open, alert and watchful. The third man, whom Bradley had gathered was called Andrea, was sat at the rear of the plane. He was as tall as the others but more heavily built, his black hair and olive skin suggesting Mediterranean origins. There was an expression of faint if genial amusement on his face, usually directed at Miller. Even in his rough clothes, he looked like a slow-witted, but kindly bear of a man. In that company Bradley seriously doubted he could be the simple buffoon he so resembled.

Returning his attention to the task at hand, Bradley once again checked the controls and scanned the horizon. Jenkins matched his actions.

"Skipper, I've got two fighters at four o'clock. Looks like they're on an intercept course."

"Right, I see them." Messerschmitt 109s. "Go and make sure our passengers are strapped in and hand out the 'chutes, just in case, then get on the machine gun."

Jenkins crawled back to comply. The three men were already awake and alert. Swiftly Jenkins tossed the parachutes to them before heading towards the dorsal mounted 7.92mm gun. He put on the intercom headphones to hear Bradley on the radio with the fighters. His German was passable enough to understand his skipper's words.

"I am Leutnant Baum from the supply depot at Regensburg. I'm carrying medical supplies which are urgently needed in Bremen. I have my orders from General von Kratow that they are to be delivered with all speed."

"Leutnant Baum, I am Hauptmann Kleist. You are ordered to land immediately for a complete inspection of your papers and cargo."

"I have my orders, sir. These supplies are needed or more people will die. Contact General von Kratow and he will confirm this."

"Leutnant Baum, or who ever you are, Regensburg was attacked last night, the airfield destroyed and General von Kratow was killed during the bombing. I fail to see how you could have taken off from there under von Kratow's orders. You will land immediately or I will shoot you down." The messerschmitt pilot's voice was harsh and mocking.

Bradley turned off the RT and watched the fighters as they lined up for an attack run on the lightly armed transport. "Oh, bugger!" he muttered, as he put the transport into a steep bank under the approaching fighters. It would buy him only a few more seconds. The attacking messerschmitts were faster and more manoeuvrable than the ponderous transport. He could not escape. It would only be a matter of time now. Leaning backwards he shouted over his shoulder, "Sorry, chaps, it's all gone a bit wrong I'm afraid. Make sure you've got your 'chutes. I won't be able to keep this kite away from those fighters for long. Probably best if you bail out now before it gets too sticky, eh? Jenkins and I will see if we can't keep jerry occupied for a bit."

Mallory nodded tersely and stood up. Holding onto whatever came to hand as Bradley jinked to avoid the fighters, Mallory made his way to the hatch. Behind him he heard their own machine gun open up as the messerschmitts made their run. Miller and Andrea followed, Miller hooking a tether from the parachute harness to his case. Within a few seconds they got the hatch open, the chill high altitude air taking their breath away. The plane shuddered and they heard the unmistakable sound of heavy calibre bullets stitching their way through the fuselage. Moments later a crash came from the cockpit. They were out of time. One after the other the three men leapt from the plane. Miller for once deciding that parachute jumping wasn't such a bad thing after all.

Germany, Stalag 13, 2nd March 1944, 1520 hrs.

The sound of distant machine gun fire drew Hogan's eyes upwards. The other prisoners too had noticed the dogfight going on high above them. Squinting and shielding his eyes in the bright light Hogan frowned at what he saw. Two Messerschmitts shooting at a Junkers tri-motor transport. Far off as they were, Hogan had no problem identifying them. It had been a combination of Ack-Ack fire and Messerschmitt 109s that had shot down his B-17 in that last raid he had led the 504th in over Hamburg back in 1942.

"Nice of the krauts to shoot each other, ain't it Guv'nor," commented Newkirk in his characteristically sarcastic cockney drawl. "D'ya suppose we could convince 'em to do it a bit more. It'd save us an awful lot of trouble in the long run."

"Yeah," agreed Hogan non-committally, still studying the dogfight and not really concentrating on Newkirk's words.

"Just think of all the planes that would save us. Hey, a lot of our flyers could take some time off, y'know," put in Carter, missing Newkirk's sarcasm as he generally did.

"Some 'ow, Carter, I don't think the krauts would go for it, more's the shame," retorted Newkirk. "So, what d'ya think it's all about then Colonel?"

"I don't know...yet," mused Hogan. Sergeant Schultz had been in Hammelburg for the day. He was due back before evening roll call. "Newkirk, Carter, what's left over from the Red Cross packages? I think we need to have a chat with Schultz, see if he's heard anything in town. It's unusual enough for people to be wondering about what's going on. Kinch, get on the radio to London, tell them about it."

High above them the Ju-52 was losing the fight to stay airborne, trailing smoke as the messerschmitts managed to hit at least one of the engines. As it began its final dive, Hogan saw three parachutes blossom from the hatch. Passengers, it looked like. Hogan idly wondered who they were.

Germany, 15 000' above Hammelburg, 2nd March 1944, 1520 hrs.

Behind them the plane tilted slowly onto its left wing before turning over and beginning the long tumble to earth streaming smoke and fire. Mallory yanked the ripcord on his parachute and looked around to find the others. To his relief he saw two more parachutes open a few hundred yards off. Knowing it was futile he watched their plane go down, hoping all the while to see two more parachutes appear, yet certain that he would not.

Then his own predicament became all too clear. The land directly below him was a swath of forest. He noted the presence of a medium sized town off to one side. Miller and Andrea looked to be having better luck than he was. They were coming down on the edges of the wood in an area of farmland, further away from the town than he. From his vantage point he

could see army trucks coming along the road following the descending parachutes. They would reach his position before they got through to Andrea and Miller on the other side of the wood. A few seconds later he crashed through the canopy. The parachute snagged on one of the branches, bringing his descent to an abrupt halt, and slamming him into the trunk. Another branch caught him in the side, the impact driving the air from his lungs. He slipped a few feet lower as the silk of the parachute tore, then stopped again hanging twenty feet above the ground.

Wood outside Hammelburg, 2nd March 1944, 1600 hrs.

Mallory took a few deep breaths to steady himself. He had no time to lose. Taking hold of part of the harness he hit the release catch and used the guy lines to swing over to a nearby branch. With deceptive ease he climbed down the tree and crouched quietly near the trunk. Yes, there: dogs and soldiers were moving through the wood towards him. There was no way to stand them off with a knife and pistol. He had to find Miller and Andrea and hole up somewhere. He had spent a great deal of time behind enemy lines but never in Germany itself. Getting his bearings, he headed away from the soldiers at a steady lope. The coldly analytical part of his mind knew that he had to find some way of getting the dogs off his trail. He knew he had not come down near a river - he would have noticed it during his descent, and the sky was too clear for there to be any chance of a downpour to wash away his scent trail. If he couldn't lose them, the only thing left was to lead them away from Miller and Andrea, giving them at least a chance to get away.

About a mile away Miller and Andrea landed in a field. With a speed born of necessity, Andrea quickly gathered his parachute, then turned to help Miller who had rolled on landing and was now hopelessly entangled. He was soon freed and both were able to hide the parachutes in the dense undergrowth at the edge of the wood. Further into the wood they found a hollow under an uprooted tree where they concealed Miller's case. As he put the finishing touches on the camouflage hiding the case, Miller glanced at Andrea. The Greek was standing, gun held loosely at his side, listening for any movement. He had seen Mallory go down deeper into the wood and had caught a glimpse of the trucks moving down the road.

Andrea had worked with Mallory a long time, back when he had been a Lieutenant-Colonel of the Greek army's 19th motorised division just before the outbreak of war, and the New Zealander had been a British army second lieutenant, assigned as his liaison because he spoke Greek. After the Greek army had been defeated, they had gone into the guerrilla business together, first in Macedonia, then on Crete. For eighteen months Mallory and Andrea had conducted a guerrilla war on the island, turning it into a running sore for the Nazis. They had often played cat and mouse with the WGB, the German army's elite mountain troops in

Crete's desolate White Mountains. On Crete, they had called Mallory 'The Ghost' as he was never seen when he didn't want to be. These woods were a world away from the dry, rocky terrain of Crete and none of them knew the area. Here, there were no places where they knew to make for.

A faint, staccato rattle of automatic fire brought Andrea out of his reverie. Mallory was probably in trouble and too far away for him to help. The only thing left to do was to get Miller and himself into cover and try to make contact with the local resistance - if there was one. The light was beginning to fade as they made their way along the hedge line towards a barn. With luck, it would do for a hiding place for the evening.

Deeper in the wood, Mallory knew he was in trouble. He guessed there were about twenty men after him, SS, not Wehrmacht. The wood was getting darker as evening wore on. If he could stay ahead of his pursuers until nightfall he knew he had a chance of slipping by them under cover of darkness. Turning as he ran, he fired a couple of shots behind him. Not that he was going to hit anyone, just enough to let them know he was armed, persuade them to keep their heads down, slow them up, give him more time.

Overhead the moon rose in the clear sky. The SS troops were moving methodically through the wood, sweeping the undergrowth with powerful torches. As he ran Mallory ejected the empty clip from his luger and reloaded. Only eight rounds left. He had noticed a dense thicket nearby that might serve his purpose. With the insolent grace of a man who had been one of the world's greatest climbers before the war, he scaled an ancient oak. Other trees were close enough for him to travel some way through their branches. Beneath, the SS had caught up, their dogs leading them to the base of the oak. Torch beams scoured the branches followed by an impatient spurt of machine gun fire. Slipping silently downwards, Mallory doubled back, easily avoiding the SS who had gathered around the base of the old tree. He drifted noiselessly from shadow to shadow, invisible as a wraith in the darkness below the canopy. Time to head back to the road and get some transport.

London, Allied HQ, 2nd March 1944, 1830 hrs.

"Sir, we've had a message from Papa Bear. He reports that two German fighters shot down a German transport plane near his position."

General Parnell looked up as the messenger placed the decoded transmission on his desk. He was little more than a boy, with an eagerness the war had not yet driven out of him. Parnell sighed. Sometimes he felt very old. He had seen too many of these eager youngsters die these past few years. He brought his mind back to the job at hand. German planes apparently shooting down German planes. Either some sort of a mix up by the Luftwaffe, or something underhanded was going on. The messenger was hovering, waiting for a reply.

"Send an acknowledgement to Papa Bear and confirm that we'll check it out."

"Yes sir." The messenger saluted and left.

Parnell absently returned the salute, his thoughts already on the problem. Underhanded goings on in occupied Europe. He pressed a toggle on his intercom. "Mildred, see if you could set up a meeting with Commodore Jensen. You can reach him through the Admiralty. If he has no other arrangements, tell him I'll meet him for dinner this evening at the Connaught."

When it came to underhanded goings on in Europe, that deceptively bluff and hearty Royal Navy Commodore was definitely the man to consult.

Germany, Stalag 13, Barracks 2, 2nd March 1944, 2040 hrs.

Peter Newkirk, Andrew Carter, and Louis LeBeau were sat around the rough wooden table at the centre of the barracks playing cards. The pot was a mixture of cigarettes, chocolate and cookies. Fifteen minutes earlier they had heard from one of their lookouts that Schultz had got back to camp. It had given them more than enough time to set up the bait.

The door of the barracks opened and a German sergeant the size of a small Alp entered.

"Hi, Schultzie," called LeBeau. "Did you get my shopping?"

"Come off it LeBeau," interrupted Newkirk, "Schultzie's been visitin' that new fraulein at the Haus Brau again. What's 'er name? Lisa?"

"Lisl. Ah she is my liebbling. So elegante, so schöne," he enthused. The others exchanged an amused look. Schultz had always been an easy sell on any new pretty face in town.

At that moment Schultz noticed the food on the table. The schöne Lisl was momentarily forgotten as he gazed longingly at the pot. Deliberately misinterpreting his interest, Newkirk pulled over another stool. "Sit down Schultzie, we'll deal you in."

Mesmerised by the lure of the chocolate Schultz sat. "Ach, nein. I have nothing to bet with. But," he continued optimistically, "my credit should..."

He got no further before he was cut of by outraged refusals by the other players.

"Cash game, Schultz, you know the rules," put in LeBeau, happily ignoring the irrelevant detail that gambling was prohibited under camp regulations.

"Okay, okay, Schultz, yer clearly wastin' away before our eyes. 'Ow about this..." Newkirk subconsciously picked up a bar of chocolate from his winnings and used it to gesture as he explained his proposal. Schultz's eyes tracked the chocolate with undisguised interest. "You tell us about the gossip in Hammelburg and we'll let you into the game, after all, we 'ear so little about what's goin' on in the outside world locked up in 'ere!"

"Agreed," said Schultz as the cards were gathered in, shuffled and dealt. "It has been a very interesting day..." He paused to study his hand: two jacks, two fours and a three. The openers went into the pot.

"So, what happened Schultz?" inquired LeBeau as the game paused.

"Everything in Hammelburg is on alert, the SS are searching for commandos near here. Eine karte, bitte," added Schultz, discarding the three. Newkirk dealt him a card. Schultz carefully

pulled it towards him - another jack. He added it to the cards in his hand, failing to maintain any pretence at impassivity.

The bet went round again. Carter raised. LeBeau folded. Eyes turned towards Schultz who was still wrestling to contain a smirk due to his now complete full house.

"They say that a German plane carrying Allied commandos was shot down. Allied commandos, stealing a German plane. For shame, it's not a very nice thing to do, even in wartime," he chided.

"Do you know if they've caught any of 'em yet?"

"No, none yet. The SS are still looking. Call!" Schultz laid the cards on the table, "full house, jacks over fours." He leaned forwards to rake in the pot.

"Full house? Hey, me too," piped up Carter as he spread his cards out in front of him: three queens and a pair of twos. "I guess that means I win."

Schultz stood up, unable to conceal a growl of annoyance. That verdammt Englander was behind this somehow, he felt. He seldom won at cards anyway. The most annoying thing about playing cards with Newkirk was that it always seemed like he was about to win and then lost at the last minute. Particularly when it was the Englander who was dealing.

As he left the barracks he carefully failed to notice the card game fold up behind him and the trio head over towards one of the bunks. Something funny was definitely going on. He knew for a fact that he had no desire at all to find out what it was. He had worked out long ago that it was far safer to know nothing.

Hammelburg Road, 2nd March 1944, 2230 hrs.

An hour or so later Mallory came upon the trucks. Only one soldier was there, greatcoat around his shoulders, rifle propped up by the cab as he leaned into the engine compartment of one while the headlights of the other floodlit the area. Mallory paused a moment to check if any other soldiers had been left there. It looked like their CO was being overconfident as they were in the heart of Germany. He waited awhile, listening - nothing. There was about 50 yards of open ground between the tree line and the road. A risk certainly, but one he had to take. With a truck, papers and a uniform he stood at least a chance of finding the others and getting out of Germany. He couldn't stay skulking in the wood forever.

Mallory broke cover and padded softly towards the soldier, knife in hand. No sense in advertising his presence with a gun shot. Half-way there... 10 yards... Unaware, the soldier was still tinkering with the engine. Then everything was suffused in glaring light.

"Halt, hands up!" The order was shouted in German, backed up by a burst of gunfire over his head. The soldier who had been working on the truck turned around holding a Walther P-38 pointed at Mallory's midsection. Underneath the greatcoat he wore the unmistakable uniform of a Standartenfuhrer: a full Colonel of the SS. He was about fifty years old with severe, aristocratic face, neatly trimmed grey hair and keen pale blue eyes. For a brief moment Mallory hesitated. He had seen the results of SS interrogations. Shot while trying to escape seemed a better, cleaner way out. The Standartenfuhrer almost read the thoughts going through Mallory's mind. He had seen it many times before.

"You will not escape that way, mein freund," he warned quietly, in barely accented English. "Their orders are to shoot you in the leg first. We would not want to pass up the chance for a talk. I think we will have interesting things to discuss, you and I... starting with who you are and what you were doing in that plane."

Mallory knew he had run out of options and dropped the knife and gun. Guards cuffed his hands behind his back and threw a hood over his head. They searched him with a laudable thoroughness but found nothing. There was nothing to find. Mallory was too old a hand at this game to carry anything incriminating. Although he held captain's rank in the British army, he had seldom carried ID in his own name outside of England. Officer's rank was no protection if you were caught out of uniform.

Standartenfuhrer Friedrich Haussner watched as the prisoner was loaded into the truck. He had not spoken a word since his capture. The man was a puzzle. He was too poorly equipped to be a commando, but after the way his troops had been dealt with in the woods he knew he was no stranger to combat, or to being hunted. He was dangerous. Haussner was certain of that. The calm calculation the man had shown staring down the guns of a platoon of SS. He

had watched men facing death many times over the years. He had seen reactions from defiance, stoicism and courage through to fear, despair and panic. This man showed as much nervousness and panic as a bag of cement. Yes, he reflected, this was going to be a very interesting conversation.

Stalag 13, in the tunnel beneath Barracks 2, 2nd March 1944, 2300 hrs.

Newkirk, LeBeau and Carter headed down to the radio room. Kinch was on the line to London. He had just got the message back from Allied HQ. If the plane had been carrying commandos as Schultz had said, surely HQ would have known about it. Kinch glanced up to see Hogan similarly deep in thought.

"What do we do, Colonel?"

"Put the word out to the underground - any information they come across without putting themselves at greater risk. Have we heard anything yet on the phone tap to Klink's office?"

"Nothing so far."

"You'd almost guess the SS didn't trust our gallant Kommandant," remarked Hogan wryly. "Perhaps it's time for Kommandant Klink to talk to the SS for us..."

"How are you going to manage that, Colonel? Klink wouldn't dare question the SS," argued Kinch.

"I'll just have to appeal to him at his weakest point," grinned Hogan, "his vanity!"

SS HQ, Dusseldorf, 3rd March 1944, 0800 hrs.

Standartenfuhrer Haussner gazed thoughtfully at the photographs lying on the desk in front of him. All were of the same man: his prisoner. There was a memory nagging the back of his mind. Haussner was sure he had seen this man somewhere before. He scrawled a brief note and attached it to one of the photographs. The SS kept comprehensive records. He suspected this man was on file somewhere, but with only a photo the search would take time.

There was a knock on his door. He looked up to see his aide, Hauptsturmfuhrer von Schleich, enter. Von Schleich had worked for him for three years, unambitious but meticulous and dependable. They were qualities Haussner appreciated. "Good morning, sir. How is the game going?" he gestured at the ornate ormolu chess table, the pieces frozen mid game. An open envelope bearing foreign stamps lay next to the chessboard. Haussner had been waiting for the next move for weeks now. Now, it had finally arrived, guessed von Schleich.

"Well enough," murmured Haussner. "It seems we have another game to play. That fugitive we picked up last night. I think he shows promise."

Haussner's voice trailed off into silence. Ignoring von Schleich, he wandered over to the chess table and studied the position for several minutes. "It's all a game, isn't it my friend," he finally said sardonically. "It was an Englishman of all people who described it best: 'To set the cause above renown, to love the game beyond the prize, to honour, while you strike him down, the foe that comes with fearless eyes.'" Haussner paused again then looked back at his aide. "You, I suppose, have only read Nietzsche," he joked.

"May I ask a question, sir?" von Schleich said after a while. Haussner moved his attention from the chess board, then went back to sit behind the imposing desk. He gestured for von Schleich to continue. "Thank you, sir. I had wondered how you had managed to catch the fugitive after he lost us in the woods. The dogs were unable to pick up any fresh trails..."

Haussner smiled indulgently. "It is a matter of getting into the mind of the prey. Human prey is not rabbit or deer or boar. Human prey is capable of thinking and planning. Our prey heard the dogs. He knows he has to break the scent trail. He has several choices: water will cut the trail, so find a river or pray for a deluge, or find a route where the dogs cannot follow. There were no streams, and as you know it was not raining, so he takes the latter option. I knew this when you contacted me to say you had lost his trail at a tree near a thicket. An agile man may return to the ground away from where he climbed the tree, but where to go from there? He

knows his pursuers still have the dogs and reasons that they will spread out in order to pick up his trail, which they will do. He was in a plane and shot down so he likely does not know the area beyond what he could make out on his descent. It is imperative for him to get out of the search area as quickly as possible, so he backtracks. Crossing his own trail will confuse the dogs, he knows this, and the trucks he will have noticed will provide transport. Once you had confirmed you had not been able to pick up a clear trail, it was easy to predict his most likely course of action and prepare accordingly."

"So you were able to set up the trap at the truck and he walked straight into it. Brilliant!" completed von Schleich enthusiastically.

"Most men do not think so clearly when they are being hunted. This one did. It sets him apart, makes him...interesting."

"There is a Major Hochstetter of the local Gestapo in Hammelburg who is unhappy about the way you propose to deal with the prisoner. I understand he is considering contacting Gestapo headquarters in Berlin," pointed out von Schleich.

"Hochstetter is little more than a thug in uniform. He can do what he likes. The prisoner was captured by the SS and is therefore SS responsibility. I will conduct his interrogation as I see fit. Ensure that Major Hochstetter knows this."

Von Schleich saluted and left. Haussner leaned back in his chair. Of course the Gestapo had wanted to start the interrogation straight away, convinced of their ability to get a confession. Naturally he had refused them. He wanted to break the man, but not just to get him to sign some meaningless confession of generic crimes against the Third Reich. Haussner wanted the truth about the prisoner. He knew the process would take time and more thought than his subordinates or the Gestapo usually bothered with. It might even take weeks. His critics would say it was a waste of time. Haussner disagreed. He was certain the effort would be worthwhile. Haussner had an instinct about people, and now it was telling him that this man was somebody. He had to get to know his subject, how to manipulate him, to find out what drove him. It would take weeks, and from what he had seen of the man already, it would be a challenge. Standartenfuhrer Haussner had always enjoyed a challenge.

SS HQ Dusseldorf, basement, 3rd March 1944, 0800 hrs.

Mallory had been delivered to one of the basement cells hours earlier. Apart from a few jabs from the butts of guards' rifles, he had to admit he was not in too bad shape overall. The hood and cuffs had been removed. He had been forced to strip and given a one piece grey overall to wear that did nothing to keep out the penetrating cold of the concrete cell. It was a ten foot by six foot box, drain in the middle of the floor, light bulb recessed in the ceiling protected by wire mesh. There was no furniture and no window. Just the steel bound door with a barred spy hole and a hatch at the base, presumably for food, not that he had seen any so far.

He had always known it could end up like this. He had come too damn close to it many times in the past to be ignorant of the possibility. Objectively he could appreciate the technique. He remembered the dry, emotionless voice of one of many instructors telling him and others about interrogation methods, to give them some idea of what they might have to deal with if they were caught. It seemed an age ago. That elegant wood panelled classroom incongruously at odds with the matter of fact brutality of the subject being taught. It was one lesson he had hoped never to have to put into practice.

Stalag 11, near Dortmund, 3rd March 1944, 0830 hrs.

The two car convoy rolled through the gates of the luft stalag into the main compound, pulling to a halt in front of the Kommandantur. Men identically clad in dark suits and black trench coats got out. With them was a woman, petite and attractive despite her weariness and dishevelment. She studied her surroundings, worry clearly evident on her features. Her escorts took an arm each and led her up the steps into the Kommandant's office.

The men in the camp had a more than fair idea of the identity of their visitors. The Gestapo needed no introduction. Word of the new arrivals spread quietly through the camp, quickly reaching the ear of the senior POW officer. Squadron Leader George Thurleigh put on his coat, picked up his cane and limped towards the Kommandantur to see for himself what was going on. By the time he reached the open space in front of the Kommandantur there were about a hundred others, watching the Gestapo with bored disinterest. There were extra guards stationed in front of the office. Thurleigh knew there was no chance of finding out anything now. Best to wait. There were few things that stayed secret for long in the stalag. He would put the word out for his people to talk to whatever contacts they had amongst the guards.

There was nothing for him to do at the moment. He turned and slowing made his way back to his barracks, cursing, not for the first time, the Focke-Wulf pilot who had shot him down and nearly taken his leg off in the process. In his more charitable moments he would reluctantly admit that the German surgeons had done a good job in saving his leg. With his leg aching miserably in the early morning chill, he did not feel the least bit charitable. Thurleigh had been in Stalag 11 for over a year. He looked out for the other POWs where he could. He chaired the escape committee, freely acknowledging that his injury barred him from any attempt, knowing that he was there for the duration. His fairness and efforts on their behalf had earned him the grudging respect of most of the POWs if not always their obedience.

Throughout the afternoon and into the evening the reports started coming in about the unknown woman. It turned out that she was an English doctor called Edith Windermere. She was to be held at Stalag 4 indefinitely. The leader of the visiting Gestapo, a Herr Kluge, had promised dire consequences should anything happen to her or if she should escape. Whoever this Edith Windermere really was, she was clearly of value to the Nazis, mused Thurleigh. It was something that London could well be interested in. He took a small piece of paper and wrote the details on it in pencil, then used it to roll a cigarette. After evening roll call he would hand it to one of the guards along with the packet of cigarettes. By tomorrow, with luck, the information should be on its way to London.

Barn, near Hammelburg, 3rd March 1944, 0640 hrs.

Miller and Andrea woke up at dawn, chilled and hungry. They had spent the night up in the hay loft, huddled between bales of hay to keep out the worst of the cold. Miller was getting ready to climb down when Andrea grabbed his arm and pulled him back into the cover of the hay. Below them they could hear someone fiddling with the latch on the barn door.

Without exchanging a look, Andrea began to creep to one side of the barn, moving with an unnerving silence for a man of his size. Behind him Miller had reached into his jacket and was screwing a bulbous tube onto the muzzle of his pistol, keeping his eyes always on the door. They had worked together long enough to know what the other would do.

The door of the barn opened. Silhouetted against the doorway they could see eight figures, six of which were carrying rifles. Of the remaining two, one was a blonde teenager wearing the peaked cap of an officer while the other was a farmer if his clothing was anything to go by. Andrea, fluent in German, listened to the disagreement they appeared to be having. He knew Miller would wait for him to act before opening fire.

"Enemy commandos? Hiding in my barn? Surely not, Untersturmfuhrer Schenk, I have been in already this morning to check on the hens. I saw no-one."

In the hayloft Andrea frowned. The farmer was lying, he was certain of it. He had heard the sound of the latch being opened. It would have been more than loud enough to wake him. Andrea was a light sleeper: a fact that had kept him alive before now.

The soldiers, SS troops, quickly checked the floor of the barn. The senior NCO of the group headed towards the ladder to the hayloft. Peering through a gap made in the pile of straw he was hiding behind, Miller aimed at the point where the soldier's head would appear at the top of the ladder.

"Enough, Unterscharfuhrer," ordered the Untersturmfuhrer, "this has already taken too long. We have to be in Hammelburg for 0700. Let's go."

The disapproval clear on his face, the Unterscharfuhrer gathered his men and left. Shortly afterwards they heard the faint sound of a truck driving away. The farmer watched them leave from the door of the barn. After a few minutes he turned back.

"Hello? Is anyone here?" The question came in heavily accented English. "I am friend. No gun."

There was a pause as the farmer scanned the barn for any signs of movement or disturbance. From his corner in the hay loft Andrea stood up, his gun held loosely at his side.

"You are here. Good. Macht schnell. More SS soon, I think," said the farmer. "You are English, nicht wahr. Es tut mir leid, but I speak not good English. Speak German, ja?" he added hopefully, gesturing all the while for Andrea to come down.

Andrea obliged, knowing Miller would be watching.

"I speak German," he stated. Miller, too, spoke a little German as well as some Greek picked up from Mallory and Andrea.

The farmer smiled in relief. "This makes everything much easier. I am Johann Maurer. There is no one else living on the farm; you are safe, for a little while. But enough talking. You are doubtless hungry, yes? I'll get you some food, then I will take you to a place to hid. We best go quickly: I think that arrogant Hitlerjugend pup may come back."

Andrea nodded. "There are two of us, Herr Maurer." Then he half turned, still keeping his eyes on Maurer, saying in English: "It's okay. Come down."

Miller stood up and tucked the silenced pistol inside his jacket. Without a word he climbed down the ladder and walked past Maurer to the barn door. Carefully he checked outside. There was no sign of anyone. He looked back at Andrea and gave a slight nod.

Maurer caught the gesture and led the way to the house. He quickly gathered up a large piece of sausage, slab of cheese, a loaf of bread and a large earthenware jug, handing them to Miller and Andrea. "Follow me," he instructed, heading up a steep flight of stairs from the scullery of the cottage. The stairs were tight and low enough that both men were forced to stoop. They opened out into a surprisingly large attic, with a tiny, low window at one end overlooking the track leading to the farm. Maurer walked over to the opposite wall. "Watch carefully," he said as he twisted an apparently solidly attached piece of wood. A small hatch at floor level opened up, just large enough for a man to crawl through. The room beyond was barely six feet square, mostly taken up by two narrow bunks with only an eighteen-inch gap between them. "You can sit out in the attic, but hide quickly if you see anyone at all on the road. If you are discovered it will be death for us all."

"So we stay here for now," agreed Andrea, "but what next? Do you know anyone who has access to a radio to reach London? Also, we have a friend who came down in the woods. Is there anywhere he could be hiding, friends of yours who might be sheltering him?"

For a moment Maurer just looked at them, regret clear on his face. "I'm sorry, my friend. The Untersturmfuhrer boasted to me that a commando had been caught last night. I think it must be your friend. If the SS are following the Kommandobefehl, he will have been shot soon after his capture. If he is still alive he will most likely be in the SS HQ in Dusseldorf by now. All that can be done for him is to pray for a quick death. It is the kindest thing you can do for

him. The SS are not known for their observance of the Geneva Convention," he finished sadly.

Miller could sense Andrea's tension. There was no way the Greek was going to leave Mallory to die. They had been through too much together for it to end like this. Miller sympathised with him. There were few enough people in the world whom corporal Dusty Miller respected. Captain Mallory was at the top of that very short list. He knew Andrea would try to get Mallory out and just as surely he knew that he would be with him in the attempt. The only problem was, they had no idea yet where to start.

Stalag 13, Kommandantur, 3rd March 1944, 1100 hrs.

"Colonel Hogan wishes to see you, Herr Kommandant," announced Schultz.

"Tell him 'no', Schultz, I'm too busy. Does Berlin think I have nothing better to do than fill in paperwork? It takes time and effort to run the toughest POW camp in all of Germany."

Schultz remained silent. He had heard this rant of his Kommandant's too many times before to even bother professing an answer. He knew Klink did not actually need one. It was just a reiteration of his one achievement in a distinctly mediocre military career.

"Never mind, Schultz, show him in."

Hogan walked in, offering the Kommandant a vague approximation of a salute which the Kommandant punctiliously returned.

"Just dropped in to see how it was going, Kommandant."

"How what is going, Hogan? What are you taking about?"

An expression of almost theatrical surprise crept over Hogan's features. He had learned early on that with Klink, overacting was the safest course. He reserved subtlety for those more able to appreciate it.

"The search, Kommandant. I would have thought that the SS were co-ordinating their troops with you. I mean, with your expertise in the field it seemed natural that even the SS would seek the advice of the great Colonel Klink. After all, sir, you've never lost a prisoner."

"True, true," agreed Klink, accepting the accolade as if it was no more than his due.

"Hey!" exclaimed Hogan, clicking his fingers urgently as if he had just had a sudden inspiration, "maybe the SS guy in charge isn't local. Maybe he doesn't even know he has such an expert as yourself in the area. Why don't you call and ask for an update. As soon as the SS commander knows who he's talking to, he's sure to ask for your help and advice. Just think how that will look in Berlin, sir..." Hogan trailed off, leaving the bait dangling. He watched as a smile crept across Klink's face at the idea.

"Thank you, Colonel Hogan. Dismissed." Hogan saluted and left. He wanted to get back to the barracks before Klink made the phone call. There were some things he really wanted to hear first hand.

Stalag 13, Barracks 2, 3rd March 1944, 1115 hrs.

Five men were crowded into Colonel Hogan's office, gathered around the table, listening to the Kommandant's voice issue tinnily from the filter on a coffee pot. He had clearly taken Hogan's advice and was on the phone to the SS HQ in Hammelburg.

"Hello. This is Colonel Klink, Kommandant of Stalag 13. I wish to speak to the officer commanding the search for the missing commandos.....yes.....yes, I'll hold.....Standartenfuhrer Haussner? No? Well put me through to his deputy.....Hauptsturmfuhrer von Schleich."

"Seems like ol' Klink's being given the run around," murmured Carter, "I used to have the same problem with the phone company back in Bullfrog..."

"Sh! Listen!" ordered Hogan.

"Hauptsturmführer von Schleich? This is Kommandant Klink, Stalag 13.....oh, you knew that.....what do I want? Well, I thought you might want to consult with me on the search.....You don't.....You've caught one of them already? I'll have you know I have never lost even a single prisoner from Sta.....oh, you knew that too.....General Burkhalter told you of me?.....oh.....yes, that was all.....no, nothing else, auf wiederhören.....what?.....of course, Heil Hitler."

"So they've picked up one of them already," mused Hogan. "Three men made it out of that plane before it went down. If the SS haven't got the others they must be holed up somewhere."

"They might 'ave been shot instead," pointed out Newkirk.

"No, the search is still going on. They're out there and we need to find them first. If the SS are after them, they're probably people we would want to meet. They might even be able to collect one of our all-expenses-paid trips to England. Kinch, get on the radio to our people in Hammelburg. Keep it brief. If the SS are out in force there's usually a radio detector truck around somewhere."

"Right, Colonel." Kinch left for the tunnel.

"So what do the rest of us do, mon Colonel?" asked LeBeau.

"We wait."

Stalag 13, main compound, 3rd March 1944, 1400 hrs.

Hogan leaned against the side of the barracks, taking advantage of the brief warmth offered by the afternoon sun. It was a pleasant change after another long, bitterly cold German winter. He hated waiting. Patience had certainly never been a talent of his before he was shot down. It was something he had always had to work at. He still had to. He vaguely remembered someone describing war as long stretches of tedium interspersed by moments of utter terror. It was a sentiment he could appreciate, particularly here. Sure, it had been risky flying bombing missions. He had seen enough of his own people killed up there not to be aware of how dangerous it had been.

On the ground it was different. It was a very different kind of war. Somehow the proximity made it all more immediate, more real. He knew objectively that he had killed hundreds, possibly thousands through the bombing raids he had led. It had not overly worried him back then. They had been the enemy. Distant. Hidden far below in the darkness. He had not seen their faces. Seeing the faces made the difference. He saw the faces now, in his dreams, his nightmares. He had had to kill people close up - to save his men's' lives, his own life, the secret beneath Stalag 13. And between all the killing and the sabotage and the spying was the boredom of waiting.

Hogan hated waiting.

Stalag 13, main compound, 3rd March 1944, 1540 hrs.

Kinch stepped out of the door of barracks 2, looking for Colonel Hogan. In his hand was a piece of paper with the message he had just finished decoding. Allied command in London had finally got back in touch with them with more information about their visitors.

He spotted the Colonel idly wandering the wire, hands in pockets, alternating his gaze between the ground and the outside world. Kinch smiled faintly. Sometimes his CO's attempts to pretend he wasn't at all impatient did not quite work. Kinch saw the Colonel halt at his approach, perking up, suddenly interested.

"News from London, Colonel. The three men from that plane...they're SOE. You remember hearing about the rescue of over a thousand troops from Kheros, that island off the coast of Turkey, and the blowing up of the guns at Navarone last year? These are the guys who blew up the guns, and most of the fortress in the process. From what London says, it seems like they've been kept busy since then."

"What were they doing on that plane? Did London say?"

"Yeah, Colonel, " There was a rueful expression on Kinch's face. "They were going home for a furlough."

"Some furlough," muttered Hogan sympathetically. "They give us any names?"

"Their CO is Captain Keith Mallory."

"The climber?" interrupted Hogan. He remembered seeing pictures of Mallory in the papers before the war, usually with the Himalayas or Alps or some other mountain range in the background and carrying a report of yet another peak that the man had climbed.

"The very same. The other two are Lieutenant-Colonel Andrea Stavrou, late of the Greek army, and corporal Dusty Miller, an American and their demolitions specialist."

"Any orders?"

"Yeah, we've been told to find them and get them out of Germany."

"Oh, good," muttered Hogan with a distinct lack of sincerity. "Well, as long as they don't want us to do anything difficult," he could not help adding sarcastically.

SS HQ Dusseldorf, basement, 4th March 1944, 0400 hrs.

Mallory guessed he had been in the cell for about a day. It was already becoming difficult to keep track of the passage of time. Food had been delivered twice so far: a cup of water, bowl of thin tepid soup and a sort of dried biscuit on each occasion. After the second delivery he had curled up in a corner to try to get some sleep. He hadn't slept since they had left Termoli. Had that been two, or was it three days ago? He didn't know for sure. Before now he had not truly realised how disconcerting it was to not even know if it was day or night. As he drifted off to sleep, the door slammed open and three huge masked guards rushed in. Two of them were carrying short rubber hoses, while the third held a bucket. Before Mallory could react the bucket was upended over him, drenching him with a torrent of icy water. The others hauled him away from the wall and started striking him with the hoses.

Acting on instinct and adrenaline, Mallory jabbed savagely with his bare heel at the nearest man's kneecap. He had the brief satisfaction of hearing a yelp of pain before a renewed flurry of blows drove him away. As quickly as it started, the attack ceased and the guards left. Mallory lay for a few minutes where he had fallen, then pulled himself back to the corner, shivering from the cold. The beating had been cold-blooded, methodical and unhurried, even after he had kicked the man. He checked himself over: bruises, but no broken bones. The guards clearly knew their trade too well to make mistakes like that.

Some time later the hatch opened and the now familiar food was pushed into the cell as if nothing had happened. Moving stiffly, Mallory took it and ate. Paper cup, paper bowl, no utensils, nothing he could use as a weapon.

An hour later the stomach cramps started. The remains of the scant meal were quickly vomited as Mallory began to retch uncontrollably. Diarrhoea followed. It felt as if his whole gut was on fire. A foul mixture of vomit and ordure soon covered the floor of the cell. His grey overall too was soon stained and rancid. Gradually the spasms subsided. Mallory lay hunched on the floor, too weak even to move.

Scientific Research Establishment, Nordhausen, Germany, 4th March 1944, 1000 hrs.

"Good morning, Herr Professor, how are you this fine day?" Paul Venner looked up at his visitor, biting back his normal acerbic response. Venner disliked the false affability. The dull but persistent ache from his ribs reminded him of how superficial that affability could be. Herr Schaub of the Gestapo was both his minder and his jailer.

Venner was lounging in an armchair in a large, well-equipped laboratory. The place was spotless. Everything was neatly stacked, stored or filed, ready for immediate use. Two white-coated assistants stood almost at attention near one wall. The wall on the opposite side of the room was taken up with a bookcase and a large blackboard. Getting the lab prepared to such a specification in the middle of the war had taken Schaub a great deal of time and effort. Now Venner, the genius for whom it had been prepared, refused to work. His superiors had impressed on him the importance of Venner's work in the development of a dependable, accurate rocket delivery system. Before the war Venner had been one of the pioneers in the research into rocket propellants and controlling their combustion.

Loyal German scientists working both in Nordhausen and at Peenemunde on the Baltic coast were wrestling with the problem. Many had cited the excellence of Venner's work. Several of them had moved the research on further, but it was generally agreed within the German scientific community that having Venner himself join the project would give it a huge boost. There was just one small problem: Venner did not like Nazis. He had been working at the university in Oslo when the Germans invaded. For the next three years he brewed explosives for the Norwegian underground before he was betrayed and captured. A bright young SS lieutenant recognised him and spirited him away from the inevitable firing squad and into Germany.

For three months the Germans had tried to coerce, cajole or bribe Venner into working for them without success. They were stuck in an impasse. As Venner had pointed out, he was of no use to them dead. Each morning Schaub would come into the lab, greet him, and enquire whether he had changed his mind about working for them. The answer had always been no.

This morning, however, Schaub did not leave. Venner leaned back, expecting some tedious nazi polemic about the honour of working for the master race. Instead Schaub reached into an inside pocket and pulled out a plain envelope which he handed to Venner. Intrigued despite himself, Venner took it. Opening it he withdrew a stack of photographs. Each was a different image of his niece, Edith, whom he had thought safely in London. With an increasing sense of urgency he fanned through the pictures, noting the backgrounds. The first few were clearly taken in London. Edith walking along the street, entering or leaving buildings. The later ones were taken in Germany. Edith tired and drawn, huddled in a coat, surrounded by Germans in uniform. In the background was a wooden building marked 'Kommandantur'. She was in a prison camp.

Venner looked up from the photographs to see Schaub staring down at him triumphantly. "What do you want?" he asked quietly, already knowing the answer.

"Your genius, Herr Professor. As long as you work for us, the girl remains unharmed. I think you have a fair idea of the ...unpleasantness...that can befall your young, pretty niece if you do not co-operate."

His features taut with anger Venner got up. Schaub stood his ground, daring the man to try something. Venner lowered his eyes and wandered over to the bookcase. He pulled down two books, then glanced back at Schaub. "If anything happens to her..." he let the sentence trail off. He was in no position to threaten, but he promised himself that if Edith died, he would take out Schaub and his research in the best explosion he could come up with. It was a sobering if satisfying image.

That would not help Edith, however. It would be far better plan if he could manage somehow to get her out of Germany. However much as he liked the idea of the grand, dramatic exit, it was in a way his fault that Edith had been kidnapped. A faint smile playing on his mouth, he started planning a way to get word to London.

Maurer's Farm, near Hammelburg, 4th March 1944, 1500 hrs.

It was Miller who spotted the lonely figure on the bicycle approaching the farm. He could hear Maurer below in the scullery.

"Company!" he warned Andrea.

The entrance to the hidden room had been left open earlier. The two men crawled inside. Andrea glanced around sharply, looking if they had forgotten anything that might be incriminating. Finding nothing, he joined Miller and closed the secret panel behind them.

The minutes passed. They could faintly make out conversation from the scullery, too quiet and muffled to pick out words, then the sound of people climbing up the stairs to the attic. Beside him Andrea saw Miller pull out the silenced handgun. For close work like this promised to be, Andrea preferred his knife.

The footsteps came nearer, into the attic, then over to the wall they were hidden behind. Someone started fumbling with the release mechanism on the panel. At the last moment, the fumbling stopped. The sound of two short taps resounded through the hidden room, then Maurer's voice. "It's okay, it's me, Maurer. I have a friend here. He can help you."

Warily Andrea opened the panel. Maurer was there. Another man was crouched beside the low window, watching the road.

"This is Josef," introduced Maurer. Then saying to Josef, "These two are careful. They do not say their names."

Josef turned from the window and nodded in greeting before going back to watching the road. He was dark haired, younger than Maurer. "Careful is good. I would appreciate it if you stay careful, if only for my sake," he added. "We're moving you tonight. Be ready to go at 2030 hrs. I'll meet you then."

Allied HQ, London, 4th March 1944, 1530 hrs.

General Parnell leaned over the conference table, holding a cup of the tannic, sugared paint remover that passed for British army tea. Not for the first time he wondered just how much pull he had and if it could extend to getting a coffee machine installed. Strewn across the table were a number of maps, files and reports, each stamped 'top secret'. He was due to give a briefing that evening at the War Office. The government wanted some idea of the scale of current covert operations within occupied Europe. Dealing with politicians was Parnell's least favourite part of holding field rank. It would make things so much easier if politicians stuck to giving speeches and left the military to wage the damned war, he thought.

A WAAF flight officer came into the conference room. "General, we've received word through the underground that there's a British civilian doctor being held under special

Gestapo guard in Stalag 11."

"Anything to do with Papa Bear?"

"No, sir, at least not that we're know of. The message code came through from Cormorant. As far as we've been able to determine, Cormorant is operating independently of Papa Bear's group. Mostly as a courier."

"What information do we have on this doctor?"

"Not much, I'm afraid, sir. The message described the prisoner as being referred to by the Gestapo as 'fraulein Doktor Windermere'. I did some checking and a Doctor Edith de Momerie Windermere failed to turn up for her job at the Royal London Hospital on 28th February. She has no relatives in London. Staff at the hospital filed a missing persons report, but with so many missing in the bombing, nothing further was done about it."

"Get me whatever information you can put together on our missing doctor. See if she's done any work that might be significant to the German war effort, and find out about any relatives. It wouldn't be the first time the krauts have used emotional blackmail to force people to work for them," warned Parnell.

SS HQ Dusseldorf, 4th March 1944, 1900 hrs.

Haussner sat alone in his office, his thoughts straying to his prisoner. At last he had a name to put to him: Keith Mallory. His aide, Erich von Schleich, had called from SS central records in Berlin. The Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) there was the destination of virtually all intelligence reports, concerning both foreign and domestic security.

The clerks who worked there had recognised the photo he had sent as the famous climber. Once they had the name, it was merely a matter of retrieving the information from the immaculately arranged files. The file itself had been quite substantial, a testament as much to

the man's activities during the war as before it. The clerks had provided von Schleich with a copy to return with to Dusseldorf.

While waiting for von Schleich's arrival he reviewed the log that had been kept since Mallory's incarceration nearly two days earlier. Minimal food and water had been provided at irregular intervals. The purgative had been administered at 0800 with predictable results. Twice since then, the guards had entered to ensure Mallory got no sleep. To a man as famous as Mallory had been, the systematic degradation and stripping away of any remaining shreds of human dignity should have greater effect than usual, reasoned Haussner.

The process of wearing down the man's resistance was well under way, he noted. With Mallory now suitably debilitated, they could move on to the next stage of the process. Haussner reached for the log and wrote in the instructions. He would not see Mallory yet. It was still up to the faceless interrogators to continue for now. He would not interfere until later, when the man would need to see a face and a friend. Meanwhile he would have time to go through Mallory's file. It promised to be an interesting read.

Maurer's farm, near Hammelburg, 4th March 1944, 2030 hrs.

Josef arrived on time and on foot. "There are SS checkpoints on the roads, too many to risk travelling by car. We'll go cross-country. I hope you like walking: our destination is several kilometres away and it will take us four to five hours to get there."

Andrea almost laughed out loud at the horrified expression on Miller's face.

SS HQ Dusseldorf, basement, 4th March 1944, 2300 hrs.

Once again guards burst into Mallory's cell. Two of them hauled him to his feet. The now filthy overall was stripped off and another put on. His hands were cuffed again and a hood thrown over his head. Then suddenly he was struggling for breath as a cord cut into his throat. The tension eased for an instant allowing him to grab a breath, then jerked him to one

side. Unable to catch himself he lost his balance, only to be prevented from falling by the noose around his neck. There was another sharp jerk and Mallory was propelled forwards.

He soon lost track of direction. The floor was cold, smooth and damp under his bare feet. The heavy footfalls of the guards rang hollowly, the sound muffled by the hood. None of them spoke. He was taken down a flight of stairs, a bit further on the level, then down another flight, all the while being half choked by the noose. They were taking a lot of precautions, Mallory reflected, considering at the moment he could barely stand unaided.

Finally they halted. Mallory was forced to his knees. The noose, cuffs and hood were removed. He looked around. The room looked like a large communal shower, floor, walls and ceiling all tiled in the same clinical white. He heard a metallic click from behind him. Before he could turn he was blasted to the floor by a jet of frigid water. The force bowled him over and he caught sight of two guards struggling to hold a fire hose. Behind them were about half a dozen others dressed in heavy oilskins, wearing boots and gloves.

They used the water to force him up against the back wall, changing the direction of the jet to follow him whenever he tried to crawl away. The pressure hammered against his bruised torso. When he fell to the ground and curled up to escape the water, two guards came forward and pinioned him against the wall. They took turns holding him. The weight of the water battering him was relentless. The cold left him shivering and gasping for each breath. With increasing frequency he inhaled water, coughing and choking as he did so. The end of the room was soon awash, drains struggling to keep up with the sheer volume of water. After an eternity the hose was shut off. Mallory slumped in the guards' grasp. When another approached holding noose, cuffs and hood he had not the strength to pull away.

Hooded and cuffed he was taken back to his cell which had evidently been washed out during his absence. Soon after his return, food was delivered. Not trusting it, Mallory left it where it stood. Exhausted, wretched and in pain he huddled in the corner of the cell.

Woods near Stalag 13, 4th March 1944, 2330 hrs.

Josef had led them through woods for the most part. Overhead the moon was full, giving them enough light to travel by. Whatever else he was, Josef was a good woodsman, picking

his way unerringly through the trees. At the base of a towering pine he stopped and hunkered down, gesturing for the others to do the same. "Our contact will meet us here," he whispered.

They crouched in the dark, alert for the slightest sound. Andrea heard it first, footsteps, coming towards them. Miller had his gun out and ready. Beside them Josef glanced at him and gestured: wait. The footsteps stopped then from the darkness came a low, soft whistle. Josef responded. Seconds later two black clad figures appeared from the undergrowth.

"Ta, Josef," said one, as their guide drifted back into the wood. The other, much shorter than the first was stood off a way, keeping watch. "I'm Newkirk," he continued, then pointed to the shorter man, "and that's LeBeau. Come with us."

They headed off, LeBeau first, then Miller, Andrea and finally Newkirk. The forest which had been limned in the hard edged silver of moonlight, darkened occasionally as clouds drifted overhead. Now given no choice, Lebeau and Newkirk pulled out torches to see their path. They spread out, LeBeau several yards ahead on point. Eyes and ears alert for any sign of patrolling Germans, they moved forwards.

About half an hour after they had met up, they head the faint but unmistakable sound of a schmeisser sub-machinegun being cocked. LeBeau was ahead of them, scrambling down a slope. Newkirk extinguished his torch and hissed a warning. LeBeau half turned, startled.

"Halt! Hande hoch!" the order was shouted tersely.

The Frenchman completed his turn with pulling out a gun, then a fusillade of shots rang out. LeBeau's torch cartwheeled away in the wood as he tumbled to the base of the slope. He came to a stop clutching his arm, illuminated in the light of two torch beams from the wood below. From the top of the slope, the others could make out the German patrol as it neared the fallen Frenchman who, to Newkirk's relief, was still alive. Peter Newkirk had a very specialised knowledge of the French language, certainly enough to recognise many of the epithets LeBeau was busily hurling at the approaching Germans.

Four Germans in the uniform of the Waffen-SS had emerged from the wood and surrounded the wounded Frenchman. Newkirk, gun in hand, was drawing bead on one when a hand gently restrained his shooting arm. It was the lankier of his two charges. "You just hold on.

Won't do your friend no good you going off half cocked," he said complacently in a soft American drawl. "This is more Andrea's kind of thing. Trust me."

Newkirk looked around. The other man had left without making a sound. "What good's one man goin' to do against four of 'em? 'E don't stand a chance," he whispered urgently. The Germans had dragged LeBeau to his feet. Two stood guarding him while the others headed back into the undergrowth, schmeissers held ready. Then the other two headed back, LeBeau between them, still holding his arm.

"It's the Germans who don't stand a chance. All we can do now is wait. We go down there, we'll just be in his way," said the American, almost resignedly.

Newkirk heard the utter confidence in the American's voice of the outcome. It was compelling. He waited. Fifteen minutes passed without a sound from the wood. The light from the Germans' torches was long since blocked by the trees. Then from below the stillness was punctuated by the brief, otherworldly 'bleep' of a Scops owl. He heard the American beside him murmur, "it's okay, Andrea's back."

Newkirk could see for himself. LeBeau led the way, his upper right arm wrapped in a crude bandage. Behind him followed Andrea, four schmeissers hung over his shoulder by their straps. He climbed the slope easily and hunkered down next to the others. Newkirk looked at him as Andrea unlimbered the schmeissers and handed them round. He glanced over at LeBeau, concern in his eyes.

"You alright, Louis?"

"Oui, mon ami. It's not too serious. The bullet just winged me really. I was lucky." Then he turned to Andrea who had been checking over the schmeisser. "Merci, M'sieu."

"De rien," replied Andrea with a glimmer of a smile. "We should continue. Your M'sieu LeBeau will need to get that wound cleaned and bandaged properly as soon as possible."

Newkirk picked up on the order implicit in Andrea's tone. For a moment the scruffy, unshaven bear of a man seemed almost to be something else entirely, something far more

military. "Right, then. I'll lead the way. We're only about an hour away now," he said.

Nearly an hour later, they spotted a light gleaming through the wood. LeBeau's arm had been aching throughout the walk, but the bleeding had stopped. Miller had rigged up a sling for the arm and had stayed nearby to steady the Frenchman over the rougher areas of the terrain. To their relief they had seen no other German patrols.

"Follow me, and keep low," Newkirk warned, continuing in the direction of the light. As they neared, they could make out wooden structures, guard towers and fences.

"A prison camp!?! " exclaimed Miller quietly. He paused, thinking, suddenly worried. Newkirk was certainly English: a Londoner, if he had placed the accent correctly. LeBeau was as French as a pavement café or the Eiffel Tower, not to mention his having just been shot by Germans. He just could not work out why an Englishman and a Frenchman would be leading them towards a prison camp.

"Welcome to Stalag 13," their escort said softly.

Miller was about to try and make a break for it when the Englishman pulled the top off a tree stump to reveal a ladder leading downwards. Miller noticed a slight frown on Andrea's face, as close to an expression of consternation as Andrea ever achieved, then he shrugged and climbed down into the tree trunk.

The ladder led to a tunnel running back under the wire. It was well shored with timber at regular interval and lit by electric lights. "Like I said, gents, welcome to Stalag 13. Come with me. I'll take you to meet the Guv'nor, Colonel Hogan."

Newkirk preceded them down the tunnel. They passed a couple of others on the way, all in worn Allied uniforms. Newkirk flagged down one of them. "Get sergeant Wilson over here, LeBeau got winged while we were out." None of the others spared them a glance. It was evidently quite an extensive tunnel network. They passed a few junctions before they were led into a room set up with a table and stools. The three men who were in the room looked up at their entrance.

A tall, slender man in a leather flight jacket walked over to them. He had clear, brown eyes and wore a crumpled officer's cap tilted back on his head. "I'm Colonel Robert Hogan, US Army Air Corps, semi-retired," he added with an impish grin. "These are Kinch and Carter and you've already met Newkirk and LeBeau. London told us to pick you up."

"LeBeau caught one in the arm, Guv'nor," started Newkirk. "I've passed the word for sergeant Wilson to get over 'ere to clean it up. It doesn't look too bad," he added, forestalling Hogan's next question. Hogan nodded gratefully and returned his attention to his guests.

The taller of the two newcomers took a step forwards. "Thank you, Colonel. I am Andrea Stavrou. This is Dusty Miller."

"Colonel Stavrou, Miller." Hogan acknowledged.

"Andrea," corrected the Greek. Next to him Miller was looking around in shock. One of the Allied soldiers they had spotted in the tunnel came in carrying a tray: bowls of stew, bread and even a bottle of wine.

"My gawd," he exclaimed, "the rigours of the war in a POW camp." Miller took the glass of wine which had been filled for him, muttered "cheers", tipped it back then sat down to eat the stew. Next to him Andrea was eating, all the while studying the room and its occupants.

Hogan took out his pack of cigarettes and lit one. For all that his new guests looked old, tired and scruffy, he was glad they were on his side. The people used by the SOE might be a little eccentric by regular army standards, but they undertook and accomplished almost suicidal tasks. It was a role he and his men could appreciate.

They quickly finished eating, then Andrea turned questioningly towards Hogan. "Tell me, Colonel, have you heard anything about Captain Mallory? The farmer who sheltered us said he had heard an SS man boasting that they had captured one of the 'commandos'."

"We've heard the same thing. Our Kommandant spoke to an SS captain early yesterday. He confirmed that they had a man in custody."

"And your Kommandant told you this?" interjected Miller with disbelief.

"We tapped his office," explained Carter cheerfully. Hogan sighed. Carter was too trusting and open for his own good.

Stalag 11, hut 20, 5th March 1944, 1100 hrs.

It had been the second time Edith had read the same story in the paper. There was nothing else to do. Since her arrival at Stalag 11 she had been allowed out of the hut for only an hour each day, escorted by four silent guards and a Gestapo officer whose conversation began and ended with the wonderfulness of the Third Reich. So Edith was reduced to reading whatever old German newspapers she could get hold of. For any similarity in the reporting of events to the British papers, they could as well of been reporting a different war.

At least some effort had been made on the hut where she had been billeted, she thought. Spare clothes had been found from somewhere that almost fitted her and rudimentary washing facilities had been provided. She had noticed the crowded conditions in the rest of the camp, the stench of sweat and poor sanitation hovering over the area. It took little imagination to think of the ease with which disease could take hold here. The conditions were all too ripe for typhus, cholera or dysentery to name just a few. In this environment the death toll would be appalling. She was considering approaching the Kommandant with some suggestions to try and reduce the risk when she heard a knock at the door.

"Enter," she called in German.

Her captors had known from the outset that she spoke their language. The Kommandant walked in. Major Hilgenfeldt was a stocky, dark haired Prussian in his thirties, the inevitable duelling scar on his cheek and a patch over his left eye. Edith was suddenly nervous - it was the first time he had called on her since they had been introduced on her arrival.

"Good morning, fraulein Doktor," he said politely, punctuating the greeting with the abrupt half bow of the Prussian aristocracy.

"Good morning, Herr Major," returned Edith, "to what do I owe the pleasure." The routines of polite conversation took over from fear. For a brief, surreal, moment Edith was back in London Society before the war, welcoming visitors to the house. Then the major continued, breaking the spell.

"I was hoping to prevail on you for your medical services, fraulein Doktor. One of the prisoners here, the senior POW officer in fact, was hurt when his plane was shot down. A multiple leg fracture, I believe. It has been causing him trouble and I was wondering if you would have a look at it."

It was not at all what she had expected. A German Kommandant concerned for the welfare of a prisoner. She remembered Hilgenfeldt was there, waiting for her reply.

"I'm afraid I don't have any of my equipment with me, but I will do what I can. Where is he."

"Come with me," he said. They left the hut and crossed the compound, escorted by two guards. Eyes followed them as they entered another hut. Edith suddenly realised the gulf between her own accommodations and the rest of the camp. Hilgenfeldt led her through the hut, almost entirely taken up by bunks, into a small annex. Propped up on the cot was a man in the uniform of a Squadron Leader of the RAF. Hilgenfeldt performed the introductions in English with pedantic correctness.

"Doctor Windermere, may I present Squadron Leader George Thurleigh of the Royal Air Force. Squadron Leader Thurleigh, I have the honour to name Doctor Edith de Momerie Windermere."

Thurleigh put out his hand. Edith took it. "Charmed, I'm sure."

Even in a prison camp in the middle of a war, the formalities had to be dealt with before Edith got down to business examining the Squadron Leader's leg. As she did so, he explained what had happened: femur broken by a bullet as he had been in the cockpit, breaks of the tibia and fibula when he had made a forced landing. Edith had to admit that the German surgeons had done well saving the leg. As she was making the examination, a call came from outside, summoning the Kommandant.

The moment he was out of earshot, Thurleigh leaned forward urgently. "Why have the Gestapo got you here?"

After a brief moment of confusion, Edith replied: "I don't know. I've been trying to work that one out myself. Only thing I can think of is that it might be something to do with an aunt of mine. Rumour had it she was doing something hush-hush in North Africa, something to do with the DDT apparently." Thurleigh recognised the Whitehall shorthand for the Department of Dirty Tricks, fifth columnists working for the War Office.

"Anyone else?"

"Can't think of anyone. Pretty much everyone else is regular army or navy. Or dead," she murmured, half to herself.

"I'm sorry," sympathised Thurleigh, "but the distraction we set up won't keep Hilgenfeldt away for long. Get thinking. Try to see if you can get anything out of your Gestapo companion. I'll keep playing up the leg so you can come back to do a check up. If needs be, I can get messages out of here."

Edith looked down at the leg and nodded her understanding. "I know it must be uncomfortable, but I was fairly sure you were hamming it up a bit," she smiled. "Hilgenfeldt's coming back... so try to keep off the leg as far as possible. I'll speak to the Kommandant about any possibility of getting painkillers."

"Thank you, Doctor," replied Thurleigh.

Edith left the Thurleigh's hut to return to her own. Time to think about how to try to worm information out of that Gestapo fanatic.

Stalag 13, Kommandantur, 5th March 1944, 1400 hrs.

A staff car arriving at Stalag 13 was by no means an unusual occurrence. A staff car carrying an SS Colonel who had come to visit the Kommandant was worthy of note. Almost as soon as the car had cleared the gate, Hogan had been informed. The visiting colonel had gone straight into Klink's office. Hogan and his men were ready with the coffee pot to hear Schultz introduce Standartenfuhrer Haussner.

"Welcome to Stalag 13, Standartenfuhrer. This is a great honour for me. I am always glad to entertain the SS. What brings you to our humble abode?" began Klink unctuously.

There was silence. The mere presence of the SS had always rattled him, particularly when they gave him no clues as to what to agree with them about. Klink had discovered that the easiest way of dealing with the SS was to agree with them, then hope they would leave. The Standartenfuhrer, unlike previous such visitors, was not telling Klink what to do, and it was making him nervous.

"Some refreshments, perhaps," suggested Klink with a fragile laugh, heading over to the sideboard.

"Thank you, no."

"No, no, of course not. So, um, how may we at Stalag 13 serve the SS?"

"An interesting question," murmured Haussner. He was studying this Kommandant. Before his visit he had reviewed the man's service record. Until he had been placed in command of Stalag 13 it had been a study in mediocrity. But here, suddenly, he ran the only POW camp from which there had never been a successful escape. Having seen the man, Haussner was at a loss to explain how.

"Yes, I do manage to ask interesting questions, even if I do say so myself," Klink babbled, trailing off to an uncomfortable silence, waiting for the Standartenfuhrer to continue.

"Yet since you took over here, no prisoner has ever escaped..." mused Haussner, apparently to himself. It brought Klink back onto familiar ground.

"Yes, sir, never a successful escape, despite many attempts. I run the toughest POW camp in all of Germany. My prisoners are completely cowed. They know if they try they will be caught and severely punished."

"I would like to see some of your cowed prisoners, Colonel," Haussner requested politely.

"Certainly, Standartenfuhrer. A great pleasure to be of any assistance to the SS. Schultz, bring Colonel Hogan here immediately."

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

Hogan arrived five minutes later. He offered the Kommandant his usual relaxed salute which Klink returned. "Colonel Hogan, reporting as ordered Kommandant."

Klink performed the introductions. More salutes were exchanged.

"Please sit down, Colonel Hogan," invited Haussner, neatly taking control of the interview from Klink. "Refreshments?" he offered, gesturing at the decanter and glasses on the sideboard.

"Don't mind if I do," Hogan replied. At Haussner's bidding Schultz poured schnapps for all three officers. Klink and Hogan drank. Haussner merely tasted his, the remainder left untouched on the side of Klink's desk. All the while, Hogan could feel the Standartenfuhrer's intense scrutiny.

"So, Colonel Hogan, never a successful escape...you are all too cowed...too disheartened," mocked Haussner deliberately, studying Hogan's expression, watching for any involuntary response.

"Yes, sir. We keep on trying but with the great Kommandant Klink, we've got no real chance," Hogan added ingenuously.

"Of course, of course. But as you say you have to keep on trying." Haussner was eyeing him carefully. It's not sycophancy, is it Hogan? You are adept at playing the Kommandant, as an angler plays a fish on his line, decided Haussner. Fascinating, I had not expected this. It would appear I have someone else to watch out for. As Herr Holmes would doubtless have said: the game's afoot...

Hogan swallowed his usual glib answer as he saw the expression of amusement in Haussner's eyes, not triumph or arrogance, just a disconcertingly knowing amusement. He realised in that instant that this German colonel was someone he would have to handle very carefully if it became necessary.

"That will be all, Klink," said Haussner abruptly, "thank you for your time. Perhaps if I may visit again. I'm sure Colonel Hogan and I will be able to find something interesting to talk about..." he added.

"Certainly, Herr Standartenfuhrer. Heil Hitler."

Haussner saluted and left. Alone in the office Klink turned to Hogan. "For one of the SS he seemed to be quite personable," assessed Klink generously.

Hogan did not reply. That Standartenfuhrer was one Kraut he sure as hell did not want to see anytime in the immediate future if at all possible. On his walk back to the barracks, he decided he needed to know more about Haussner. From what had happened in Klink's office he was fairly sure that Haussner would be returning the favour.

Stalag 13, tunnels under barracks 2, 5th March 1944, 1900 hrs.

Miller and Andrea were resting downstairs when Colonel Hogan walked into their room. The Colonel's normal, faintly jaunty attitude was nowhere in evidence. In his hand he carried a sheet of paper which he wordlessly handed to Andrea. The Greek read it, then handed it to Miller.

"No way! They have got to be kidding. Who the hell sent that, anyway?" protested Miller.

"Jensen," replied Andrea with quiet certainty. "With what Captain Mallory knows about the SOE set-up in Southern Europe, he has no choice."

"But to give us orders to kill him if we can't get him out..."

"We will get him out." There was an utter conviction in Andrea's voice. Miller looked over at him, into his eyes. He could see the determination there, coupled with a deep sadness. Mallory was Andrea's best friend, but if it became necessary, Miller realised that Andrea would do what needed to be done, whatever it cost him personally.

"Yeah," agreed Miller almost inaudibly. He dropped his gaze, no longer able to meet Andrea's stare.

In the doorway, Hogan had been watching the exchange. He felt like an intruder. As quietly as he could, he turned and left.

Scientific Research Establishment, Nordhausen, Germany, 6th March 1944, 0630 hrs.

Venner woke up early. He had a great deal to do before the official work of the day got started. It had taken a couple of days, but he finally had what he needed. From the moment he had accepted Schaub's ultimatum he had had a plan in mind.

It had been alarmingly straightforward to put it into effect. A few hours after starting work he had presented Schaub with a list of things he needed that had been four pages long. Every item had a legitimate reason in line with his research for being included. Some of the items also had alternative uses, more in keeping with what Venner had in mind for them, which had mandated their inclusion. Schaub, with the zeal of a fanatic, had accomplished the near impossible and had arranged for the delivery of every single item on the list.

In the meantime, Venner had been working in the lab. He had always had the reputation for being a tyrant when it came to lab work. Normally he worked hard to curb his more autocratic tendencies. Here, he did not bother. He gave his uncertain temper free rein. The two research assistants assigned to help him were experts in their own right, albeit young and inexperienced. He swore at them, harangued them, piled work on to them, much of it of only passing relevance to the task at hand. They were set lengthy analyses to do or the dull but necessary work of measuring out exact amounts of chemicals for future use. Venner was not too concerned by their results. All he had wanted was to keep them out of his way.

The once pristine lab had soon become the kind of semi-ordered chaos that Venner preferred. Hidden behind piles of books, notes, apparatus and a variety of detritus he had been quietly building a radio. Time to get in touch with London.

London, Allied HQ, 6th March 1944, 0645 hrs.

The early morning shift radio operators at Allied HQ were picking up transmission from their various contacts in occupied Europe. For the people operating radios in Europe it was always risky. The staff who were based in London were trained to pick up on even the weakest signals.

That morning, Corporal Kenyon was transcribing a message when it occurred to him that he did not recognise the call sign of the sender. He finished writing down the message, and passed it on to the lieutenant on duty. Over the next hour the message went up the chain of

command until it reached Group Captain Howard's desk. Howard looked over the message, noting the call sign - Ragnarok. He remembered back in 1941 on a supply run to Norway for the underground when a flying officer, fond of Norse legend, had come up with the code name for the Norwegian's explosives expert. Ragnarok had been missing, presumed dead for more than six months. Now, according to his message he was being held in Nordhausen, in Germany itself and being blackmailed to work for the Nazis.

Howard walked out to the WAAF flying officer. "When General Parnell gets in, tell him I need to see him as soon as is convenient."

SS HQ Dusseldorf, 6th March 1944, 1000 hrs.

The morning sun reaching through the gaps in the shutters seemed to cover Haussner's office with bars. The dust in the air lent each band a glowing solidity. Open on his desk was Mallory's file. He had been studying it since the night before. After his meeting with Hogan he had sent von Schleich to get hold of the POW's file. Haussner stood up, stretching, releasing the kinks that had knotted up his back and shoulders. He really was getting too old for all-nighters, he admitted to himself. He strolled over to the shutters and opened them. Light flooded into the office, the highly polished antique furniture blazing in response. A small unit of troops were being drilled in the central courtyard, presumably on some punishment detail. For a few minutes he watched them.

He brought his attention back to Mallory. Four times now he had been taken to the 'treatment room'. Further, he was refusing to eat. A common enough occurrence after the discovery that a meal had been laced with drugs. He wrote an order in the interrogation record: to start force feeding if he continued to refuse food. It was not a long-term solution. A prisoner could still manage to starve himself to death: force-feeding simply extended the process. On previous occasions, many prisoners had started eating again after the experience of being fed through a pipe forced down into their stomach. Idly Haussner wondered which option Mallory would take, not that it would have much difference in the long run.

Haussner returned to his desk. According to his file Mallory had managed to cause the Third Reich no small amount of inconvenience. He had been either very good or very lucky to have stayed alive for as long as he had. Fighting a minimally supported war behind enemy lines had never been a safe occupation. For eighteen months in Crete the best mountain troops in the German army had not even managed to get close to him. He might be on the other side, but Haussner could respect the man's achievements. To have done so well in that sort of war

took a level of ruthlessness, cunning and determination that most lacked. His mind went back to when he had looked into Mallory's face back in the forest. It had been the eyes that had given him away. Cold, flat, somehow distant. The British chose their killers well.

The man's inevitable execution would be a waste: a regrettable but ultimately necessary waste. It was really too bad. Perhaps tomorrow he would talk to him.

Stalag 13, tunnels under barracks 2, 6th March 1944, 1200 hrs.

Miller was in Carter's underground lab being given the guided tour. The night before Andrea had gone out and retrieved the case that they had hidden in the hollow under the uprooted tree. It contained the explosives and timers that had been left over from their last mission. With the ingredients Carter had available in the lab and the youngster's know how, Miller felt they could put together some very interesting creations. The kid might be a bit naive and have a real problem with keeping his mouth shut, but Miller had to admit he knew explosives. The only problem was the kid's enthusiasm.

Miller was not an enthusiastic person. Carter's exuberance, particularly around the collection of high explosives was disconcerting. For all the care Carter took, he seemed to think he was playing with a junior chemistry set. Miller was used to treating explosives with more respect.

Carter was equally unsure about Miller. The man was cynical and sarcastic enough to make Newkirk seem like a beacon of joy and happiness. He seemed to have little respect for anyone except the Greek, Andrea. The way he sometimes spoke to the Colonel, you would think that it was the Colonel's fault that they had been shot down. Carter could appreciate Miller might be upset that his CO was missing, but to his mind it gave him no right to rag the Colonel. Besides, Miller did not seem that upset, just sarcastic.

He sure knew explosives, though. Miller had brought some really interesting things with him in that case: new sorts of fuses, detonators, booby traps. When he described how they worked, there was no trace of sarcasm in his voice. It was a side of Miller that Carter felt far more comfortable talking to than his normal, abrasive persona.

Rathaus, Dusseldorf, 6th March 1944, 1500 hrs.

Hogan and Andrea entered the Town Hall dressed as a Major and a Captain in the Engineering branch of the army. They had left Stalag 13 after noon roll call and headed into Dusseldorf in a borrowed motorbike and sidecar.

The clerk at the front desk stood up as they approached. "Can I help you, Herr Major?"

"Yes," replied Hogan, flicking through a notepad covered artistically with a mixture of illegible scrawl and arcane diagrams. "Yes, we need to see the plans for the buildings on the north and west sides of Beusselplatz."

"Jawohl, Herr Major. The planning department is upstairs. My assistant will escort you."

They were led upstairs and into a long, dusty room, filled with bookcases and cabinets. A group of workmen were making repairs to some slight bomb damage at one end of the room. Apart from them it was empty. Hogan turned to their guide, "Thank you. We can manage from here. You may return to your duties."

"Zu befehl, Herr Major." He straightened to attention, turned and left. Hogan and Andrea waited for the door to close behind him, then started looking along the shelves, searching for Kreuzburgstrasse, the location of the SS HQ.

Twenty minutes later, Hogan, still speaking German for the benefit of the workmen, called Andrea over. He had found a set of plans filed before the war started covering the conversion of a private hospital into the local HQ for the nazi party. There were no later plans, though at some point someone had pencilled in a number of speculative alterations. Both men realised it was as much as they were going to find. Anything more recent would surely be classified. Using a bookcase to shield his actions, Andrea folded the plans and tucked them inside his coat. There would be time to study them more closely when they got back to camp.

Stalag13, Colonel Hogan's office, 7th March 1944, 0900 hrs.

Seven men crowded around the table in Hogan's office. A map of the country around Dusseldorf was displayed on the wall. A town plan was spread out on the table along with the blue prints of SS HQ which Hogan and Andrea had acquired.

"If they've got Mallory's there, he's most likely being held in one of the basement cells," Hogan speculated. "Problem is, we've no way to be certain which. We've also got no way of telling if he's even still alive. On the chance that he is, I want to go in tonight, I know it's short notice," he admitted over the complaints, "but if he is still alive, they've had him there already for five days. Given the SS, I don't think we can afford to wait any longer. I want you all to understand from the start that this is a purely volunteer mission. I'm not ordering you to go."

"What about you two?" Kinch asked Miller and Andrea.

Miller answered for both of them, his voice uncharacteristically serious. "We're going to get him." Andrea merely nodded his agreement.

Hogan looked around at the faces of his men. His staff, he called them. They could relate to the sentiment expressed by Miller. They had had to prove it on his behalf more often than he cared to recall.

"I'm in, Colonel," averred Kinch.

"Moi aussi," LeBeau added.

"Right, boy, uh, sir, I mean Miller's been showing me some really interesting explosives. Be nice to see what they could do."

Eyes turned to Newkirk. "I'm not going bloody stay 'ere on my own now, am I," he said, his voice full of mock indignation.

Hogan said nothing for a moment, then very quietly, "Thanks, guys."

"You have access to forged papers here, Colonel?" queried Miller.

Hogan's men exchanged amused glances. "Why? Did you forget your invite to Berchtesgaden?" joked Newkirk.

"That's definitely the only way to do it," said Hogan, his voice cutting through the general laughter. "There's too many guards on duty to even think of breaking in. Our best bet will be to go in as a high-ranking delegation from Berlin with orders to transfer an important prisoner who may have information about a possible invasion or something. Newkirk, what do we have in the way of SS uniforms in stock?"

"More than enough, sir. I just need to know what ranks you want them to be, and I'll need to do some fittings for people."

"Would it be possible to add SD lozenges to the sleeves?" Andrea asked. "The SS are generally as uncomfortable with the SD as everyone else is about the SS. Additionally the SD would be more likely to be involved in an intelligence matter."

"Right, we'll need fake IDs for everyone going. Carter can take the photos down in the tunnel. Also I'll need a letter of authority, and prisoner transfer orders. Can we manage for the documents to be signed by Himmler?"

"No problem, Colonel. We lifted a set of genuine documents off an SS colonel a while back. It'll give us something to use as a template."

"I also want there to be some sort of diversion to go off in Dusseldorf this evening. Carter, Miller, I want you to come up with some ideas. If we end up having to pull rank and bully our

way into SS HQ I want to make sure they're as off balance as possible. Kinch, I'm sorry but I need you to stay here. If something goes wrong I need someone I can trust who knows the operation to take over, either to keep it going or to get everyone out." Kinch nodded unwilling agreement.

"Carter and I will work something out, Colonel. I've got some 'toys' in my case that we can use. Give us some idea of targets and we'll put together a few surprises," promised Miller.

"You bet, boy, uh, Colonel," Carter added.

"Good. Get Andrea and Miller ready to go first. They'll be going out this afternoon. It'll be their job to get the transportation ready for the trips there and back. We can't leave camp before evening roll call, so you two will have to set up the diversion as well. Newkirk, get them requisition orders for a car and a truck from the motor pool."

"No problem with the truck, sir, but Klink's is the only decent car there."

"Okay, plan B. We'll do the dashing officer out to impress his new fraulein routine. Andrea, it'll have to be you. Corporal Langenscheidt would recognise any of us. Just spin him the usual line about needing a fancy car to impress the girl. We'll give you some cigars to convince Langenscheidt of your sincerity."

"Where the hell do you get hold of cigars in a POW camp?" put in Miller.

"Kommandant's office," replied Hogan evenly.

"Oh, okay." Miller shrugged. He had seen enough of Hogan's set-up at Stalag 13 that he no longer felt quite so surprised at the apparently impossible happening on a regular basis. Hell, for all he knew they probably even had a sauna downstairs.

SS HQ Dusseldorf, basement, 7th March 1944, 1500 hrs.

Haussner made his way through the labyrinthine passages that stretched beneath SS HQ, the regular click of his boot heels the only noise. Apart from those who worked there, it was a place no one returned from. It had the grim, oppressive atmosphere of a morgue.

For days now he had received reports of how Mallory's interrogation was proceeding. So far the man had not said a word, not that any questions had yet been put to him. It was part of Haussner's technique. By the time this stage in the process had been reached, many of his subjects had been begging to be asked questions, if only to escape the pain. Others had still been holding out, throwing insults at the guards. Crude attempts to incite the guards to kill them prematurely so their information would die with them. It never worked. The guards were too disciplined, too inured, too scared of the consequences to let a prisoner goad them into killing them.

Mallory had not said a single word. Haussner understood the significance. A man, however clever, brave and determined may let slip some tiny detail by accident while trying to deceive an interrogator. It was the young over-confident ones who most often made that mistake. They trusted in clever lies to befuddle their interrogators. They had not yet discovered how hard it was to maintain a coherent lie when they were in pain and exhausted. Youthful self-assurance was often fatal. It was the youngsters who usually cracked first. Those older, more experienced, shut up and let their interrogators do the work.

Haussner found the SS Oberscharfuhrer in charge of the unit of SS who had been conducting Mallory's interrogation in the Guardroom.

"Oberscharfuhrer Kunitz, any progress with the prisoner, Mallory since your last report?" Haussner asked as Kunitz leapt to attention. He had not been expecting the Standartenfuhrer to visit until later. It was all too typical of Haussner to turn up unannounced and unescorted.

"The prisoner has been taken twice more to the treatment room since the last report, sir. The most recent session lasted no more than two hours before he lost consciousness. We had to force feed him only once. Since then he has been eating without additional persuasion," reported Kunitz.

"Take me to the cell, but do not open it. I wish to observe him."

"Zu befehl, Standartenfuhrer," barked Kunitz, and marched off down one of the many corridors. Haussner followed. They reached Mallory's cell. Kunitz opened the spy hole in the door and stood back. Haussner moved forwards and peered inside. Mallory was leaning against the back wall of the cell, apparently dozing. As Haussner was studying him, he noticed the man's eyes open and gaze unblinkingly at Haussner's own, hidden though he was.

He stepped back from the door. There was more work to be done there yet. Outside the cell on a hook on the wall was a clipboard holding the records of the interrogation to date. Haussner took it down, flicked through it and added a notation on the final page. He handed it to Kunitz. "To start immediately, Oberscharfuhrer."

"Zu befehl, Standartenfuhrer," he acknowledged as Haussner walked off. Kunitz waited a moment, staring at the closed door of the cell, a glimmer of regret on his face. He was no sadist. He did not enjoy inflicting pain unlike, it seemed, some of his comrades. The only alternative however was service on the Eastern Front. Against that option, Kunitz was well able to steel himself for what had to be done. Without another glance at the door, he returned to the Guardroom to make preparations.

Rathaus, Dusseldorf, 7th March 1944, 1640 hrs.

Andrea and Miller, both in German uniform arrived at the Town Hall in the borrowed truck. Andrea was dressed once again as a captain of engineers, with Miller in a lieutenant's uniform of the same branch. Andrea walked up to the clerk - the same clerk as the previous day, he noted. The clerk recognised him.

"Good afternoon, Herr Hauptmann," he greeted.

"Good afternoon," responded Andrea, "I'm afraid we need to check through some more of your records. Shall we just go up ourselves? I remember the way."

"As you like, Herr Hauptmann, but you know we have already started locking up for the evening," informed the clerk. "It might be easier for you to come back tomorrow."

"We shouldn't be too long. It's just a matter of making sure of a few details. It shouldn't take more than about fifteen minutes." Just long enough to get some of these explosives and incendiaries set, Miller added to himself.

"Ah, that should be alright. I'll leave you to it then."

Andrea smiled his thanks and hurried upstairs. The workmen had finished most of the repairs, he thought wryly, too bad. Next to him Miller was unloading a collection of compact bombs which he and Carter had been working on, made up about half-and-half of explosives and incendiaries. They set some of the bombs in the planning office then left to hide some of the rest around the building. Easy enough as nearly everyone else was gone.

At 1655 they left the building, the clerk bidding them a cheery 'good night'. That might be problematic afterwards, mused Andrea, if he puts two and two together later, he could probably get a fairly accurate description out.

For the next two hours as dusk fell, Miller and Andrea wandered around central Dusseldorf. Bombs went in waste bins, beside electrical junction boxes, wherever an explosion would cause the most chaos with the least civilian casualties. Both men had seen far too many innocent civilians die in the war to want to gratuitously add to the total. To his delight Miller found an abandoned workman's excavation where they had been repairing a large water pipe. Minutes later a bomb was snugly nestled below the pipe.

London, Allied HQ, 7th March 1944, 1830 hrs.

The same WAAF officer who had reported to Parnell about Edith Windermere knocked on the open door of the General's office, a file tucked under her arm.

"General," she started as he looked up, "I've managed to find something about Dr Windermere. Last year she failed a vetting by the SOE. She had volunteered to work for them. She speaks German and French fluently with only the slightest Dutch accent."

"How come a Dutch accent?"

"Her first language is Afrikaans, sir. Dr Windermere was brought up in South Africa," explained the WAAF.

"Oh, right, carry on."

"Yes sir. It turns out that she has an aunt, Dian Ferrers, who did some work for the SOE during the North African campaign. The problem was though, that there was an uncle on the other side of the family who got himself involved with the Norwegian underground several years back. This uncle, sir, is Professor Paul Venner, the rocket propulsion expert. He dropped out of sight some time ago. He's currently presumed dead. The thing is, the SOE didn't want to put an agent into occupied Europe who might be used against us as bargaining chip to motivate Professor Venner, if he's alive and in their hands."

"Understandable. A little paranoid, but understandable," nodded Parnell. "This is the best reason you've been able to come up with?"

"I've gone through everything we had on Dr Windermere. Thanks to the SOE check, that's actually quite a lot of material. If there's any other reason, I can't find it."

Parnell studied the WAAF's face, noting the weariness there. She had definitely been burning the midnight oil on this one. "Thank you, now get yourself some rest."

The WAAF saluted and left. Parnell leaned back, considering the situation. He had seen other intelligence reports of nazi experiments to create a weapon that was capable of attacking England from mainland Europe. Most of them had involved rockets of some shape or form. Damn, if Venner was alive and the nazis had got him and were forcing him to work for them. What a bloody mess! That lady doctor in a prison camp in Germany, an uncle probably being blackmailed by the krauts, an aunt working for the SOE. Parnell swore never to complain about his relatives ever again. All of a sudden, cousin Alec's passion for collecting garden gnomes seemed a wonderfully sane pastime.

Stalag 13, tunnels under barracks 2, 7th March 1944, 2130 hrs.

Five men stood at the entrance leading to the emergency tunnel. Andrea and Miller had slipped back into camp through the tunnel two hours earlier. On their way back from Dusseldorf Andrea had collected Klink's car and both it and the truck were hidden in the woods a mile from the camp, branches thrown over them as a simple camouflage. The SS search parties had been withdrawn from the area over the day and the extra checkpoints were mostly gone.

Four of the men wore German uniform. Miller and Carter were dressed as sergeants, Scharfuhrers. Andrea was a Hauptscharfuhrer, a sergeant major, Newkirk a Sturmbannfuhrer or major. The uniforms were the field grey of the SD in imitation of the Waffen-SS, rather than the more pedestrian black of the Allgemeine-SS. The white on dark SD lozenge was clearly visible on the sleeve. Neatly embroidered on Newkirk's cuff were the letters: RfSS. A member of the Hauptamt Personlicher Stab RfSS: Himmler's own personal staff. He enjoyed the irony that the embroidery had been done by a Russian prisoner only that afternoon who had been chortling in delight as he had done it. Hogan was purposely the only one not in uniform. He had added a few touches of grey to his hair and some subtle age lines putting his apparent age somewhere in his forties. He wore a severe black suit and tailored black trenchcoat. A black trilby completed the look. His papers named him as a Herr Doktor Menz who held the rank of a Gruppenfuhrer of the Allgemeine-SS.

He looked around at the others. All of them were a little jittery with the exception of the Greek. For all the concern he showed he might have been going down to the shop to buy a paper. They ran a last minute check on documents and weapons. None of them carried anything to link back to Stalag 13. The car and truck were a weakness. Both were registered to the camp. The thought occurred to Hogan that if the plan went pear shaped, then it would be up to Klink to come up with some imaginative explanations to explain their presence in Dusseldorf. It's a shame that if it comes to that, I probably won't be around to hear what he comes up with, thought Hogan ruefully.

He had just picked up the weather forecast on the radio: clouds and rain drifting up from the Alps, due to reach Dusseldorf sometime around dawn. The Airforce was scheduled to bomb Cologne that night. Close enough to Dusseldorf that it might provide a bit of extra confusion, something always useful, to Hogan's way of thinking. Misdirection and obfuscation were amongst his favourite tools, and if the environment was predisposed towards them, who was he to complain.

Bar of the Connaught Hotel, London, 7th March 1944, 2200 hrs.

General Parnell was sat at a table in the bar of the Connaught Hotel, taking his time over a glass of bourbon. Away over the other side of the room a pianist played softly, the tune lost in the quiet conversation. Cigar and cigarette smoke had cast a haze over the room. Nearly everyone was in uniform, officers from Britain and America, all service branches represented.

A stocky, bearded man in the uniform of a Royal Navy Commodore meandered through the crowd in the bar, a brandy snifter balanced in his hand. He would stop occasionally to speak to people, a cheery smile on his face, glad handing his way from group to group, the image of a bon vivant. Spying Parnell, he waved in greeting and walked over to join him.

"May I join you, General?" he asked, and sat down without waiting for an answer. The smile never left his face, but it was not matched by the shrewd, calculating look that had suddenly appeared in the Commodore's grey eyes. "I hear you've been trying to get in touch with me again. What can I do for you?"

Rathaus, Dusseldorf, 7th March 1944, 2230 hrs.

The Town Hall was all but deserted. A solitary night watchman walked through the building, checking doors. He did not expect to find anything amiss. Any papers worth stealing had been transferred to the SS building. Keeping the Town Hall open seemed little more than a sinecure. Struggling a little, he climbed the stairs to the second floor. At the top of the staircase he paused to catch his breath. He had never really fully recovered from too close an encounter with mustard gas back in the first war.

Slowly getting his breath back he noticed a smell in the air. Not the familiar mustiness of old papers, but something sharper, harsher. Smoke! He reached for the light switch, then stopped. Standing orders were no lights this late. The building had not been blacked out. With a quiet oath he moved forwards, scanning the hallway with his torch, sniffing the air. Around the corner at the top of another flight of stairs he spotted a thin wisp of smoke seeming to bubble up from under the door of the planning office. Through the frosted glass he could make out a

leaping orange pattern - fire. He opened the door. The flames had taken hold of much of the room. There was nothing he could do but give the alarm.

He dashed out of the room, closing the door behind him, the smoke playing havoc with his tortured lungs. He had to make it to the telephone downstairs. Then the building shuddered. He could hear the sharp crack of an explosion from somewhere below. Within minutes there was the sound of more explosions. With a gasp of relief he made it to the front lobby and grabbed the telephone.

"Get me SS HQ, this is an emergency! The Town Hall is on fire. Explosions!" he coughed, suddenly very tired. The telephone seemed to be sliding away from him. The room was full of smoke, almost like cotton wool, he thought inconsequentially, as the cotton wool thickened and darkened quickly to black.

SS HQ Dusseldorf, 7th March 1944, 2245 hrs.

The staff car and truck swept into the central courtyard of SS HQ. The sentries noted the Sturmbannfuhrer in the front passenger seat and a man in plain clothes sitting in the back, that detail making him almost certainly more important than the Sturmbannfuhrer. The sentries came to attention and saluted. The man in the leather trench coat returned the salute casually. In front of the main door, the Sturmbannfuhrer got out and held the door open for the other man to leave the car. With him in the lead, they climbed the steps and entered the building with scarcely a sideways glance at the sentries.

The night had become very busy, reflected the sentry. An emergency at the Rathaus, bombs going off. The electricity for much of the city had gone off a few minutes earlier. The HQ was operating off its own emergency generator. Outside of the relative calm of the courtyard there was bedlam. The air raid sirens were going off. Search lights scoured the sky but found no trace of a plane. At least it wasn't raining and his shift ended at midnight.

Inside the building the grandiose entrance hall was filled with SS. Orders were being shouted. Civilians and SS were rushing around. Hogan hid a smile. As planned: chaos. Taking the lead, he strode to the desk. A Hauptsturmfuhrer was on duty, trying to field questions from a dozen sources. Hogan simply stood back from the desk and glowered. In his disguise the effect was decidedly sinister. The Hauptsturmfuhrer noticed Hogan, then the people standing

with him. He took in the SD uniforms and patches, the huge Hauptscharfuhrer wearing the Knight's Cross. His eyes strayed to the Sturmbannfuhrer and the cuff embroidered simply RfSS. That was enough. The Hauptsturmfuhrer crashed to attention.

Hogan waited a few seconds for effect, then gestured Newkirk forwards. The other officers who had been around the desk cleared away. Newkirk put an envelope down on the desk and slid it across to the Hauptsturmfuhrer.

"These are orders for the transfer of a prisoner into my custody. Have him brought here immediately."

"Zu befehl, Sturmbannfuhrer," replied the Hauptsturmfuhrer reading the intentionally brief transfer orders, "we received the call from your office earlier. The prisoner will be brought up immediately, if you and the Reichsinspektorgeneral would care to wait in the side office."

Reichsinspektorgeneral?!? Where the hell did that come from, thought Hogan.

His mind working frantically, he led the way to the office where they had been asked to wait. Clearly someone really was on the way from Berlin to pick up Mallory. They were evidently expecting him to arrive about now. All the planning in the world, and we're stuck with a coincidence like this. Hogan glanced briefly upwards - I hope You're finding this amusing, because I'm not. Ah, well, if this was the hand he had been dealt, this was the hand he would play. A Reichsinspektorgeneral he would be.

"We're really goin' to 'ave to scarper once we've got Captain Mallory, guv'nor," reminded Newkirk redundantly. He too had seen the danger.

Hogan merely nodded in reply. The real Reichsinspektorgeneral turning up before they got out would not be a good thing. He caught himself unconsciously tapping the arm of his seat impatiently. He was worried as hell, no denying it, but it would not do to let the others see how worried he was.

"Herr Reichsinspektorgeneral," began a respectful voice, "the prisoner is here."

"Bring him in," ordered Hogan.

Two guards came into the room, virtually dragging a hooded, handcuffed figure with them, holding him propped up between them. He did not seem able to stand unaided. They came to a halt in front of Hogan. Behind them followed the Hauptsturmfuhrer holding a parcel of notes which he presented to Hogan.

"The interrogation records, Herr Reichsinspektorgeneral. Standartenfuhrer Haussner has been in charge of the prisoner since his capture."

"I am acquainted with the Standartenfuhrer," commented Hogan truthfully. He took a quick glance through the papers: dry as dust accounts of brutality. The papers recorded the prisoner's identity as Keith Mallory. Then he turned his attention back to the slumped prisoner. Just one thing left to check.

"Show me his face," Hogan continued, taking a photo of Mallory from inside his coat. Kinch had found it earlier in an old magazine and mounted it on a piece of cardboard. The guards removed the hood. One grabbed the damp hair and pulled the figure's head up so he was facing Hogan. Concealing his shock at the man's condition he compared the face in front of him with the photo. It was Mallory - unshaven, bruised, exhausted and looking half dead, but definitely Mallory.

He forced a smile onto his face. "Good, give the Hauptscharfuhrer the keys to the handcuffs. You two, take charge of the prisoner," he ordered Miller and Carter. The two came to attention and moved to relieve the guards of their burden. Outside, the air raid siren began to wail again. A teenager of the Hitlerjugend ran into the room, presenting the Hauptsturmfuhrer with a note, then stood back waiting for orders. The Hauptsturmfuhrer scanned the note, then looked up at Hogan.

"Herr Reichsinspektorgeneral, we have reports from our radar stations that American bombers will be overhead in a few minutes. May I respectfully suggest the Reichsinspektorgeneral and his staff wait in the bomb shelter here for the raid to pass."

Bombers? Weren't they supposed to be over Cologne tonight? How much more of this plan can go wrong?

"Thank you, no. It is necessary that I return to Berlin as soon as possible." And before the real Reichsinspektorgeneral arrives, he silently added.

Too well disciplined to question the decision, however unreasonable, of so senior an official, the Hauptsturmführer merely saluted. From outside they could hear the sound of anti-aircraft fire begin to open up and the rumbles of not so distant explosions. It had seemed the German radar operators had overestimated the proximity of the bombers.

Possessed of a genuine urgency, Hogan directed his group out of the building. Outside he could see the silhouette of buildings outlined by the orange glow of fires, hear the whine of falling bombs getting closer. Before America had joined the war he had been an observer in London during the blitz. He was all too aware of the dangers of being outside in this sort of raid. It was less dangerous than staying at the SS HQ, even with the bomb shelters. While waiting for Mallory to be brought to them, Carter and Miller had taken advantage of the chaos to leave some gifts for the SS. Gifts that Carter in particular had been very taken by. Hogan knew he did not want to be anywhere near when they went off.

Two staff cars screamed to a halt at the base of the main steps. A group of officers rapidly decamped heading into the building at a flat run, but not so quickly that Hogan had missed the RfSS cuffs on three of them. Hogan turned sharply to Miller and Carter. "How long left on those timers?"

"Bout fifteen minutes," replied Miller.

Too long, thought Hogan. It would give them more than enough time to get into the shelter. They would have the names of the fake IDs they had used to sign the transfer papers on record. Depending on how eager the real Reichsinspektorgeneral is to get to shelter, they might have an alert out on them within minutes, particularly if they manage to speak to that Hauptsturmführer. They could not risk using the IDs to get back to Hammelburg. It would leave too obvious a paper trail. The thoughts had rushed through his mind in barely a second. Miller was still looking at him.

"That SS captain's gonna be trouble," he drawled. "You look after the boss, Colonel," he said, nodding in Mallory's direction, "I'll be back in a few minutes. If I'm not, don't wait." He turned and ran back up the steps. Through the half-light and confusion Hogan could make out the shape of a silenced pistol appear in Miller's hand.

The howl of falling bombs was now almost deafening. Explosions sounded from all around. Hogan grabbed Newkirk and dragged him into the scant cover offered by the stone balustrade. The other got the idea and joined them. At the front of the building was a blinding flare, then the pressure of the shockwave rushed over them, hot and acrid. Splinters of stone tugged at their clothes. Andrea was hunched protectively over the barely conscious Mallory, unlocking the cuffs even as he shielded him.

Hogan looked up. One wing of the building had taken a direct hit. "Quick, everyone in," he yelled heading for the staff car. Andrea loaded Mallory into the back seat and the others piled in. Hogan himself leapt behind the wheel, starting the car up. He manoeuvred it so it was pointing towards the exit.

"How long do we wait?" he called to Andrea. The Greek's eyes were on the entrance, as if willing Miller to appear. More bombs were dropping nearby. Then Hogan made the decision himself. "Sixty seconds more and we're out of here." Andrea glanced back for a moment and then nodded.

Fifty four seconds later Miller tore out of the doors, going down the steps at a flat run. Hogan got the car moving as Miller reached it. The others' willing hands dragged him on board. He manoeuvred the car out of the gates and out into the city. Fires were raging everywhere. Rubble strewn from collapsed buildings blocked the street.

"With the Hauptsturmfuhrer dead we should have a few hours grace, Colonel," pointed out Andrea as Hogan swung the car around the obstacles on the road. How he was sure Miller's mission had been a success, Hogan did not know. Miller did not dispute the assessment.

It was becoming increasingly difficult to find space for the big staff car to fit through the streets. The only piece of luck was that in the chaos and confusion of the bombing raid no one was overly inclined to notice how overcrowded the car was. On only one occasion were they stopped; Hogan, acting the part of the irate Gruppenfuhrer Doktor Menz to the hilt, soon had the troops at the road block urging them through as he threatened them variously with firing squads, Gestapo and the Russian Front.

Road between Dusseldorf and Hammelburg, 8th March 1944, 0100 hrs.

Behind them the fires of Dusseldorf had faded into an orange glow that lit up the sky. It had clouded over and started raining shortly after they had left the city. The weather front must have moved in quicker than the Met guys had originally forecast, blocking off Cologne, reasoned Hogan. Should have checked to see if Dusseldorf was the alternate target. That was an oversight on my part, he berated himself. I'm not sure how, but we pulled it off. Mallory doesn't look so good. Not really surprising, considering what he's gone through. Doc Freiling's place in on the way back to camp. I'll get him to check Mallory out before we head back in to camp. We'll have to wait somewhere anyway while Andrea returns the staff car. It's in a bit of a mess - Have to get some people to wash it before Klink sees it.

The car pulled up to the side of Doctor Freiling's house, out of sight of all but the most inquisitive watcher. Mallory had been so deeply asleep during the journey from Dusseldorf that it sometimes seemed he was dead. Andrea picked Mallory up, carrying him as effortlessly as if he were no more than a child. Miller had checked him over once they were outside of Dusseldorf, displaying a concern at odds with his usually cynical, sarcastic nature. On seeing the condition he was in, some of the things that Miller had said to describe the SS had brought a flush of embarrassment to Carter's face. There had been a depth of anxiety and feeling behind the string of SS-directed insults that belied Carter's earlier impression of Miller's indifference. Andrea had said nothing, but from the expression on his face none of the other wanted to see what would happen to any German who got in their way on their drive back from Dusseldorf.

Hogan had run in front of Andrea and was knocking on the door. Lights went on upstairs, the palest glow visible from behind heavy curtains. The door opened revealing a grey haired, middle aged man. He looked at Hogan's face, then at the supine figure cradled in Andrea's arms. "You'd better come in," he said quietly.

"Doctor Freiling has helped us before," Hogan explained to Andrea and Miller. "Let him give Captain Mallory a check over before we get back to camp."

Freiling led the way into a consulting room. Andrea followed, laying Mallory down on the table. The doctor checked the curtains were tightly closed then turned on the main light over the table. In the brightness Mallory's condition was painfully apparent. His features were gaunt and haggard, eyes sunken deep in their sockets, cheeks dark hollows. Livid red abrasions ringed throat and wrists.

"You will wait outside while I perform the examination," Freiling ordered. Andrea and Miller tried to demur but the doctor was adamant. Hogan ushered them out into Freiling's sitting room. About twenty minutes later Freiling came out to them.

"What is his condition, Doctor?" asked Andrea before any of the others could speak. Freiling looked askance at Hogan who merely gave a slight shrug in response.

"He is weak and exhausted," began Freiling. "Additionally he has been beaten repeatedly over about a week, I would think. Much of the damage is superficial but I think he has a cracked rib which I have taped. There are more recent signs of electrical burns. I will be able to give you an ointment for these. I have also given him a painkiller. I can give you some more to take with you. Ideally he needs at least two weeks of rest to recover from his physical injuries. As far as his psychological condition is concerned though, I don't know. He has gone through a terrible ordeal." Freiling paused, then looked at Hogan. "You will be moving him to England?"

"Yes, as soon as he can travel."

Freiling nodded his agreement. "Try to give him a few days to get some of his strength back. He will be travelling with others, yes? Good."

"Can we see him, Doc?" asked one of his visitors. Freiling did not recognise him. He had spoken in poor, American accented German.

"Of course. When you get back to Stalag 13, give him these pills." He handed a foil wrapped packet to Miller. "They will put him out for about twelve hours. He needs the rest. I have seen the results of SS sleep deprivation techniques before. Those subjected to it soon learn to fear falling asleep for the consequences that it brings. Be patient with your friend. He will need it."

"Thanks, Doc."

Andrea went to pick up Mallory, but the Captain was conscious and awake. He looked up at Andrea, put out an arm for support, and gingerly eased himself off the table. He looked around at the others, silently grouped there in German uniforms. "Thanks," he said, his voice rough from disuse. Then, with Mallory leaning heavily on Andrea the group moved silently back out to the car.

Stalag 13, tunnels under barracks 2, 8th March 1944, 0230 hrs.

Tired yet relieved, six men arrived back at Stalag 13. They had taken a risk and driven most of the way in the car. The Greek had quickly returned the car to the car pool while the others had gone down the emergency tunnel through the tree stump. Miller was supporting Mallory who was clearly at the end of his endurance. They took him into one of the rooms where a cot had been set up. Miller and Andrea settled him in and gave him the sedative Freiling had provided.

The rest of them settled down, taking off the now sodden, slightly torn uniforms. The POWs who did the covert side of the laundry detail would have their work cut out to salvage them, reflected Hogan. LeBeau passed around coffee, glad that the others had got back safely. He and Kinch had both been annoyed to have been left behind. LeBeau had had to accept that Himmler, that exponent of the myth of the Aryan superman, would have been unlikely to allow someone of his stature into the SD, not to mention the still painful wound in his arm.

Hogan stood up, yawning. "Try to get a few hours sleep before roll call, everyone," he suggested.

He was just at the base of the ladder leading up to barracks 2 when Kinch came up to him. "Colonel, we've had a radio message through from London."

"Can't it wait until morning?" Hogan complained. Kinch, familiar with his CO's habits, just grimaced at him, handing him the decoded message. Hogan might cavil sometimes, but he

was always the first to admit that duty was duty. He took the message and read it, a frown of sheer disbelief creeping across his face. "Are you sure you've decoded it right?" he accused. He had long ago come to the conclusion that Allied HQ in London had the convenient ability to forget that he really was a POW when it suited them - like now for instance.

"Get everyone in here, Andrea and Miller too," he told Kinch. Then he sat down and poured himself another cup of coffee. Soon the others arrived, all looking as if they needed at the very least a week's holiday somewhere warm.

"I'm sorry to be dropping this on you so late, but new orders have come through from London." He paused, gazing at the faces around him. He caught the expression of forlorn resignation cross Miller's features as if he knew what was coming next. Hogan continued regardless. "We have been ordered to break a Doctor Edith Windermere out of Stalag 11 where she's being held under Gestapo guard."

"Sure, no problem," drawled Miller. "After breaking the boss outta SS HQ, a Stalag's gonna be a stroll in the park for you guys."

"In addition," carried on Hogan, with a brief frown at Miller's interruption, "we have to get a scientist, Professor Paul Venner out of a secure research facility in Nordhausen, which, if I may remind you is more than a hundred miles from here. It seems that Doctor Windermere is being held in order to compel Venner to work for them, which we understand is something he has until this point refused to do. Because of this, the rescues need to be done simultaneously to avoid any retaliation against the remaining prisoner. Furthermore we've been ordered to destroy the Nordhausen research facility if we can. As you're here," Hogan said to Miller and Andrea, "Commodore Jensen has suggested that you might help us out with this 'little job' as he refers to it."

Miller leaned back, closing his eyes as if in pain. Andrea merely carried on filling his pipe, his expression unreadable.

Site of SS HQ, Dusseldorf, 8th March 1944, 0600 hrs.

In the grey light of dawn a heavy pall of smoke still hung over Dusseldorf. It had taken hours to get the fires under control, the effort not helped by a broken water pipe. About half of the SS HQ building lay in ruins, smoke still rising from the wreckage. Medical teams were ferrying out the wounded. They had finally managed to access the deep underground shelter where many of those in the building had managed to take shelter. The weight of collapsing masonry had caused some parts of the basement levels to give way. The rest of the building was deemed to be unsafe. Teams were being sent in to retrieve as many documents as they could find. Survivors and SS men who had been away from the building during the raid had begun to congregate.

Standing apart from the main group was a figure in the dust-covered uniform of a Standartenfuhrer. He was looking over the area, hardly seeming to be aware of the report being given to him by a subordinate. His was the most senior rank on site, the rescue workers and emergency crews reporting to him.

A dust covered Major of the Wehrmacht approached him and saluted: an army salute, not the nazi 'heil'. "Standartenfuhrer Haussner, we have completed our preliminary assessment of the damage to the headquarters. It is considerable, but some unusual details have come to light." Haussner looked at the Major, for the first time giving him his undivided attention. Paling somewhat under his intense scrutiny, the Major continued: "Firstly, we have so far found seven bodies where the main lobby was. It is assumed these men were unable to reach the shelter in time. Six were crushed by falling masonry. The seventh, while similarly crushed, had also been shot twice, in the heart. He was an SS Hauptsturmfuhrer. Secondly, the pattern of explosion in the main lobby is not consistent with a typical aerial bombardment. It is too early to be certain, but it has many of the characteristics of sabotage based on the type of damage."

"I see. Carry on, Major. Continue your investigations into the source of the explosion in the lobby and report to me. Also, have the Hauptsturmfuhrer's corpse taken to the hospital. I want it autopsied as soon as possible, and inform the local Gestapo of the shooting. I'm sure they will want to look into it," finished Haussner dryly.

"Zu befehl, Standartenfuhrer." The Major came to attention and left. Haussner stood there, his eyes on the ruins of the building, his thoughts miles away. Amongst the wounded had been a Reichsinspektorgeneral, sent from Berlin to collect his prisoner. A piece of information he had not been made aware of until that morning. Perhaps the decision had come to transfer Mallory had come from Hochstetter's meddling. No way to tell...yet.

Onlookers noted with curiosity the ghost of a smile cross the Standartenfuhrer's face. It was an unnerving expression to be seen on so senior an officer of the feared SS. They speculated on the reason for such an odd reaction to the bombing of the HQ.

Haussner felt a glow of anticipation he had missed for many years. Since the fuhrer had won power in 1933 and the SS had been made independent of the order of the SA a year later, everything had been too easy. Whatever any of the others might say, he knew that he had unearthed some of the pieces of a much larger jigsaw. It promised to be a very interesting jigsaw indeed...

Part 2

Stalag 13, tunnels under barracks 2, 9th March 1944, 1200 hrs.

Corporal Dusty Miller was stretched out on a canvas chair, dozing lightly, when he heard someone speak his name. He awoke and looked around at the braced earthen walls and rough floor - the tunnel system under Stalag 13. Andrea was collapsed in another chair leaned up against one of the walls. Laid out next to him on a cot was Mallory.

If only it had all been a nightmare, reflected Miller wistfully. Mallory had been sleeping fitfully since they had brought him down through the tunnel more than a day before despite the sedative that the German Doctor had given him. Andrea and Miller had kept a vigil at his side since then and had no intention of moving until their CO finally came to.

"Dusty?" The voice was weak, confused, but definitely Mallory's. Miller got up from the chair and went to crouch near the cot.

"Hey, boss. So you've decided to join us at last. How are ya feelin'?" Miller spoke with deliberate levity, trying to distract Mallory from what he had been through even if only for a few moments. As he spoke, he heard Andrea awaken and walk over to him. Mallory's bleary gaze went from one to the other. He frowned, as if trying to focus with eyes that would not willingly co-operate in the effort.

"Andrea?"

"I am here, my Keith," confirmed the Greek quietly. He placed a reassuring hand on Mallory's shoulder, a rare smile transforming his normally dour features. "It is good to have you back with us."

As awareness returned, Mallory studied his surroundings. His memories since leaving the SS HQ were disjointed at best: driving through the rain and the darkness for hours, a middle aged German in a clinic checking him over, being almost carried through a wood. He could not fit it all together into a coherent whole. That would come later. The others were here; they would help. For now though, he was tired; he ached all over and there was a sharp, nagging pain in his right side with every breath. He had had a cracked rib before and remembered very clearly what it felt like.

"You hungry, boss? We've got some soup here if you want some."

"Sounds good. Then you can fill me in on the situation," replied Mallory. Miller grimaced. His CO was frequently too driven for his own good. He knew that it would be pointless trying to get him to rest when he felt he ought to be doing something. Leaving Andrea to sit with Mallory, Miller left to find the soup that the Frenchman, LeBeau, had left for them.

"How's he doing?" came a quietly measured voice. Miller turned to find that the American Colonel had entered the room. He was forced to admit that Hogan had done a good job in planning and running Mallory's escape from the SS. Equally, he had to acknowledge that without Hogan and his people, he and Andrea would most likely have been caught or killed, particularly as they would have tried to rescue Mallory on their own. Corporal Dusty Miller had never had a naturally civil attitude to officers, but after the events of the previous day, Hogan had become one of the few whom he had decided were probably worth listening to.

"He's just now come 'round. Still a bit woozy from whatever it was that the Doc gave him, but he looks a hell of a lot better than he did when we got him down here. I just came in to find the soup that French guy, LeBeau said he'd leave here for us."

"Fine. When he's finished, I'd like to speak to him, if he feels up to it," said Hogan.

"Sure, Colonel," agreed Miller.

About half an hour later Hogan returned. Mallory was propped up in the cot, washed and clean-shaven. Hogan glanced at the two men who had hardly left Mallory's side since they had rescued him. He had seen this sort of tight-knit protectiveness before, both amongst his own people at Stalag 13 and before that, between the crewmembers of every bomber he had flown since the start of the war. To call it camaraderie did not begin to cover it. It was a sort of island mentality: the acknowledgement that if it came down to it, it was always going to be you and the handful of people you had gone through hell with, standing alone against the rest of the world if necessary.

Miller and Andrea settled down on the other side of the room to give Hogan and their CO at least the illusion of privacy. Neither seriously considered that Mallory would be in any danger if they left him alone, but they wanted to be there, just in case he needed them.

"Good to have you with us at last, Captain Mallory," said Hogan with quiet sincerity. "I don't know how much you remember from last night, but I'm Colonel Robert Hogan, the senior POW officer here at Stalag 13. After recent events, you've probably picked up on part of the sideline we've got going here. My men helped Andrea and Miller get you out."

"From what Dusty's been saying, it was you who was running the show. I'm reliably informed that your impression of a Nazi fanatic was...what was the phrase? Ah, yes: 'good enough to shoot!'" Mallory's voice was still slightly hoarse, the educated English accent revealing only hints of a New Zealand twang. "I'm obliged to you and your men for the rescue, Colonel. It was getting rather...unpleasant."

The English understatement again, thought Hogan. He had encountered it more than a few times since arriving in Britain, and it had managed to cause some confusion at the very beginning, before he had become used to it. It was only the British for whom 'not very good' was a most damning indictment, and 'not at all bad' was high praise. Doctor Freiling had given him some idea of the 'unpleasantness' that Mallory had referred to. And now some joker in London had dropped this double rescue mission right in their laps, suggesting that Mallory's team might help them out with it. He still did not know if Mallory's men had told their CO about it. He had to ask them later, in private. No sense in giving the man more things to worry about unless and until it became absolutely necessary. If he could come up with a viable plan to effect the release of the two prisoners without involving the others, he would. If not, he owed Mallory some say in any mission involving his men, even if ultimate authority rested with him. Sometimes, having the lives of so many depending on him, having to make the decisions he did, made Hogan feel very old.

Stalag 13, 10th March 1944, 1700 hrs.

Mallory stood at the bottom of a flight of crude wooden stairs leading upwards, catching his breath, preparing himself for the climb. The relentless stab of pain from his side made every breath an effort. I've climbed the Matterhorn, the Eiger. I can manage a simple ladder.

"May I ask what you think you're doing, Captain?" Surprised by the voice Mallory turned, almost losing his balance in the process, to see Colonel Hogan looking at him. The American Colonel's accusatory glare shifted rapidly to concern as Mallory stumbled against a nearby chair, grasping convulsively at it for support. Hogan stepped forward and manoeuvred the Captain down into the chair. He could not help but notice the tremor that was running through the New Zealander's lean frame or the man's ashen face covered with a fine sheen of sweat. The sharp inhalation he had given as he sat and the hand that was clutched protectively against the man's side spoke eloquently that the man had a cracked rib. Hogan sighed. Why was it that some people refused to heed their Doctor's advice. The sigh turned reflective as Hogan remembered in the past that he was just as stubborn and unwilling a patient as Mallory.

For a few seconds Mallory just sat there, eyes closed as he fought the pain and weakness that was threatening to send him plunging back to the dark respite of unconsciousness. Objectively, he was forced to admit to himself that he was pushing himself too hard, too soon, considering what he had been through. It was just that after being trapped, tortured in an SS dungeon, the underground room where he had woken up was too cramped, too underground to be comfortable. If he was being honest with himself, Mallory had to acknowledge that had never been comfortable in enclosed spaces since a mishap a few years earlier had trapped him in a flooding submarine.

The trembling and darkness slowly subsided and he opened his eyes at last to see Hogan sat opposite him, pouring two cups of coffee. The smell was intoxicating, real coffee, not the ersatz burnt chicory that so often masqueraded as coffee. Hogan pushed a mug over to him. "I thought you might appreciate some of the good stuff," he murmured.

"Thank you, Colonel," Mallory replied equally softly, gazing into the American's face, seeing the weariness that was lurking behind the mask of command. Hogan was younger than he by perhaps ten years, yet in the camp as senior POW officer he was responsible for the welfare

of more than two thousand other prisoners. Add that to his... extracurricular activities, and it was little wonder the man looked tired, mused Mallory.

"As I said, Captain, don't you think it's a bit early for you to be up and around?" Hogan said, sipping the coffee.

"Probably," agreed Mallory, I just wanted to see the outside, if only for a little while.

"I'm not going to be able to convince you to get back in that bed and get some more rest, am I, Captain." Hogan knew the question to be rhetorical even as he asked it.

"Probably not," Mallory smiled in dry acknowledgement of the accuracy of Hogan's assessment.

"Finish the coffee, then we'll see about getting you upstairs, for a little while anyway. I guess after... well, after where you were being held, you'd appreciate a breath of fresh air." If he had not been watching for it, Hogan would have missed the flicker of relief in Mallory's eyes. For him to have been able to see even so slight a reaction from this very self-contained man, Hogan guessed that there was more behind his wanting to get up than boredom. He wouldn't press the issue. Unless, until he had to, it was really none of his business.

With a deceptively quiet tread, the huge Greek, Andrea padded into the room. His level gaze met Mallory's, his expression equal parts censure and concern. "You wait until I am gone to decide to take a walk, my Keith." Mallory offered no reply, and after a few seconds the Greek merely snorted in exasperated amusement at his colleague's typical reaction to injury, then sat down and casually started to fill his pipe. Hogan poured out another cup of coffee and pushed it over to Andrea who grunted his thanks and continued working on the pipe.

Schloss Konigsfels, near Dusseldorf, 11th March 1944, 1400 hrs.

Since his earlier brief meeting with the American Colonel, Robert Hogan, Standartenfuhrer Haussner had been looking forward to reviewing the records of the man's career and his

sojourn in Stalag 13. If he had correctly assessed the American's intelligence and cunning he felt he could have easily been able to make, at the very least, more successful attempts to escape from Stalag 13. Particularly, he added to himself, as the Kommandant of the camp was a man like Colonel Klink. Even in their brief meeting, Hogan had demonstrated an understanding of Klink that said he was well able to manipulate him should he feel the need.

Why had he not? Haussner could not help but ask himself the question. What reason was there behind Hogan's apparent inability to plan and carry out an effective escape? Prisoners had escaped from other camps, sometimes with an alarming degree of regularity - why not from Stalag 13? He did not believe for one instant Klink's assertion that he ran the toughest POW camp in all Germany. The camp was well managed, certainly. It came as close to the guidelines laid down in the Geneva Convention as any camp that Haussner was aware of, but it was not like the place was comfortable enough for POWs to want to sit the war out there if they had the chance to escape.

Haussner had been frustrated waiting for the records to arrive. The Luftwaffe, who held many of the records, had no reason to show any great consideration to the SS. Further, with the damage to the HQ in Dusseldorf, it was taking much longer than usual to get things done, which had left Haussner nothing to do but theorise.

Finally his aide, Hauptsturmführer von Schleich arrived with the files. Haussner took them like a starving man grasping for a proffered loaf of bread. Without a word of thanks to his aide, he sat down to read. Von Schleich walked quietly over to the gramophone. The machine was one of the best money could buy. His commanding officer liked to have music to think to. He glanced through the extensive collection, noting the requisite number of Wagner pieces which had only occasionally been listened to. It had always amused him that the Nazi party held 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' in such high esteem as a shining example of the Teutonic spirit, given that it told of the downfall of Gods through their own arrogance and foolishness. He'd always thought that 'Parsifal' with its Aryan retelling of the origins of Christianity to be more apropos to the Nazi ideal. Then von Schleich's eyes lighted upon the ideal work for Haussner's mood. He set up the records with the care and expertise of long practice. Soon the trenchant chords and drifting melody of Gounod's opera: Faust, were resounding through the room. From his desk, Haussner glanced up, smiling his appreciation for his aide's selection. Von Schleich bowed slightly and left.

Hogan's file made interesting reading. From the earliest entries detailing his capture and initial interrogation to his extended stay at Stalag 13, it told of a man who should have been easily as capable of escaping from Klink as Haussner suspected. His tactical acumen at leading bombing raids had led to the appointment of a Luftwaffe Colonel, Biedenbender, to analyse both the man and his style. It was largely due to Biedenbender's work that Hogan had been shot down over Hamburg. Interesting, Haussner thought, General Biedenbender (as he

had become) had vanished after carrying out a series of experiments aimed to establish the alleged superiority of Luftwaffe pilots which was based at Stalag 13. The attached report was confused, but it claimed that a nearby refinery had been destroyed the night of Biedenbender's disappearance by a bombing run undertaken by General Biedenbender's own plane.

Looking at the SS and Gestapo files for the region, a pattern gradually appeared. Almost without exception, any project allied to the German war effort that took place anywhere in the vicinity of Hammelburg had been sabotaged in some way. The Gestapo, showing their usual zealotry, had investigated each occurrence and made countless arrests. Not even the implacable Major Hochstetter had been able to conclusively prove the identity of those behind the epidemic of sabotage. Hogan's file was full of comments appended by Hochstetter which showed where the Gestapo major thought a good part of the blame lay.

Was it possible, he mused, to carry out an active sabotage programme whilst imprisoned in a Luft-Stalag? Maybe it was merely co-ordinated from the camp using resistance groups or saboteurs dropped from England. Given Hogan's proven skill at tactical planning it was conceivable, but Hogan was a bomber commander, not a commando. For an instant Haussner entertained the possibility that the prisoner at Stalag 13 was not the real Hogan, or at least not a real Airforce pilot, that he was instead a trained commando. He dismissed the idea immediately: there were too many uncontrolled variables for the British to have risked dropping a commando over Hamburg in the hope that he would be sent to any specific POW camp to run a covert operation. He wondered briefly if Mallory had had any involvement in the business going on around Hammelburg. Unlike Hogan, the man had the background for that sort of work and a history of surviving in enemy territory, but he no longer had Mallory to interrogate. Evidence of the way that his removal from SS HQ Dusseldorf was carried out suggested Gestapo. Except for the detail that even the Gestapo would need a very good reason to assassinate an SS officer and set off a bomb in the HQ, just to cover their acquisition of a prisoner. That part of it did not add up. He knew that there was something he was missing.

But if it was Hogan behind the sabotage in the area, he was not dealing with a conventionally trained commando and saboteur. He was dealing with someone who was clever, adaptable and largely self trained. That meant different tactics from the norm. Haussner sat back, noting with disinterest that it had got dark outside while he had been reading. He needed to talk to Hogan first hand and establish some pattern as to how his mind worked. It was unfortunate about Biedenbender, he shrugged: the man's insights into Hogan's character would have doubtless been quite valuable.

Schloss Konigsfels, near Dusseldorf, 11th March 1944, 2200 hrs.

Even in wartime the advantages of wealth were apparent. Hauptsturmfuhrer Erich von Schleich's family had always been wealthy. With their money in land and property they had weathered the crash of 1929 and the depression of the 1930s better than many. Von Schleich had offered the use of Schloss Konigsfels, his family's country retreat, to Haussner as his temporary base while their HQ was being repaired. His father who was the head of the family, was a Gruppenfuhrer of the Waffen-SS based in Italy. His Grandmother, the Dowager Baroness, was a shrewd, quick-witted old lady who had grown up around politicians and diplomats. She remembered from her youth the glory days of Germany: Bismarck and the Kaiser, before they had all been washed away by the slaughter that had been the Great War and the subsequent ignominy imposed on them by the Treaty of Versailles that had emasculated the country. She was proud of being German, and if it took an upstart little Austrian corporal strutting around, calling himself 'Der Fuhrer' to restore her country to its rightful pre-eminent position, then she would swallow her distaste of the man and support him.

As for her Grandson's superior, Standartenfuhrer Friedrich Haussner, the man had taste and manners certainly, and he looked out for her grandson Erich. That much was apparent. There was just something indefinable about Haussner that made her uncomfortable. Her late husband would have doubtless joked about her female intuition, but she knew: Friedrich Haussner was not a man she ever wanted to have to trust - with anything.

After they had dined, the two men had stood up as the Baroness retired to her music room for the evening. Haussner and von Schleich took their cognacs and settled back in the library. The fire in the grate was beginning to die down, lending a reddish cast to the brown and gilt spines of the books. Von Schleich offered the cigar case to his superior, then took and lit one himself. For a long time Haussner sat in one of the high wing-backed armchairs, staring into the fire. His cigar, unattended in an ashtray, smouldered and finally went out. Von Schleich waited quietly, recognising the signs. When Haussner had played out the options in his mind, he would talk.

Two hours passed. Von Schleich had pulled down a book, laid it on a lectern and was leafing idly through it. The Latin text had been painstakingly inscribed by hand and ornately illuminated. The reading light over the lectern caught the gold leaf, making it blaze a warm orange. His own knowledge of Latin was fleeting, insufficient to grasp more than the gist of the argument being put forward by the author so many centuries before. He glanced upward to see Haussner gazing at him, eyes glittering in the fading light of the fire, a fey smile lending his face an otherworldly countenance.

"I have found the goat whose call may lure our tiger to his doom: a goat so fat and important that the tiger will be tempted to leave its lair and come to us."

"But, won't he realise it's a trap? From what you've said of Colonel Hogan, he is a shrewd and subtle adversary..." von Schleich pointed out cautiously.

"Of course! That's the beauty of it, you see, because the goat will be real enough, if not quite what he believes it to be. If he is in contact with London, as he must be if our suspicions are correct, their intelligence will be able to back up the genuine importance of the bait which we are leaving out for him."

"What bait, sir, if I may ask?"

A beatific smile crossed Haussner's face. "Dora-Mittelbau: it's an old, converted factory complex not far from here in Northern Thuringia. From what our spies tell us, the Allies are aware of the name and they've attached a certain amount of importance to it. I think we should give them a reason as to why it is so important, such as it being part of a project to build a new munitions plant, for example."

"But if the Colonel is as well informed as you believe, surely he will check and find out that there is nothing of any real importance at Dora-Mittelbau, or is there?" protested von Schleich, confused not for the first time by his superior's train of thought.

"Any spies he has contact with will confirm the importance of Dora-Mittelbau. It has indeed been highly important these past few months. If he decides on a sabotage mission, we can have a division waiting there to ensnare him. Given the nature of the project at Dora-Mittelbau, the commander there will be alert for the danger of sabotage and be willing to co-operate."

"But, what if they just send over a bombing raid? What good will that do us? All that will accomplish is the destruction of Dora-Mittelbau and the loss of..." von Schleich paused for a couple of seconds, then asked "What exactly is at Dora-Mittelbau?"

"It is related to a top secret research project. That much, the Allies own intelligence resources will be able to correctly tell them. It is the detail that is important, detail that they are currently missing but which we can provide. We can drop information in London that the site is used for storing fuel, explosives, other munitions." Haussner noticed von Schleich's impatience, and then completed his explanation. "Dora-Mittelbau stores none of these. It is a labour camp where the workers who excavated the real munitions depot are billeted: an easily replaceable resource. Can you imagine the international outcry, the propaganda coup, if the Allies bomb a labour camp?"

Von Schleich felt a chill run down his spine. Haussner was holding out the lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, albeit untermenschen, just to entrap this one American Colonel or embarrass the Allies. The numbers just did not quite seem to add up. It was a terrifyingly elegant plan, however, a win-win situation for the Third Reich, assuming that they no longer had any use for the workers at Dora-Mittelbau.

More than ever, von Schleich was looking forward to meeting this American Colonel who warranted such interest from Haussner.

OSS HQ Grosvenor Square, London, 12th March 1944, 0700 hrs.

It was not the first time she had been inside the London headquarters of the OSS on Grosvenor Square. She had to walk carefully. The Americans tended to notice 'other ranks' more often than their British counterparts. Her papers named her as a volunteer driver working for the war office. The name was one of dozens she had used since the start of her work in London.

She sat in the mess, sipping the foul brew that passed for NAAFI tea. In a moment of rare humour, she wondered how the Allies even managed to fight given the amount of the stuff they went through on a daily basis. Staff walked along the corridor outside, in clear view of those in the mess. Most of the senior officers there she could put a name to. That was part of her job, and it was a job she did very well. With a few exceptions, all of them were in American uniform.

She finished her tea and got up to leave, going out into the corridor. As she turned a corner, she had to pull up sharp to avoid crashing into a bearded British naval officer coming the

other way. The man's face triggered a distant memory from a briefing long before she had been dropped into England. Captain...Jensen? No, the braid on the sleeves made him a Commodore now. He was one of the figures that German Intelligence suspected of being involved in SOE activities in the Mediterranean. If he was here in London...?

Perhaps more interestingly, what was he doing visiting the OSS? She was comfortably aware of the fierce rivalry between the British and American forces not to mention the even deeper rivalry between the SOE and the SAS as well as the various other commando groups. She shrugged mentally. It was not for her to analyse the data, merely to transmit it to her control officer to be sent on to Berlin.

Stalag 13, 12th March 1944, 1000 hrs.

The staff car swung through the gates of Stalag 13 accompanied by the salutes of the guards. Hauptsturmführer Erich von Schleich was looking forward to finally meeting the American who had so occupied his superior's thoughts. Von Schleich knew himself to be no more than a pawn in Haussner's game. He was not concerned. Since he had become Haussner's aide he had developed a near religious faith in the Standartenführer's ability to outthink his opponents. Listening to Haussner describe his plan the previous night had been to von Schleich on par with watching a spider at the centre of an intricate web or a conductor control an orchestra, however ethically disturbing he felt the plan to be. All too often recently Haussner had been disinterested with events as they went on around him, doing little more than was required of him.

First the business with Mallory, and now this suspicion about an American POW. Haussner had seemed almost glad when Mallory had been rescued. Von Schleich understood: Haussner thrived on challenge. To him, lasting success was stagnation. When he had first joined him as his aide, he had been dubious about the posting. Haussner had been with Hitler since before he had taken power back in 1933, yet he was still only a Colonel, while many of his contemporaries were Generals or close advisors to the Führer himself. Von Schleich had wondered why. His original guess, that Haussner was an incompetent, was dropped after he had worked for the man only one day.

Haussner's difficulty was that he was an artist and a genius. Neither were traits that had endeared him to the higher echelons of the party. Haussner had never given himself heart and soul to the Nazi ideal. His innate cynicism seemed to rail against such blind, unquestioning devotion. It was as if he had merely decided that they were going in the same direction, and

he had made himself too useful to them to be disposed of. It had left him with an unusual, slightly untenable position within the Nazi hierarchy: influential beyond his rank only for as long as he was successful, and never likely to advance further.

Von Schleich did not deceive himself. Haussner's patronage was of scant value in the German military. He had remained with the Standartenfuhrer out of loyalty and an odd sense of mutual reliance, however little a word like that seemed to apply to a man such as Haussner. So here he was, von Schleich reflected, visiting a depressing collection of wooden huts and barbed wire for no other reason than because it was part of his superior's plan and perhaps, because he wanted to meet this Colonel Hogan for himself.

The staff car rolled to a halt before the Kommandantur. His own escort opened the door for him. By the time he got out, the camp Kommandant was already hurrying down the steps to meet him, an obsequious smile etched across his face. From Haussner's less than flattering descriptions, he recognised his host as Colonel Wilhelm Klink. Remembering what he had read in the man's file, he decided that it had probably been a huge relief for the Luftwaffe for them to ensure that Klink was kept safely away from any active combat theatre.

"Welcome to Stalag 13, Hauptsturmfuhrer von Schleich. Standartenfuhrer Haussner told us to expect you. Our Stalag is your Stalag," Klink added with a poor attempt at humour.

Von Schleich succeeded in hiding a grimace at the man's ingenuousness and contented himself with returning the Kommandant's salute. Military protocol demanded that as the more junior officer, von Schleich should have been the first to have saluted. Klink had evidently ignored the convention in an obvious attempt to ingratiate himself with a more junior officer, albeit one attached to the SS. Even to von Schleich's eyes the man was transparent. Before he had arrived he had entertained the remote idea that Haussner had been mistaken in his assessment of the Kommandant. Having had the acquaintance of the Colonel for less than a minute to draw on, von Schleich concluded that Haussner was correct. If Hogan was as sharp as Haussner believed him to be, there was no way he would still be this man's prisoner after nearly two years. Add that detail to the now unbelievable record of no successful escapes from the camp, and he could see why Haussner had come to the conclusion that there was something not quite right going on at Stalag 13.

The Kommandant allowed von Schleich to interview Hogan in his office. Regulations required that a Luftwaffe officer be present during any questioning. Klink had been more than willing to oblige von Schleich by forgetting this if it were required. To his surprise, it was not.

It was an odd interview to Klink's way of thinking. It seemed to be no more than a comprehensive review of Hogan's internment at Stalag 13, a book-keeping exercise if anything. Mention was made of the officers who had visited the camp, of the occasions when he had been interrogated by the Gestapo or other members of the SS and of the failed escape attempts. Hauptsturmführer von Schleich seemed good humoured and courteous, taking a genuine interest in some of the less usual incidents which had happened in the vicinity of Stalag 13.

Colonel Hogan was initially somewhat thrown off balance by von Schleich's attitude. He had become too used to having to sit through bombastic tirades about the invincibility of the Third Reich and the Nazi war machine, often punctuated by threats, some of which were carried out. He recognised the trap: put a person in a stressful situation, then lull them into a false sense of security and they might let something slip. Hogan kept up his guard throughout the conversation, matching the Hauptsturmführer courtesy for courtesy. He had relatively few problems remembering the explanations which had been filed with Berlin to explain away the alarming numbers of mishaps and odd incidents in the Hammelburg area. He had suggested many of them to Klink himself.

Klink, not perceiving any threat to his own standing or reputation, kept silent apart from a few endorsements of Hogan's explanations of events. They finally finished talking mid afternoon. Hogan was dismissed back to his barracks, and Klink escorted von Schleich down to his car.

"I trust that you found everything satisfactory, Hauptsturmführer. We pride ourselves on our security and our attention to detail here at Stalag 13."

"Quite satisfactory, thank you Kommandant. Your co-operation has, so far, been exemplary."

"So far?" interjected Klink, a note of caution entering his voice.

"As I said, Kommandant. I will be returning tomorrow to pick up Colonel Hogan: Standartenführer Haussner wishes to interview him." Von Schleich noticed the worried expression on Klink's face. "Please understand, Kommandant, it is no reflection on your excellent arrangements here at Stalag 13. Indeed, the Standartenführer himself briefed me on your outstanding record of preventing any escapes from here."

"Yes, my record here is outstanding, isn't it," Klink preened. "I shall expect you tomorrow, then. Auf wiedersehen."

So easy, mused von Schleich as the car pulled away from the camp, the merest hint of censure and for the Kommandant nothing becomes too much trouble. The skill with which Colonel Hogan comported himself throughout their conversation had impressed him. If not for Haussner's comments about the man on the previous evening, he would have most likely been convinced by Hogan's deferential, sometimes even submissive attitude.

Forewarned, von Schleich had made a point of studying the Colonel closely. He had seen the quick flash of intelligence in the man's eyes as he easily manoeuvred around von Schleich's questioning. He still could not see whatever it was that Haussner believed was going on involving Hogan, but he accepted that if he wanted to, the American could have done far more to escape than he apparently had.

Allied HQ, London, 13th March 1944, 0700 hrs.

No one noticed him. It was just as he always hoped. His was an unmemorable face, a priceless asset in his line of work. He was the kind of person that people figured knew them when he nodded in greeting but whom they had forgotten being introduced to. The credentials with which he had obtained entry to the building were excellent, created by the best forgers that were working for the SD. When he spoke, he spoke fluent, idiomatic English with a faint but definite Somerset accent. He was proud of the accent, something that had taken him nearly a year to perfect. It was just sufficient to lull listeners into accepting him as the Londoner's stereotype of a slow-witted West Country yokel, an impression he did nothing to alter.

For two years he had been one of the top Nazi spies in Britain. He had worked quietly, softly and meticulously. He had delivered no great intelligence coups, nor had he been obliged to draw attention to his actions through unreasonable demands from his own Control. His own circumspection and preparation had kept him from ever falling under the slightest suspicion.

His current task was straightforward: to add a fake intelligence report to those legitimately gathered by the Allies. The danger lay with getting caught carrying the faked report. There

would be no credible way to explain that away. He did not know what was in the report or why it had to be delivered. He did not need to know. It was better that way.

With a casual gait he walked through offices thronged with people even early in the morning. As a junior NCO of the signals corps he blended perfectly with the environment; just another man who was going about his duty. In his hands was a pile of documents which his cover had required him to deliver. Tucked underneath them was the other report. He reached the outside office of Group Captain Howard. Howard's secretary was not at her desk. Ideally he would have liked to deliver the report to General Parnell, but this slip by the Group Captain's secretary was too good to pass up. He put down the pile of papers he had been carrying and with a quick, surreptitious movement slid the report in amongst the others on the secretary's desk. Two doors down as he delivered the documents, he noticed the secretary return, apparently none the wiser to the addition to her desk.

An amateur would have left then, he thought to himself, but he was no amateur. The brief flash of pride caught him by surprise. He quelled the emotion, disgusted at himself for the slip. There was no place for pride or any other emotion in his line of work, at least not until the war was done and the Reich was victorious. That evening, no one took any notice as he left work.

Stalag 11, 13th March 1944, 1100 hrs.

Mallory arrived at Stalag 11 dressed in German uniform as a Major of the WGB. Since leaving Crete and starting a long succession of "little jobs" for Commodore Jensen, he guessed he had worn some variation of the German uniform more often than he had his own. He was still tired and his body ached from the privations of the previous week, but with the pills given to him by Dr Freiling to dull the pain, he figured he was able to function well enough to start to earn his keep.

He had to admit that Colonel Hogan's people had done a good job on the uniform and papers, especially considering the conditions they were working under. Now it was up to him to impersonate a German soldier - again.

From what they had discovered about the Kommandant of Stalag 11, he was an officer of the old school, unlikely to be overly impressed by a visitor from the SS or even the Abwehr.

Furthermore, if the Gestapo still had people at the Stalag, they would be more likely to ignore a visit by an officer of the regular army than one from an intelligence or security division. It gave Mallory a feeling of sardonic amusement to wear the uniform of a Major of the Wurttembergische Gebirgsbataillon, the WGB, the German Army's elite mountain troops who had spent eighteen months pursuing him in Crete and then later on Navarone.

The plan was simple. Mallory, or Major Anton Heiden as he was, would arrive in his car complaining of engine trouble while on his way back from medical leave due to injuries received on the Eastern Front. He was forced to admit that even after the rest he had had, he still looked ill enough for the scenario to be credible. Andrea, in his guise as Feldwebel Otto Schwede, drove the car.

The car pulled to a halt in front of the Kommandantur and Andrea got out to open the door for Mallory. He slowly got out of the car, bracing himself against it to forestall the brief rush of dizziness that the movement had caused. He glanced up to see Andrea's dark eyes studying him with scantily hidden concern. Mallory straightened, nodded reassurance to his friend and prepared himself to greet the camp's commanding officer. Major Hilgenfeldt stepped forward to meet Mallory once he had got out of the car. "Welcome to Stalag 11, Major...?"

"Heiden, Anton Heiden," Mallory supplied. As soon as he heard Mallory's Heidelberg-accented German, the Kommandant felt an immediate sense of fellowship with the tall WGB officer. He had studied at Heidelberg and had been a member of the University's duelling society.

"I am Ulrich Hilgenfeldt, grounded from the Luftwaffe for the duration," returned the Kommandant, indicating the patch over his eye. "Forgive me, Major, but you were at Heidelberg?"

Mallory felt a flash of concern. The camp's Kommandant was younger than he. Mallory had spent some time in Heidelberg long before the war back in the 1920s, probably before Hilgenfeldt's time. He did not want to bring up any dangerous memories, but..."Yes, I was there for a while." He hoped that vague statement would be enough to assuage the Major's curiosity.

"Then you must join me for dinner. It is so seldom I get the chance to talk. Running a POW camp is a tedious, sordid business: all tunnels and subterfuge and deception from the prisoners. Then there's the Gestapo strutting around like they own the place because they

have decided to place a detainee here. It is good to see another regular officer instead of those SS. Oh, the Waffen-SS aren't so bad, I suppose. Maybe they're a little brutal in their methods, but at least they do their part of the fighting unlike the verdammt Gestapo and Allgemeine-SS who just spend their time making life miserable for loyal German soldiers." Hilgenfeldt paused in his tirade and offered a wry glance at Mallory. "If I carry on like this, dinner will be one of those annoying meals where one person talks and everybody else gets to listen. You really must stop me when I start to go on like that. So, Major, what have you been up to recently?"

"I've spent quite a lot of time in the White Mountains of Crete..." began Mallory honestly as they headed towards Hilgenfeldt's office.

Gestapo HQ, Hammelburg, 13th March 1944, 1500 hrs.

Gestapo headquarters was sited in too elegant a building for its role, thought Haussner as his driver opened the car door for him. Once it had been a graceful townhouse, perhaps the residence of some well-to-do businessman or official. The Gestapo presence had not improved it.

Haussner climbed the stairs, noting the black uniformed guards who snapped to attention as he passed. He disdained to acknowledge them. The youthful officer on duty sprang to his feet as Haussner approached, and called out a loud and enthusiastic "Heil Hitler!" He studied the boy for a moment and casually, silently returned the salute.

"My name is Haussner. I am here to see Major Hochstetter. You will be so kind as to take me to him."

The suddenly flustered officer checked a diary on the desk in front of him. He took his duties seriously and had already reviewed the appointments for the day. He knew that Haussner's name could not have miraculously appeared there. "I beg your pardon, Standartenfuhrer, but there appears to have been an oversight. Your name is not on Major Hochstetter's schedule for today."

"I did not say I had made an appointment, I merely said that I am here to see him," retorted Haussner, allowing a calculated trace of impatience to colour his tone. "What is your name?"

"Untersturmführer Max Schaeffer, of the Hammelburg Abschnitte," he replied at a parade brace, eyes staring straight ahead over Haussner's left shoulder.

"Well, Untersturmführer Max Schaeffer," purred Haussner, "as I see it you have two options: either you arrange for me to be escorted to Major Hochstetter immediately, or you will be Untersturmführer Max Schaeffer, commander and only member of the Russian Front Abschnitte. I leave the choice entirely to your discretion."

Schaeffer paled. "Zu befehl, Standartenführer, if you will follow me please..."

Haussner smiled faintly to himself as he followed Schaeffer. He could no more have arranged for the boy's transfer than he could Hochstetter's, however much he wished he could do the latter. In this Abschnitte, he had neither the authority nor the contacts, not that young Schaeffer could have been expected to realise that. Hochstetter would have already made enquiries about his level of influence, and would have to be dealt with differently if it came down to it.

Hochstetter had managed to acquire one of the better rooms in the converted house. Its previous role of a formal dining room could just be discerned beneath the additions made by the Gestapo to turn it into an office. Hochstetter, a slightly built man, was dwarfed behind the imposing bulk of his desk. He was evidently unprepared for Haussner's visit, scowling with dislike as Schaeffer showed him in.

"Standartenführer Haussner, what a pleasant surprise!" Hochstetter managed to get out, "I had not expected to see you here after the recent... events... in Dusseldorf. I hear that the bombing raid made quite a mess of the SS headquarters there."

Haussner could hear the gleeful satisfaction in the man's voice. Since they had met nearly ten years earlier during Hitler's purge of undesirables in the SA in what had become known as 'The Night of the Long Knives' they had developed a mutual and lasting dislike. They had managed to avoid each other most of the intervening time out of a realisation that continuing their feud would likely cause significant damage to both their careers.

"It could have been worse. It was in fact very fortunate that the Reichsinspektorgeneral was not killed. That would have reflected poorly on you as you were the one who arranged his presence." Haussner was fishing. Hochstetter's interference was the only logical, plausible reason for the Reichsinspektorgeneral to be there with papers ordering the transfer to Berlin of his prisoner, Mallory. At Hochstetter's silence, Haussner continued. "Of course you know that the prisoner whom the Reichsinspektorgeneral came to collect was not found in his cell after the attack. In fact, papers recording the prisoner's release into the charge of an ersatz Reichsinspektorgeneral have been recovered. Witnesses have even said that he was escorted by a group of the SD, including a Sturmbannfuhrer wearing a uniform that alleged him to be on Himmler's staff. Look at it this way, Hochstetter, the SS do not have the prisoner, nor does the Reichsinspektorgeneral, or even the Abwehr for that matter. Who else does that leave who was interested in him?" asked Haussner silkily with a pointed glance at Hochstetter. "I mean, who would have access to the information needed to get hold of the currently missing Captain Mallory? Oh, don't get me wrong...I'm making no accusations, but you can see how it would look should anyone care to start an investigation."

Hochstetter was smart and politically adept enough to see the barely veiled threat. He was fairly certain that Haussner had no real conviction that he was behind Mallory's disappearance, but as he had pointed out, there were sufficient coincidences there to make it look suspicious. Hochstetter was all too aware of how damaging even suspicions of wrongdoing could be. It would just depend on where Haussner was going with this conversation. Somewhere along the way Haussner would make a slip, and Hochstetter wanted to be on hand to make sure he never got up again.

Schloss Konigsfels, near Dusseldorf, 13th March 1944, 1700 hrs.

Hogan could barely suppress his trepidation as the staff car approached the main gates of the building. To his eyes the place bore an uncomfortable resemblance to a medieval fortress, all dark stone and gothic detail. It looked disturbingly as he imagined a film director would envisage the hideout of some Nazi mastermind in one of the Saturday morning serials. In the gathering dusk, the place squatted in the surrounding forest like some malignant growth. Hogan smiled wryly at the image. The sheer theatricality of the place was clearly getting to him. The smile faded as he realised that that could well have been Haussner's intent.

It had taken nearly two hours to drive from Stalag 13. His escort, Hauptsturmfuhrer von Schleich had been considerate in the extreme, even stopping the car half way there giving Hogan a chance to admire the countryside from the crest of a hill. The two schmeisser-

carrying guards gave him the illusion of space, but no more. Hogan was confused. He had had run-ins with the SS before. In the past they had involved pain or the threat of pain, not von Schleich's genial 'appreciate-the-beautiful-German-countryside tour'. Before he had left Stalag 13 he had given Kinch orders to get everyone out at the first inklings of trouble. He had seen what the SS had done to Mallory and had been half-expecting similar treatment despite his status as a bona fide POW.

Von Schleich watched the American Colonel. He had seen the tension in the man's posture as he had climbed into the car back at the camp. The other POWs had been looking on anxiously, evidently concerned for the welfare of their CO. As he had climbed into the car, von Schleich had noticed that Hogan had nodded at a group of four men stood in front of one of the barracks. He could not tell if it was a signal of some kind or just a 'don't worry about me, I'll manage' gesture. One of the group, a Negro, had nodded back. It was odd, thought von Schleich, that it had been the Negro who had apparently been the senior of those four, despite their virtual parity of rank. He would relate the incident to Haussner when he had the chance. He had learned long ago that the Standartenfuhrer appreciated and paid attention to details such as that. Now it seemed like the American was off balance as had been Haussner's intention all along.

The car pulled to a halt in front of a shallow flight of stairs leading up to a substantial wooden door that was open. Light flooded out into the courtyard from the room beyond. Von Schleich escorted Hogan up the stairs. Inside the building, a youth wearing an SS full dress uniform came up to them. To Hogan's surprise the salute was offered to him rather than von Schleich. As a full Colonel, he outranked von Schleich by two grades as von Schleich's SS rank of Hauptsturmfuhrer equated to an army captain, but it was unusual to have it so clearly acknowledged by one of the SS. With a hint of bemusement Hogan returned the salute the young cadet had been holding.

Another cadet came up to take hats and coats with the sort of courtesy Hogan had experienced only at formal gatherings back in Britain and the US. The hall he stood in was huge: massive carved stone pillars and a vaulted ceiling built of heavy timbers. Tapestries that must have been hundreds of years old adorned the walls. The sole concession to the presence of the Third Reich was a pair of red, black and white Nazi banners hung from the upstairs balcony.

"Welcome to Schloss Konigsfels, Colonel Hogan." Hogan turned at the sound of the distinctly cultured female voice. The words had been spoken in German-accented English with the sort of aristocratic tones that had grated on Hogan's ears during his time in London. Here, the environment seemed to demand them. Sweeping down the stairs with the grace of a practised society hostess was a woman, dignified in old age, dressed in an evening gown. Von

Schleich hastened to meet her, putting out his hand to lead her down the final steps. There was a sense about her of a regal splendour that had walked out of an old painting.

Von Schleich led her to Hogan. "Grandmother, I would like to introduce you to Colonel Robert Hogan of the United States Army Air Corps. Colonel Hogan, I have the honour to introduce you to the Dowager Baroness von Schleich whose house this is."

The Baroness held out her hand. Hogan took it and bent over it. From the expression in the Baroness's face it had been the right thing to do. Thank God for Hollywood, Hogan thought, then continued: "Thank you for the invitation, Baroness, it is a magnificent house. May I ask, when was it built?"

The small talk carried on as the Baroness took Hogan's left arm and directed him into an elegantly appointed drawing room complete with roaring fire and a stag's head above the mantelpiece. Two more cadets were there, clearly in the role of stewards for the evening. A gramophone played in the corner. Hogan could almost place the music, an English composer - Elgar? From one of the massive knole sofas a man stood up. He was in the full dress uniform of a Standartenfuhrer: Haussner.

"Good to see you again, Colonel Hogan. The Baroness was visiting briefly from Berlin and had suggested dinner, and I recalled meeting you at that miserable Stalag, so I took the liberty of asking her to invite you to join us. I do hope the short notice has not inconvenienced you in any way."

Struggling to reclaim a degree of equanimity, Hogan replied: "No, no, not at all. We had to cancel the gala musical evening we had planned anyway: something to do with having no music and no instruments. Still, I am reliably informed that there is a war on."

Haussner smiled thinly at Hogan's wit. The Baroness, good hostess to the core, laughed lightly but without genuine amusement at the joke. Von Schleich merely raised an eyebrow then snapped his fingers in the direction of one of the cadets who hurried forward carrying a silver tray on which was a crystal decanter and glasses.

"Sherry?" He offered. Hogan sighed. It was going to be a long evening. He was going to have to be very careful indeed as to what he said. A line from a nursery rhyme popped into his head - come into my parlour, said the spider to the fly...

Stalag 11, 13th March 1944, 2030 hrs.

Major Hilgenfeldt had decided that the presence of the WGB Major, Anton Heiden, warranted a decent attempt at an evening meal. He had a few subordinates at Stalag 11 whom he invited as well as the British senior POW officer, Squadron Leader George Thurleigh, and Doctor Edith de Momerie Windermere, detained at his Stalag under the auspices of the Gestapo. His gentlemanly upbringing did not allow him to think of refusing her an invitation, whatever her surly Gestapo minder might say. As for Thurleigh, Major Hilgenfeldt retained a fair degree of respect for the RAF officer, despite knowing of his involvement in arranging some of the successful escapes from the Stalag. They were both career military men in a war that was over-populated, to Hilgenfeldt's way of thinking, by enthusiastic amateurs.

Dinner was catered for by the kitchen of a local Gasthaus, while a group of prisoners provided the waiters. The meal was stolid and unimaginative but nevertheless considerably better than the fare produced by the kitchen at Stalag 11. The conversation over the meal was a testament both to their depth of experiences and their united ability to avoid any subject that might have had any sort of bearing on the war. Their over-dinner discussions ranged from big game hunting, a subject on which the Fraulein Doktor appeared unusually well informed, and archaeology through to music, drama and travel.

After dinner they sat in Major Hilgenfeldt's comfortable, if slightly austere, sitting room drinking schnapps. The prisoners who had acted as waiters throughout dinner had been dismissed to their barracks once the meal was over. The conversation, which had by that point drifted to the relative merits of Bordeaux and Burgandy wines was interrupted by a deferential knock on the door. At Hilgenfeldt's acknowledgement, a plump, cherubic faced corporal entered and saluted.

"Excuse me, Herr Major, but there is a telephone call for you from Berlin, a General Kinchendorff. He says it's urgent."

"Kinchendorff? I don't think I'm acquainted with the General, how about you Heiden?" said Hilgenfeldt.

Mallory thought for a moment. Hogan had a German speaking sergeant called Kinchloe who said he would arrange to distract Hilgenfeldt to give him a chance to speak to Doctor Windermere or Thurleigh, but surely he would not have the brass to imitate a German General. Then he thought of the rest of Hogan's bizarre operation and the idea suddenly became far less implausible. Thinking quickly he said "The name's familiar but I've never met the General in person."

Hilgenfeldt shrugged. "Duty calls, if you would excuse me please." He clicked his heels in a curt bow to Edith Windermere and left for his office.

Alone in the room with Edith and Thurleigh, Mallory dropped his German accent. "Excuse the charade, Squadron Leader, Doctor Windermere, but I've come from Papa Bear." Thurleigh's eyebrows lifted in blank disbelief. Mallory had made a convincing German, far too convincing for comfort. Edith's glance was still suspicious: Anton Heiden, or whoever he was, now spoke perfect English. He had also spoken German just as perfectly. Meanwhile, Mallory was reaching into the attaché case he had brought with him. He pulled out a small package wrapped in brown paper and handed it to Thurleigh. "Radio parts," he explained, "Papa Bear said you needed them to repair your set. He suggested that I deliver them while I'm here."

"And why are you here... Major?" asked Edith. Her medical experience was more than sufficient to notice the man's unhealthy pallor and the occasional slight tremors that spoke of a weakness he was nearly managing to conceal. Whatever else she thought he might have been lying about, she knew he had been injured, and recently.

"Reconnaissance, Doctor, as well as to ensure we have good lines of communication in place before we take you away from all this," he finished with a half smile. Edith unwillingly smiled back: the situation did not seem to offer much in the way of hope, but it was the best thing that she had heard since she had arrived in Germany.

A few minutes later, Hilgenfeldt returned. "The inefficiency of the current telephone system is beyond belief," he complained, "they cut off General Kinchendorff before I had a chance to find out why the General had called. If it is really so important, doubtless he will call back. Now, where were we...?"

Stalag 13, 14th March 1944, 0900 hrs.

It was LeBeau who first noticed the approach of the staff car. When Hogan had not returned last night, they had feared the worst. The atmosphere in the camp was jumpy. The air of casualness that Hogan had brought to the place was somehow missing: the guards were acting more like guards, the prisoners more like prisoners. As had been arranged, Kinch was in temporary charge of the operation. Even the other officers in the camp had to admit that the Negro sergeant was better able to run the operation than they were. Kinch, however, was not Hogan, and he was worried about the man he considered one of his best friends. He was sitting in the subterranean radio room, wondering what to tell London about their missing Colonel when LeBeau called down with the news of the car, the same car that Hogan had left in the previous day.

Kinch left the radio, climbed up the hidden ladder and left the barracks. In the short space of time since LeBeau had first noticed the car, word had got around the compound, so that by the time the car pulled up in front of the Kommandantur, a crowd had gathered. LeBeau, Newkirk and Carter had found their way unnoticed to Kinch's side. The door opened and an SS Hauptsturmführer got out. Every one of the prisoners was dreading seeing what condition their Colonel had been returned in.

Hogan unsteadily got out of the car then leaned against it, head clutched in his hands. A frisson of anger rippled through the crowd of waiting POWs. The guards picked up on the mood and rifles were brought to bear. The Colonel seemed to notice the disturbance for the first time and turned around. His face was ashen. Unable to wait, Kinch moved forwards, daring the guns of both the SS and their own Stalag 13 guards. He moved slowly, hands up. The now silent crowd watched him, praying that the next sound they heard would not be a gun shot.

Klink hurried down the steps from the Kommandantur and stopped, feeling the tension that hung over the parade ground in front of his office. The Hauptsturmführer broke the silence with a curt: "Take him to his quarters," directed at Kinch. Then he noticed the presence of the Kommandant, saluted briskly and without waiting for a reply, he turned on his heel, got back into his car and drove off. Klink held his return salute until the car cleared the gate, then looked for Hogan.

Taking advantage of the moment, Kinch got to Hogan and steadied him. Neither of them noticed the Kommandant watching them. Newkirk moved to the Colonel's other side and together they got him back to his quarters. Gratefully Hogan collapsed onto his bunk, and

closed his eyes with a groan. Moments later he opened them again, to peer questioningly at the four men who were still watching him.

Characteristically, it was Kinch who spoke first. "What did they do to you, Colonel?" His voice was quiet, concerned.

Hogan had closed his eyes again. He could not remember his quarters ever being so bright. At least lying down his head was beginning to stop spinning. The journey from the Schloss had been as close to purgatory as he ever wanted to get. He could not recall how many times they had had to stop the car to allow him to throw up.

"Colonel?" Prompted Kinch gently.

"Don't worry, it's just a hangover," Hogan finally muttered. Oh God, was it a hangover! He swore to himself never again to mix cocktails, wine, cognac and schnapps, no matter how politely he was asked. His last conscious thoughts as he drifted off to sleep were how the hell he had managed to get so drunk, so quickly, especially considering how much of the drinks had ended up being surreptitiously tipped into flower pots over the course of the evening. More relevantly, he wondered whether he had unwittingly said anything that Haussner might be able to use. It did not make for restful dreams.

Stalag 13, 14th March 1944, 1100 hrs.

The sky was leaden with the threat of rain by the time Mallory and Andrea got back to Stalag 13. The gloom and murkiness gave them the advantage they had needed to slip quickly into the escape tunnel hidden in the tree stump. Mallory was unable to restrain a faintly disbelieving grin at the incongruity of it all, despite having exited the same way. The idea of running a sabotage ring from within a POW camp was something it would take him a while to get used to. He stole a glance at Andrea. As usual, the immense Greek was taking it all in his stride. In the few reflective moments his job offered, Mallory did occasionally wonder what it would take to break through his friend's monumental equanimity.

Down in the tunnel, they changed back into clothing more suited to POWs. There were sufficient prisoners at Stalag 13 that, outside of roll calls, they could spend some time

upstairs out of the tunnel system. The guards generally knew only the faces of the prisoners of whatever barracks they were assigned to. Unknown faces would naturally be assumed to be prisoners from one of the other barracks. The other POWs had taken the presence of their three visitors completely in their stride. Hogan had told Mallory that no-one outside of Hogan's Barracks knew of their identity or their link with the SOE. As far as the camp at large was aware, Mallory and the others were just another group of Allied soldiers who had been forced to take an extended lay-over at Stalag 13 as so many others had done before them.

Stalag 13, 14th March 1944, 1500 hrs.

Hogan had scarcely recovered from his hangover when Kinch warned him that von Schleich's staff car had pulled up in front of the Kommandantur. He was no stranger to either getting drunk, or hung over, but the previous night's drinking session had left an odd, unfamiliar taste in his mouth. If Haussner had in mind a repeat performance then this time he would be prepared.

He had been sitting in the main part of the barracks drinking coffee when Schultz came in to deliver the expected summons to the Kommandant's office. As he crossed the compound he became aware of the side-ward glances of other POWs as he passed. He noticed Mallory lounging against the wall of one of the other barracks. The New Zealander was still pale, and though he tried, he could not always hide the painful twinge that his cracked rib sometimes caused him. Miller and Andrea were only yards away, playing a game of draughts, but close enough to lend support to their CO should he need it.

Newkirk, LeBeau and Carter were on clean-up duty around the Kommandantur. They watched Hogan as he approached the building. None said a word. They did not need to: after so long working together, there were some things that did not need to be said to be expressed, like their concern over their Colonel being under such close scrutiny by an SS officer. They had worked for Hogan long enough to know that he was uncomfortable about this SS Colonel, Haussner; uncomfortable as much as, if not more for their operation at Stalag 13 as he was for his own safety, according to Kinch.

Kommandant Klink came down the steps of the Kommandantur chatting amicably with Hauptsturmführer von Schleich. The latter noted Hogan's presence and offered the American a respectful salute.

"Good afternoon, Colonel Hogan. I trust you are feeling better: you seemed a little... unwell... when we left this morning. The Baroness offers her regrets, but she has prior engagements this afternoon, however, Standartenfuhrer Haussner requests the pleasure of your company. Shall we go?"

Hogan returned the salute. Requests the pleasure of my company, he thought cynically; a request to be backed up with a couple of schmeissers if he should even think of trying to demur. He climbed into the back of the car in silent acquiescence of the 'invitation' that he had been issued. Von Schleich got in beside him and the car accelerated through the gates.

Schloss Konigsfels, near Dusseldorf, 14th March 1944, 1630 hrs.

The journey to Schloss Konigsfels passed in relative silence. Von Schleich had made an unconvincing effort at small talk to occupy the time, but Hogan's virtually monosyllabic responses had not encouraged him to continue. He had only learnt that morning that Standartenfuhrer Haussner had doped some of the drinks that the American had been given. He had questioned Haussner about it after he had noticed Hogan surreptitiously emptying most of them into flower pots or other convenient containers. To a certain extent it made him feel guilty, that Haussner had done that to a man who had nominally been a guest of the von Schleich family. The old habits of courtesy and hospitality sometimes died hard: it was one thing to ply someone with alcohol to such an extent that they let slip important information, it was quite another to drug them if they had refused to drink.

There was a wariness about Colonel Hogan now and a sense of competence that had not been so apparent the last time they had met. For the first time von Schleich could understand the threat that Haussner had sensed, the threat the man could pose to the German Reich. He had initially felt Haussner's attitude to be paranoid, perhaps brought on by the escape of his prisoner - Mallory. The man had, after all, been taken from inside SS HQ itself under the noses of hundreds of SS troops. Haussner clearly believed the American to be responsible for that in some way. Now von Schleich was beginning to believe it too.

In the daylight Hogan decided the Schloss looked less melodramatic. The harshly unforgiving light of the sun revealed the cracks in the ancient structure and the flaking paint work. SS troops stood on guard around the perimeter as befitted the Schloss's current role as a temporary base of a senior SS officer. He went inside and was led into a magnificent drawing

room, decorated in the baroque taste. He had not seen the room on his earlier visit, but mentally acknowledged the psychological advantage that Haussner had taken in choosing an unfamiliar room for their current meeting. Haussner was stood beside the massive fireplace as he entered.

"Welcome back, my dear Colonel Hogan. I trust you are fully recovered from yesterday's pardonable excesses. I should have realised that after the time you've spent as a POW, that you have not had much opportunity to drink. I'm afraid that the Baroness's excellent Napoleon 1800 has a very salutary effect even on those used to it. Please accept my apologies."

"Not at all, Standartenfuhrer, the brandy was quite remarkable as was the choice of wines throughout the meal," replied Hogan, maintaining the polite facade.

Haussner smiled his appreciation at his opponent's composure: Hogan had, it seemed, worked out the cause of his apparent inebriation. It was these sort of mind games and verbal fencing that made life interesting to a man like Haussner. "Some coffee then, Colonel? Then, would you care to join me in a game of chess while we talk?"

Hogan returned Haussner's smile and sat down as the pieces were set up for the game.

Schloss Konigsfels, near Dusseldorf, 14th March 1944, 2030 hrs.

Hogan sat opposite Haussner, studying the man as much as the chess pieces for some clue as to the trap he was doubtless going to fall into this time. He had always considered himself to be quite a good chess player, but after the past few hours the opinion that he had held of his own ability was being rapidly revised downwards. The first game that they had played had been, for Hogan, a salutary lesson in the dangers of overconfidence. In subsequent games he had managed to hold his own for a little while before falling into a succession of elegantly laid traps that had to have been thought out by Haussner a dozen moves in advance.

Their current game had already been going on for an hour. Hogan's coffee, long cooled, sat forgotten at the side of the board as he studied the position, running through the permutations offered. Several moves previously he had had to take the decision to concentrate on a

defensive game as the possibilities for Haussner to launch an attack were becoming ever more apparent. As it was, he did not spot it when it came before it was too late. What had started out on Haussner's part as nothing more threatening than a simple exchange of minor pieces escalated rapidly into what Hogan could only describe a chess version of Armageddon. Ten moves later, the board was almost empty and Hogan was again obliged to concede defeat as his position had rapidly become untenable. He could not help but wonder if the ruthless brilliance with which the man used then sacrificed chess pieces extended to whatever plans Haussner had in mind for him.

"Thank you for another interesting game, Colonel Hogan. Most educational. I'm afraid, though, that until you manage to curb your tendencies to impetuosity that you will encounter problems playing chess at a high level. You do however show a certain amount of potential, and with a little more self discipline, as well as a little less impatience I think you could do quite well," Haussner allowed. Some of Hogan's tactical moves during the games they had played had made for a few interesting moments. The American had lost though because he did not look far enough ahead. Superior tactics might win a battle, but it was superior strategy that won wars.

Hogan did not reply to the Standartenfuhrer's somewhat condescending assessment of his chess playing skills. He could feel himself growing angry at the man's casual dismissal of his ability, then paused. Was it merely a ploy on Haussner's part, to get him angry, off-balance? Was it just chess that Haussner was referring to in his assessment? Hogan had thought Mallory was hard to read, but he was discovering that Haussner could be utterly opaque - as he was now.

"That will be all for this evening, Hogan. Von Schleich will see you back to Stalag 13." Haussner reset the chess pieces, not even glancing up as he summarily dismissed Hogan as if he was no longer of any relevance to him.

Stalag 13, 14th March 1944, 2300 hrs.

Once von Schleich's car had dropped Hogan off in front of the Kommandantur and his return had been logged by Schultz, the sergeant escorted him back to the barracks. The Colonel seemed more pensive than he usually was, and his trademark quirky grin was notably absent. When he thought about it, Schultz had to admit that he had a great deal of respect for the American Colonel; more respect than he had for many officers on his own side. He knew that the prisoners sometimes got up to some occasional monkey business, but they had the

decency to make sure that it was done, so far as it was possible, behind his back so he did not have to find out about it. That way, everyone was happy.

Inside the barracks all the prisoners who were billeted there were awake. Schultz was unsurprised: Hogan's men felt a great deal of loyalty towards their Colonel, and his recent spate of interviews with the SS had made all of them concerned. Most of them could recall unpleasant encounters with SS interrogators when they had been captured. Schultz, older than all the prisoners in barracks 5, bade them a faintly paternal "gute Nacht, meine Kleinen. Schlaft gut." and left. Before the door had fully closed behind him, the men of Hogan's staff headed for his office.

Hogan glanced up, a reassuringly warm smile on his otherwise tired features. "Shouldn't you guys be asleep by now," he mock-chided them.

"Yeah, well you see guv'nor, when yer stuck in the same room as Carter 'ere an' 'e's worried 'bout somethin', 'e snores an' there's no way anyone else's goin' to get a moment's kip."

"I do not snore!" Carter protested, then with less certainty added, "do I?" Newkirk's return grin robbed his earlier words of any bite.

Sergeant Kinchloe, more serious minded than his cohorts, asked the question they all wanted to ask but could not. "What's going on with this SS guy, Haussner? Does he have any sort of handle on our operation here?" Hogan said nothing in reply, evidently lost in thought. Kinch continued with quiet insistence, "Colonel, we need to know."

"I'm not trying to hide something from you, it's just that I haven't quite got the extent of Haussner's knowledge figured out yet. There's a lot of stuff he suspects about what's going on here; some of it's flat wrong, but a lot of it is too close to the truth for comfort."

An uncomfortable silence settled over the group at Hogan's admission. Kinch broke it. "So what are we going to do about it Colonel, and what do we do about these 'little jobs' that London's given us to do. I don't see how we can get out of camp to do anything while we've got the SS watching us, waiting for us to slip up." Kinch's voice was level, reasonable yet somehow conveyed his sense of exasperation at the demands that London continually, often unrealistically made of them. The problem, he had long ago decided, was that Colonel Hogan

was too good at accomplishing tasks that other, more reasonable men would have point blank refused to accept.

"Right now, I'm not sure. I've got some ideas but Captain Mallory and his people are involved in this as well, so I'll have a talk with him and see what he thinks. Go on, why don't you turn in, it's late."

They turned and left apart from Kinch who lingered by the door. He had known Hogan longer than any of them, and the Colonel's current indecision was unusual enough to merit comment. He shut the door behind him and went back to sit at the rickety table that served as Hogan's desk. "What is it?"

Hogan leaned back in his bunk, frowning. "We played chess all afternoon. No interrogation, no threats, no lamp shining into my eyes, no third degree, just chess. I lost. Badly. Every game. He was always at least five moves ahead of me, almost like he could read my mind and knew what move I was going to make before I made it. At the end of each game he'd critique it, his tactics as well as mine. It was like playing against a machine that just couldn't lose."

Kinch steepled his fingers, considering Hogan's words. The Colonel had always relied on out-thinking his opposition, something he normally managed with insouciant ease. Kinch had never met Haussner, but already disliked him for what he was doing to his usually enormously self-assured Commanding Officer. He shrugged mentally, then turned to Hogan. "So far as I'm concerned, Colonel, all that proves is that he can play chess."

The frown receded slowly from Hogan's brow, then he looked at his sergeant, a wry smile on his face. "Thanks, Kinch. Now you turn in as well, and give me a chance to think things through."

"Night, Colonel." Kinch pulled the door closed behind him. Hogan lay back in his bunk, eyes half closed as he began to plot out the moves of his own chess game.

Gestapo HQ, Hammelburg, 15th March 1944, 1000 hrs.

The next day a tired Colonel Hogan was mentally kicking himself for his complacency. When the staff car had arrived to pick him up, both he and Klink had assumed it had been sent by Haussner. The car had been the same make and model as von Schleich's and the guards had worn the same uniforms. It had only been after leaving Stalag 13 that he had figured out the mistake. The guards had handcuffed him and thrown a hood over his head. When he had asked the Untersturmfuhrer in charge what was going on, he had received sharp jab from a rifle-butt to the ribs.

Either the SS Standartenfuhrer had made a major change of technique or he had been picked up by someone else. He just could not figure out the need for such a deception...unless their intent was that he should disappear. He had walked straight into it. Ordinarily, Kinch would have the men back at Stalag 13 ready for an emergency exit, but so far as Kinch knew, he had been taken for another visit to see Haussner, visits which Hogan had so far returned from. He had a fair idea of what was coming. The possibility had always been at the back of his mind ever since he had started the operation at Stalag 13, but seeing what Mallory had been through had recently brought it all into uncomfortably sharp focus.

He knew the geography around Stalag 13 well enough to know that he was being taken to Hammelburg, despite being unable to see. The sounds of the town, its church bells and businesses, were sufficiently familiar to be easily recognisable. Just as recognisable, but infinitely less welcome, were the steps leading up to the building that the Gestapo had taken over for their local headquarters.

Stalag 13, 15th March 1944, 1200 hrs.

Hauptsturmfuhrer von Schleich was confused. He had arrived to pick up Colonel Hogan for his scheduled meeting with Haussner only to discover that the American had been picked up by a group of SS troops who had seemingly implied that they were working for Haussner. Stalag 13's Kommandant Klink was blustering to conceal the mistake he had made in not checking his visitors' credentials. The prisoners were beginning to pick up on their guards' unrest.

Kinch and the others were in Hogan's office listening intently to the heated argument going on between Colonel Klink and the SS captain, von Schleich. Mallory, Miller and Andrea were there too, dressed convincingly enough as POWs to escape casual inspection. All

understood enough German to pick up on the gist of the conversation. It was more than sufficient to worry them. If von Schleich's people did not have Hogan, then they had a fair idea who had. Colonel Hogan had been able to keep one step ahead of Hochstetter's investigations until now.

Back in the office, von Schleich had given hoping that Klink would give him any useful information. The man was playing it safe. Von Schleich had to admit that in the circumstances it was a wise, if annoying move on the part of the Kommandant.

Then he thought, what might have made the Kommandant so concerned for his own safety? The answer was then all too obvious, and von Schleich cursed himself for taking so long to have realised: the Gestapo. He had become aware of the antipathy that subsisted between Haussner and Major Hochstetter of the local Abschnitte. If Hochstetter could persuade Hogan to talk... Von Schleich shook his head - the American Colonel had struck him as being both tough and stubborn, as well as quick-witted. Given Hochstetter's methods, he would probably end up killing him first.

Haussner had to be informed. If Hogan was being interrogated by the Gestapo, only Haussner had the rank, not to mention the audacity to walk into Gestapo headquarters and demand the return of his prisoner. Peremptorily, he ordered Hilda to place a call to Schloss Konigsfels.

Gestapo HQ, Hammelburg, 15th March 1944, 1300 hrs.

Major Hochstetter was having a slow, frustrating afternoon. It was all down to one man whom he had developed a dislike for as soon as he met him: Colonel Robert E. Hogan. The tall, handsome, wise-cracking American Colonel annoyed Hochstetter as no other prisoner ever had. Even in his current condition: bruised, beaten and handcuffed to a chair, Hogan still failed to show the appropriate respect and deference that Hochstetter felt was no more than his due.

For his part, Hogan was mildly confused. Reading between the lines of the questions that Hochstetter had been throwing at him, it seemed that the Gestapo Major was on a fishing trip. It was almost as if he was more interested in discovering Standartenfuhrer Haussner's sudden interest in him than in anything he might have been planning or of his links with the local Resistance. The speculative nature of Hochstetter's enquiries had not altered his interrogation

technique, Hogan had noted ruefully. His face and ribs ached. The salty, oddly metallic taste of blood was in his mouth and he could feel it dribbling from his nose down the side of his collar. The blows had been fairly superficial so far. Uncomfortable, certainly, but on the whole just softening up. His wrists and shoulders ached from the too-tight cuffs pulling him against the back of the unyielding wooden chair. Until they had more proof to go on than Hochstetter's paranoia, they would be necessarily circumspect: Hogan was still a POW and as such nominally protected by the Geneva Convention. They would not want to cause too much in the way of permanent damage.

Hochstetter studied his prisoner, a sly predatory smile on his face. He had always hated and envied the officers who possessed the charisma and effortless authority that he lacked. Even bleeding and handcuffed to a chair, Hogan still had that indefinable something that made men follow him, that same something that Hochstetter just as obviously lacked. He came to a decision, reached into a desk drawer, and pulled out a plain wooden box that was about the size of a cigar case. He unlatched it, laid it open and slid it across his desk for Hogan to see the contents. A syringe and several glass vials nestled snugly in the velvet lined interior.

"Do you know what these vials contain, Hogan? No? They contain a truth serum developed by our own scientists. Its effectiveness is far greater than Sodium Pentothal, but it does carry a few more in the way of side effects. Shall I tell you about them?" Hochstetter's voice was silky, almost caressing.

Hogan schooled his features to impassivity. He had a reasonable idea of the sort of side effects that Hochstetter was talking about. When it came down to it, he was forced to admit to himself that he found the prospect of dying to be less disagreeable than living on while being brain damaged. The idea of that sort of existence, of being little better than a mental vegetable was abhorrent to him. He would rather die.

"The drug alters the blood flow to the brain. I'm told that in the initial stages, the subjects can find the sensation quite pleasant. They lose their inhibitions, trust and believe everything they hear. It can make for stimulating conversation, but only for a while. As time passes, pressure grows within the blood vessels of the brain. It seems to cause excruciating pain, from what I understand, and then... Well, the fortunate ones die."

With an effort Hogan tore his eyes from the syringe and the innocuous looking vials. He was no stranger to fear - over much of the past years of his extended sojourn in Germany, he had been afraid for himself and for his men. He counted himself fortunate that he had experienced few moments such as the horrified revulsion such as he felt at that moment.

The Gestapo Major had been watching Hogan carefully. He had noted his silence when he had shown him the case and told him of the effects of the drug. Hogan had offered none of the sarcastic quips or biting retorts that he had earlier in the interrogation. There was a significance to that, Hochstetter knew, he had found a lever he could use to break down the resistance of the arrogantly mocking American Colonel. With slow deliberate movements he filled the syringe and laid it down on the desk in front of him, then he gazed at Hogan, unable to keep a smile of grim satisfaction from his face.

As Hochstetter was getting ready for another round of the same questions, the door to the interrogation room burst open. A quartet of grey-clad Waffen-SS soldiers carrying schmeissers boiled into the room, spreading out to cover the occupants. Hochstetter back-pedalled in fear. His two cohorts did the only sensible thing in the circumstances and raised their hands. Hogan, his back to the door, could only guess what had happened. He half expected a bullet in the back.

"My dear Colonel Hogan, what have they been doing to you?" Haussner - Hogan easily recognised those urbane, cultured tones. He heard the steady, rhythmic 'clack' of the Standartenfuhrer's jackboots behind him as he entered the room.

Hochstetter, meanwhile, had regained some of his poise. "What is this man doing here?!" he screeched at the bewildered Untersturmfuhrer Schaeffer who had accompanied Haussner.

Haussner nodded a dismissal to a relieved Schaeffer, then turned back to Hochstetter. "I think you have something of mine, Major," he said casually. Hochstetter reddened with anger but did not reply. Haussner held out a hand to one of Hochstetter's men. "Keys!" he ordered peremptorily. Unwilling to buck the odds, the man handed the keys over. Haussner crouched down and released the cuffs. Hogan gingerly rotated his shoulders, wincing at the pain.

"Do you require assistance to walk, Colonel?" enquired Haussner without solicitude. For all the inflection present in his voice he could as easily have been commenting on the weather.

Hogan gave himself a couple of seconds then eased himself to his feet. He'd be damned if he was going to give them the satisfaction of carrying him out. The room seemed to tilt wildly as he stood, then settled. In the background he heard Hochstetter's voice hurling a string of vituperative German at Haussner. The Standartenfuhrer for his part was merely watching

Hochstetter's performance with the mild disinterest of an adult forced to watch the performance of a friend's child at the theatre.

One of Haussner's troops acquired a damp towel and gave it to Hogan to clean up his face and staunch the blood that was still seeping from his nose. Without another word, they escorted Hogan from the building to a staff car where von Schleich was waiting. The SS troops climbed on motorcycles, and the cavalcade moved off. Against Hogan's protests, Haussner took him to the local hospital where a Doctor grudgingly checked him over. A nurse cleaned him up and arranged for a fresh shirt to replace his own, bloodied one.

Back at Gestapo headquarters, von Schleich had taken advantage of Hochstetter's discomfiture to get a copy of the record made of Hogan's interrogation while Haussner delayed Hogan at the hospital. With a practised eye, von Schleich skimmed through the account. Hogan had indeed been as stubborn as he and Haussner had expected. He had revealed nothing of any relevance. The operation could proceed as planned, despite Hochstetter's meddling. He left the building and climbed into the waiting motorbike sidecar to rendezvous with Haussner at the hospital as arranged.

Scientific Research Establishment, Nordhausen, 15th March 1944, 1500 hrs.

Professor Paul Venner had to admit that he was finding a perverse pleasure in tyrannising the Nazi scientists assigned to aid him in his project. Having been coerced into working for the Nazis through their threats made to his imprisoned niece, Edith Windermere, the scientist took his revenge where he could find it. The Gestapo had taken great pains to impress on his assistants the importance of Professor Venner's genius to the Third Reich. They had no recourse but to accept his insults and streams of abuse impugning their skill, knowledge or accuracy. As far as possible, they avoided him which from Venner's point of view was absolutely ideal.

As he was doing the rounds of the experiments in progress he came upon a file tucked haphazardly under a notepad full of equations. The file carried a red tab, marking its secret classification. Venner shrugged mentally, eased it out and began to read. It was headed simply: Kaunstein Project.

What he read appalled him. He had heard rumours of extermination camps to eliminate what the Nazi's cynically referred to as the 'Jewish Problem'. Buchenwald was one of the names mentioned in connection to that. The Kaunstein Project had requisitioned 20,000 prisoners from Buchenwald, amongst other places, for use as slave labour. Doing... what? Venner flicked through the file. He found a chart, scheduling the conversion of the anhydrite and gypsum mine at Kaunstein into an armaments factory to produce the rockets whose propulsion systems he was being forced to work on. The Nazis were far enough along in their research and they were confident enough of its outcome to have gone to the expense and trouble of converting the mine. He read on: the preparatory stage of the conversion project was just about completed having been commenced back in October 1943. He found a set of accounts at the back of the file, noting expenditure on a week by week basis. The total came to a little under 3000. He scanned the page. It could not be Deutschmarks, unless it was figured in ,000s. There was no such notation at the top of the column. He found the accompanying notes: the figure represented the fatalities amongst the workforce.

He sat there, staring at the death toll that some Nazi book-keeper had emotionlessly recorded in black and white. He chided himself for his previous smugness at causing his lab assistants some small amount of grief while hundreds of prisoners had been worked to death; Kaunstein was only a few miles from Nordhausen, in the northern part of Thuringia.

Venner had never considered himself an overly moralistic person. He had decided to go up against the Nazis because they had invaded other countries to impose their rule of law on them, not because of any outrages they had perpetrated. For Venner, it had been a reasoned, rather than an emotional decision. Looking at the notes casually describing the deaths of so many, he felt the distant stirrings of a sense of responsibility. He had been one of the pioneers of rocket propulsion technology. The refurbishment being carried out at Kaunstein was, albeit at several removes, a result of his work.

With a sense of purpose that surprised even him, he returned the file carefully to the place where he had found it, then headed back to his lab. For about an hour he studied the schedule of experiments which were underway in the parts of the building open to him, then worked out how each experiment could be most effectively sabotaged. When most of the staff had gone to have dinner, he walked through the building, causing enough damage to retard the research for weeks, if not months.

By the time he got back to his lab, he could hear alarms going off throughout the complex. A sense of grim fatalism took him. In that moment, he did not care whether the Nazis executed him or not. The only regret he felt was for his niece, Edith, held as a hostage against his good behaviour. He prayed that she would forgive him for what his actions had brought her to. All he could do now was to wait for the arrival of Herr Schaub and his guards.

Stalag 11, 15th March 1944, 1945 hrs.

Edith had been reading in the Stalag's guest quarters where she had been billeted when the door had burst open and a group of black suited men led by Herr Kluge, her personal Gestapo watchdog stormed in. The Gestapo's loutish behaviour was nothing new but the distinctly unpleasant anticipatory sneer on Kluge's features warned all too clearly that this was no social call. His terse "You will come with us now, Fraulein Doktor!" merely reinforced her suspicions that she was in trouble. Held tightly between two of the men she was marched briskly towards the cooler, escorted by more of the Gestapo who had been waiting outside. As they walked, Kluge added conversationally, "it has become necessary for one of your fingers to be amputated, as an example, you understand? I am not a vindictive man - I will leave the decision as to which finger it will be down to you."

It took a few moments for the meaning of Kluge's words to register before a look of horror spread over Edith's face and she began to struggle in the arms of her captors. It was a hopeless effort. Her Gestapo escorts were too accustomed to controlling recalcitrant prisoners to be overly inconvenienced by Edith's attempts to resist.

From the growing crowd of watching POWs, Squadron Leader Thurleigh limped forward and placed himself in their path. "Where do you think you're taking her?"

"Get out of the way, you English Krueppel! The Gestapo are not answerable to prisoners."

"Good God man, you can't be thinking of putting a lady in the cooler. It's barbaric!" exclaimed Thurleigh in genuine outrage.

"Hau ab! Verschwinde, sofort" barked Kluge. Thurleigh stood his ground, refusing to move, an expression of grim determination on his face. For endless moments the tableau held: the slightly built English officer leaning on his stick facing down half a dozen armed Gestapo. More than a hundred prisoners were gathered in the compound, unmoving under the watchful eyes of the guards. Kluge's harsh, staccato laughter broke the spell. At his gesture four of his black uniformed subordinates moved forwards, laying into Thurleigh with their fists, then when he collapsed under their assault, their boots.

As the beating went on a low, angry murmur ran through the watching POWs. It was an ugly sound, feral, threatening. The group of prisoners grew larger as others came out of barracks to join them. Shouts of abuse directed at the Gestapo began to ring through the compound. One of the younger tower guards fired a burst from his machine gun along the edges of the crowd. It did nothing to dispel the growing mob.

Kluge ignored the crowd, intent as he was on watching his troops' punishment of the defiant Englishman. His concentration was not so deep however to miss the unmistakable sound of a pistol being cocked close to his left ear. "You will call your men off now, Herr Kluge." Kluge grimaced as he recognised the harsh patrician tones of the camp's Kommandant.

"Or what?" he retorted, recovering his confidence and with it a measure of his former arrogance. "You'll shoot me, an officer of the Gestapo?" Kluge's men stepped back from the Squadron Leader's now unmoving form, awaiting the outcome of the confrontation.

Kommandant Hilgenfeldt's cold reply shocked him. "I would shoot any man who attempts to incite a riot in my Stalag, not to mention your abhorrent intentions in respect of Fraulein Doktor Windermere. I trust I make myself clear? Now get out of here!"

Kluge looked into Hilgenfeldt's implacable face, then he glanced around at the now quiet mob of prisoners. The deaths of a few dozen or more prisoners in a riot meant little enough to him, but if the Fraulein Doktor had been injured or killed in the resulting confusion... He knew exactly what that would mean to his career, if not his life. Gathering what shreds of dignity he could muster, Kluge led his men back to their cars.

With the departure of the Gestapo, Hilgenfeldt reholstered his pistol. He turned to face the prisoners. "Take Squadron Leader Thurleigh to his quarters. Fraulein Doktor Windermere, if you feel well enough, would be so kind as to look after him? I will see you have the appropriate supplies sent to you. As for the rest, back to your barracks. If this compound is not cleared within ten minutes, the entire camp will be on punishment detail. Dismissed!"

Bar at the Connaught Hotel, London, 15th March 1944, 2200 hrs.

The Bar at the Connaught was as full as it always was. Commodore Jensen was sat at the bar itself, half listening in to a debate going on behind him between an army Brigadier, an Air Commodore and a couple of Group Captains concerning the viability of mass parachute drops over hostile territory. Jensen sometimes wondered how many secrets had found their way from the Connaught Bar into the hands of the Nazis, so freely were they discussed. It made him angry, this blithe certainty that no German agent would consider eavesdropping in the Connaught, because it was just 'not done'. In his experience the Germans placed even less importance on things being 'not done' than even he did.

With care, the Bar was an excellent place to discuss matters in a less formal setting. The background noise made any bugging operation problematic. It was an open joke amongst staff at HQ that many of the important military decisions over the past years had been taken following lengthy consultation and discussion at the Connaught.

He spotted one of his American counterparts, General Parnell as he came down the short flight of stairs into the bar. Seemingly by accident he found a place at the bar next to Jensen. They sat awhile in comfortable silence, Jensen sipping his cognac, Parnell drinking bourbon. Without appearing to, each was checking the room. After about five minutes Jensen got up and strolled through to the billiards room. As had been arranged, it was empty except for Jensen's aide: Lieutenant Forrester. Forrester wordlessly set up the game and left. Jensen pottered around, knocking the balls around the table without any real interest, then Parnell came in.

Parnell had never cared for billiards, but he took up a cue and chalked the point while Jensen set the game up again. "You asked for this meeting, Commodore. What can I do for you and why all the precautions?" Parnell enquired quietly.

Jensen did not reply for a moment as he concentrated on his shot. "I rather imagine that we, or more to the point, you, have a problem with security."

"What are you getting at?" started Parnell, stung at the implication. He had a professional intelligence officer's respect for secrecy, and while his pride was hurt by Jensen's intimation, his professionalism reflected that there was seldom such a thing as absolute security. The best that could be done was to plug the leaks as they were found.

"When I came by Grosvenor Square a couple of days back, I bumped into a young woman in the hallway outside the NAAFI. I thought I recognised her at the time, but her face didn't

click until this afternoon. She's on file as working for the SD. One of my people encountered her last year in... well it's doesn't really matter where. We don't know her real name for certain, but her code name is Schwertleite. I'm told it's the name of one of Odin's Valkyries, his Choosers of the Slain. In her case, it's an apt title. She's implicated in the disappearance of at least two of my people last year." Privately he wondered if she had any involvement in Mallory's plane being shot down. The OSS had not known about the SOE's use of the Junkers: that meant some surreptitious witch-hunting in his own back yard. He would have to speak to Forrester later.

"Right, I can check the entry records, see what name she's going under at the moment. We should be able to pick her up within a few days."

"There may be an alternative..." Jensen began cautiously. This was an OSS matter, not SOE. He and Parnell might respect each other professionally, but he did not want to step on the toes of his opposite number.

"Misinformation? It's a possibility. Let me get back to you on that, I'll see what sort of stuff we could usefully throw her way."

Stalag 13, 15th March 1944, 2300 hrs.

Hogan's tiny office was filled to capacity with his own staff as well as the three SOE who had been loaned to him for the duration. There may not have been any question that, as senior officer, he was in command, but he found the idea of giving orders to Mallory and his two cohorts a little disconcerting. He could not say whether it was their age, their dangerous quietude, or simply the knowledge of some of the things they had done before that was getting to him.

For his part, Mallory knew that the American Colonel had excellent local knowledge, support and contacts, not to mention the kind of devious mind that he could appreciate. Any man who had accomplished what Hogan had was, to Mallory's way of thinking, worth listening to. He had no problems about taking his orders, despite the Colonel's relative youth. It was a relief to him to find that Hogan was not as gung-ho as many of his countrymen. In the kind of war that Mallory waged, that sort of wild enthusiasm was as good as a death sentence.

With everyone gathered, Hogan called the group to order. "We've received word from Stalag 11 where, as you're doubtless aware, Doctor Windermere is being held hostage. This evening, the Gestapo security people assigned to her tried to get nasty. Squadron Leader Thurleigh, senior POW officer at the camp, tried to intervene and they beat him half to death for his trouble. Apparently the word is that the Gestapo thug in charge there - Kluge - wanted to cut off one of Doctor Windermere's fingers and send it, presumably as a warning, to Professor Venner at Nordhausen." Hogan was forced to halt, his voice drowned out by the cries of outrage from his staff. Neither Mallory nor his people said anything, however. Looking at them, Hogan thought he could detect a tautness to Mallory's features as he exchanged glances with Andrea then Miller. Something just happened there, decided Hogan, I wonder what?

"Is the lady okay, Colonel?" asked Kinch over the uproar. The others quietened down to hear Hogan's answer.

"Fortunately, yes. The camp Kommandant stepped in and faced down the Gestapo. It seems that Major Hilgenfeldt doesn't take with making war on women."

"Never thought I'd say this about a kraut, but good on 'im!" said Newkirk.

"Hilgenfeldt's a Prussian officer of the Old School. As far as he's concerned there are rules to war, and those rules don't allow for hurting civilian detainees, especially women," explained Mallory dryly.

"That's fortunate, for the Doctor anyway," admitted Hogan. "Something must have happened at Nordhausen for them to have made this sort of move against Doctor Windermere, something that meant that they had had such a problem with Professor Venner, that they needed to remind him of the consequences of his actions, or inaction as the case may be. At the moment, there's no way of telling what's going on at Nordhausen, and why now in particular, Venner decided to do something that caused this attempted reprisal."

"Colonel, do you have anyone in place at Nordhausen who can provide any up-to-date intelligence on the situation there?" enquired Mallory.

"There's no-one directly linked to our local network, but I've spoken to some of our contacts with the Underground. They may be able to put us in touch with any group based in the area, assuming there is one," Hogan responded.

"And assuming it hasn't been infiltrated by the Gestapo," Miller added cynically. The silence that greeted Miller's comment eloquently made the point that this was not an altogether unlikely scenario.

"The way things stand at the moment," began Hogan, "we must assume that we will receive minimal or no support from any Underground groups local to Nordhausen. That being the case, we have to split our resources to cover both missions: the rescue of Doctor Windermere, the extraction of Professor Venner from Nordhausen and the sabotage of the facility. We've got good contacts around Dortmund where Stalag 11 is located, as well as Squadron Leader Thurleigh's people inside the camp."

"Any thoughts as to how we're going to get in to Nordhausen, Colonel?" Mallory asked.

Hogan smiled in response, a devious, yet somehow utterly reasonable smile - directed at Kinch. "How would you like to be a visiting diplomat?"

"Why?" Kinch replied slowly, cautiously. He was glad to see that smile back on Hogan's face, but he wished it had not been turned in his direction. That smile almost invariably meant that something bizarre and risky was in the offing.

Hogan settled back to explain his idea. "I got to thinking when I heard about Navarone: the German war machine pouring its elite forces onto a collection of insignificant rocks in the Aegean Sea in order to crush a small beleaguered British force, and why? To convince Turkey to get off the fence and join the war on the side of the Axis powers. So far, they haven't. But, an alliance with Turkey is something that would help the Germans immensely, and I think they would go to great lengths to achieve it, as they showed at Navarone. So sergeant Kinchloe becomes some sort of high ranking Turkish envoy; I'm sure Andrea can help with appropriate names, titles and so forth. We'll have 'General Kinchendorff' call ahead, warning the facility of a top-secret visit by a Turkish delegation with the aim of impressing the Turks sufficiently with Nazi technology to convince them to throw in their lot with Germany."

Kinch tossed Hogan a mock Nazi salute. "Jawohl, Herr Oberst!" he said dryly, then pointed out, "I suppose it's occurred to you that I don't actually speak Turkish."

"Speak in German, then! You're an educated diplomatic type sent to Germany because of your ability with the German language." Hogan responded, then got back to detailing the plan. "That way, we get in and get a guided tour of the place. London's dropping a picture of Venner with tonight's supply drop, which also includes, I understand, a few items you requested Captain. I've got people out picking it up now; they should be back in a couple of hours."

"Thanks, Colonel. We have felt a little...underdressed," said Mallory.

"Right then, the plan for tomorrow: we divide up into three groups. Group One, in charge of getting Doctor Windermere out of Stalag 11 and safely to the rendezvous point will comprise Newkirk and Carter, as SS and Gestapo officers respectively. We've got Standartenfuhrer Haussner's signature from Captain Mallory's interrogation records, so your orders will be signed by him, right Newkirk?"

"Right you are, guv'nor. What do they need to say?"

"Something like - routine transfer to keep her presence in Germany a secret. We don't want anything that's going to raise eyebrows. Group Two is you, LeBeau. I need you to liaise with the underground. London will be sending over a plane to pick up Doctor Windermere and Venner. Make sure the landing field is arranged, ready to be lit up and keep it secure. We may end up having unwanted guests along with us, depending on how things work out. Finally Group Three which will comprise Kinch and Andrea as the Turkish delegation, Mallory as their German diplomatic service liaison, and I'll be their Luftwaffe escort with Miller as my aide. We'll all leave camp tomorrow, escorted by 'Major Anton Heiden', following his recent transfer to the SS, and under the pretext of further interviews with Haussner. I've spoken to our people in Hammelburg and should Haussner or von Schleich intend to visit Stalag 13 for real, they assure me that they'll be able to arrange to delay him. Questions?"

Allied HQ, London 16th March 1944, 1200 hrs.

General Parnell, Commodore Jensen and Group Captain Howard sat in uncomfortable folding chairs around a rickety trestle table. Only hours before the room they were in had been a basement storeroom, one amongst dozens. The cleaning crew that blocked any access to the corridor outside were SBS, summoned by lieutenant Forrester who was himself in

overalls wielding a mop with awkward enthusiasm. Strewn across the table were stacks of reports, compiled from the many and varied intelligence resources the men had access to. Apart from the men providing the security, only two others knew of the meeting. It had been set up with paranoid efficiency by word of mouth; no secretaries took the minutes, and no memoranda had been circulated.

Group Captain Howard placed a file in the centre of the table with grim deliberation. "This is the problem," he murmured. It looked indistinguishable from the other files likewise marked 'top secret'. He opened the file and withdrew the most recent intelligence report that lay on the top. It was headed: Dora-Mittelbau. He passed it around for the others to see.

"I'm familiar with this, Howard, I read the summary of this in the usual intelligence briefing. I was going to ask Papa Bear to take a recce and perhaps put it on his itinerary, depending on whether he can confirm the details," said Parnell.

"I think that's exactly what you shouldn't do, General. You see, I don't think this latest report is exactly on the level," replied Howard.

Parnell took up the original report and scanned it again. It looked like any other of the thousands of intelligence reports that were sent from their people in occupied Europe. He put it back down and turned to Howard. "Talk to me."

"It's a subtle mistake; one I missed, I'm afraid. You'll note, gentlemen, the identity of the courier who is alleged to have transported this report: Cormorant. We do indeed have a courier by that code name who normally operates in the area of Northern Thuringia. The problem is, that for the period he was supposed to have been there, we have also received reports from him from Dortmund and the area around Stalag 11. The accuracy of Cormorant's reports from Dortmund have been confirmed by the Papa Bear network."

"So if Cormorant was in Dortmund, what's his name doing on a report from Thuringia," completed Parnell. "It could, of course, just be a genuine mistake, but you clearly don't buy that any more than I do. Which leaves us with a problem and a hole in security the size of the East River. Howard, you said you missed it. Who picked it up?"

"My secretary. She came back from a week's leave this morning. Wonderful, terrifying woman; mind like a steel trap. She was actually retired when the war started, but came back

to help out. By sheer chance she'd been the one to transcribe Cormorant's report from Dortmund, and when she was reordering the desk after her temporary replacement had left, she came upon the Dora-Mittelbau report. She brought the discrepancy to my attention immediately."

Parnell leaned back in his chair, listening to Howard explain how he had backtracked the Dora-Mittelbau report and found that it had not even existed until its appearance on his secretary's desk. The building was supposed to be secure. He made a mental note to see whoever was in charge of security and replace them, then he brought his mind back to the issue at hand. It had been no more than sheer good fortune that they had found out about the report. If it was fake, that would mean that Dora-Mittelbau was a trap; a trap into which he had nearly sent the best undercover group he had in Germany. The proximity of Dora-Mittelbau to Papa Bear's set up, suggested that it might have been put in place for his benefit which meant that the Nazis were trying to move against him - something Papa Bear would need to be informed of during their next communication.

For the first time in the meeting, Jensen spoke out. "We may be able to use this," he pointed out cautiously. The others turned to him, curiosity apparent in their expressions. "This has been thrown to us as bait; and as I think both General Parnell and I believe, it's bait for Papa Bear. Certainly he's been causing the Nazis no end of inconvenience so it's reasonable to assume that they've decided to try set a trap for him, using Dora-Mittelbau. Pap Bear's current mission takes him to Nordhausen, itself in Northern Thuringia. Why not let our young Valkyrie friend - Schwertleite? - send back news that we have an operation on in Thuringia? Let the Nazis set their trap at Dora-Mittelbau, while our people are instead at Nordhausen."

A slow smile spread across Parnell's face. "You're a devious old bastard, Jensen, I've always said so," he said admiringly.

Jensen coughed with embarrassment. "Not entirely accurate; I'm not always devious."

Stalag 13, 17th March 1944, 1400 hrs.

The German army truck pulled up in front of the Kommandantur and three men got out. Each wore the grey uniform of the Waffen-SS. Their leader, a tall haughty Sturmbannfuhrer, strode up the steps to the Kommandant's office, just avoiding the Kommandant who was himself

hurrying out to greet his visitors. On seeing the Kommandant, the Sturmbannfuhrer's men crashed to attention and offered the straight arm Nazi salute. The Sturmbannfuhrer's salute to the Luftwaffe Colonel was a masterpiece of arrogant condescension which the Kommandant apparently failed to notice. As Klink returned the salutes, the Sturmbannfuhrer pushed past him and into the office. Klink had no choice but to follow.

The Sturmbannfuhrer was waiting impatiently in front of Klink's desk as the Colonel bustled past him and sat down, an ingratiating smile etched firmly on his face. "Welcome to Stalag 13, Sturmbannfuhrer...?"

"Heiden," replied the other tersely. "Standartenfuhrer Haussner wishes to interview Colonel Hogan as well as the following four prisoners: Carter, A., sergeant; Kinchloe, J.I., sergeant; LeBeau, L., corporal and Newkirk, P., corporal. I have the transit papers here for your signature. Order them to be loaded onto the truck - I expect to be leaving within fifteen minutes, versteht?"

"Of course, of course, Sturmbannfuhrer," agreed Klink quickly before turning to Schultz who had followed them into the office. "See to it, Sergeant," he added. Schultz saluted and left.

Heiden/Mallory nodded in terse acknowledgement of the Kommandant's actions, then occupied himself looking at the photographs on the walls of Klink's office. In the awkward silence Klink got up and walked to a side cabinet to pour himself a glass of schnapps and offered one to his visitor. The Sturmbannfuhrer looked at the proffered glass. "Danke, no."

Klink was relieved when a knock at his door announced the return of Sergeant Schultz. "Herr Kommandant, Colonel Hogan and the other prisoners are on the truck as ordered."

Heiden/Mallory glanced down at his watch, nodded slightly then turned to Klink. "Adequate, Kommandant," he allowed, then headed back to the truck. Klink followed behind him, sighing in unconcealed relief. Having to deal with SS fanatics was perhaps the part of his job he liked least. More salutes were exchanged and the Sturmbannfuhrer got into the truck and they drove out of Stalag 13.

Stalag 11, 18th March 1944, 1145 hrs.

Driving a car borrowed from the local underground in Hammelburg, Newkirk and Carter drove into Stalag 11. Newkirk wore the black uniform of an Obersturmführer of the Allgemeine-SS. Carter, by comparison, wore a plain black suit and leather overcoat. Both were playing familiar roles: Newkirk, the haughty SS officer, and Carter, a dangerously mercurial official of the Gestapo.

They halted in front of the Kommandantur, watched with the same apparent bored indifference with which they themselves would have observed German visitors to Stalag 13. The buildings, the mud, the stench were too similar for comfort, but the guards, however young they looked, were warier than their counterparts at Stalag 13 ever were. Both Carter and Newkirk could sense the tension that hung in the air.

Already in character, they got out of the car and headed up the stairs to the Kommandant's office, absently returning the Nazi salute offered by the sentry on duty. The Kommandant's secretary leapt to his feet and offered the straight armed salute, which both men again returned.

"I am Obersturmführer Neumann," began Newkirk. "This is Herr Frankel of the Gestapo. We are here to transfer a Fraulein Edith Windermere, whom you are holding here, to another location. Here are our papers."

Newkirk watched as an expression of almost theatrical dismay crossed the secretary's features. "I'm sorry, Herr Obersturmführer, but Fraulein Windermere is no longer here. She was transferred from Stalag 11 under Herr Kluge's orders earlier this morning."

"Incompetence!" shrieked Carter, making Newkirk jump nearly as much as the hapless secretary. "We have the transfer papers for the Fraulein here. Are you suggesting that we of the Gestapo make mistakes?"

"No... not at all, Herr Frankel, but Herr Kluge also had papers... Perhaps if you talk to Kommandant Hilgenfeldt when he gets back from town?" stammered the secretary.

"You will show me your copies of Herr Kluge's documentation, sofort!" demanded Carter, slamming his hand on the desk in punctuation of the order.

"Jawohl, Herr Frankel, I would like to but..."

"But...?" interjected Newkirk, his quiet voice silkily threatening.

"We kept no copy here: Herr Kluge's orders. He said it was a matter of State Security." The secretary looked on the verge of tears, sweating in his anxiety.

"Do you know what happens when people get caught up in matters of State Security?" asked Newkirk in his oh-so-reasonable tones.

A bright, not entirely sane grin crossed Carter's face. "They disappear!" he giggled.

"Unless they were somehow of help to an investigation such as ours," continued Newkirk, offering the man a glimpse of a way out from his dilemma.

He seized the chance, desperate to escape the situation he thought he was in. "I overheard one of Herr Kluge's men talking about taking the Fraulein to Nordhausen."

Silence reigned as Carter and Newkirk exchanged glances. Newkirk picked up the transfer papers he had so carefully forged and pocketed them. No sense in leaving evidence lying around, he thought. Just one thing left to take care of. He leaned forward, plucked the secretary's glasses from his nose and began idly polishing the lenses, his eyes never leaving the secretary's face. "This conversation never took place, and we... We were never here." He put the glasses back on the man's face, tucking the arms into place neatly behind his ears in mock solicitude. "Understood?"

The secretary nodded in mute acknowledgement of the order. By that point, he wanted nothing more than to forget about meeting his two visitors.

Carter and Newkirk got back in the car and drove out of the camp. Both men felt sullied by the way they had had to bully the secretary. It was one thing giving the SS or Gestapo a taste of what they usually handed out to others, but the man had been nothing more than a terrified bookkeeper, trying, like so many others, to get through the War without being killed. The fact that it had been necessary was of little consolation. Newkirk took a brief sideward glance at his colleague. "You okay, Andrew?"

"Yeah," he replied after a couple of moments. "It's just that I don't like doing that sorta thing y'know."

"I know," Newkirk agreed.

"We've gotta get word to the Colonel that the lady Doc's been taken to Nordhausen. Do you suppose she'll be anywhere near where the Professor is?"

"We've no way of telling, 'ave we now, Andrew. The Guv'nor said 'e was goin' to try 'n' contact the local underground. We can get the message to our people on the radio when we get back to Stalag 13. They might be able to get word through to 'im. It's all we can do, innit. Just got to 'ope we're in time."

Gasthaus near Nordhausen, 18th March 1944, 1600 hrs.

"Gentlemen, we have a problem," announced Hogan without preamble. "Group Two has sent word that Group One's target package was redirected here before they could pick it up." Hogan spoke circumspectly. He did not trust the Nordhausen underground to such an extent that he would risk giving out information they did not need to know. Their contact, a hard-faced teenage girl called Marietta had replied to the pre-arranged identification phrase and led them to a back room in the Inn. She returned minutes later carrying a tray of food and drink, and to tell them of the message she had just picked up on the radio from Papa Bear.

Once she had gone, Kinch and Andrea checked the room for bugs. By agreement, no-one had mentioned Papa Bear or offered any response to Marietta beyond Hogan terse acknowledgement. Hogan's code name was already too well known for it to be bandied about unnecessarily. Letting LeBeau use the code name to relay information was just one more

layer in a barrage of obfuscation and misdirection that had so far kept the Nazis from getting any proof as to Papa Bear's true identity.

With the room declared free of listening devices, Hogan started speaking again. "'General Kinchendorff' has already called ahead to the facility to warn them to expect His Excellency, Mehmed Ferid Pasha, envoy of the Turkish government and his escort at 1800 hrs this evening. We leave here at 1730 hrs, so be ready. Bear in mind that our mission now is two-fold: to rescue the Professor and sabotage the facility, and also to locate Doctor Windermere. From the information we have about the local security forces, they are all based in or around the research complex, so it would be likely that the Doctor's being held there after the difficulties the Gestapo encountered at Stalag 11. We're too deeply committed now to change the plan beyond hoping we'll find her there, but if anyone thinks it's no longer worth the risk, speak up."

Silence was the only reply.

Scientific Research Establishment, Nordhausen, 18th March 1944, 1800 hrs.

The car bearing the flags of both Germany and Turkey swung up to the main gate of the Nordhausen facility. Warned in advance by 'General Kinchendorff' of the importance of this visit to the Reich, a small honour guard stood by. The car halted and the door opened. As it did, the young Leutnant in charge of the honour guard called them to Present Arms. Looking the slightest bit nervous at the prospect of meeting these influential foreign visitors, the facility's administrator, Herr Doktor Steur clasped his hands behind his back to avoid fidgeting.

Clad in the black full dress uniform of an Oberfuhrer of the Allgemeine-SS, Mallory got out the car and waited to one side while Kinch and Andrea followed. Herr Doktor Steur studied his guests, faintly disappointed that they wore European suits rather than the Arabian Nights splendour he had been imagining. The scarlet fez that each wore was the only clue to their nationality. Settling himself, Steur fixed a welcoming smile to his face and walked forward. One of his aides had already moved to Mallory's side to murmur the appropriate information regarding Steur's identity. Mallory nodded imperceptibly, and murmured something back in response. The aide returned to Steur's side.

"Your Excellency," began Mallory, speaking to Kinch in German, "may I introduce the administrator of this facility, Herr Doktor Steur. He will serve as Your Excellency's guide during the visit."

"Herr Doktor Steur," acknowledged Kinch magnanimously. He could not help but notice the man's relief at his ability to speak German.

Mallory continued the formalities. "Herr Doktor Steur, I present His Excellency, Mehmed Ferid Pasha, plenipotentiary of the Turkish government, and his aide: Yussuf Khoury," he said, indicating Andrea. By that time, Hogan and Miller had joined them. "Also, Major Schmadeke and Oberleutnant Morsch of the Luftwaffe who are accompanying His Excellency on his visit."

As Mallory had been performing the introductions, Steur's aide had spoken briefly to him before heading back inside the building.

"Your Excellency," said Steur with a slight bow, "may I take this opportunity to welcome you to the Adolf Hitler Scientific Research Establishment here at Nordhausen. I hope to be able to demonstrate during your visit just how far ahead of the Allies we are technologically and how the advances we have been able to make here can find military application. Due to the constraints of Your Excellency's schedule, the tour will, of necessity, be only able to include the hi-lights of what we are doing here, but we would like to finish the evening with a small reception in Your Excellency's honour. A number of our researchers will be in attendance to answer whatever questions Your Excellency should wish to ask about our work here."

"That will be acceptable, Herr Doktor Steur," said Kinch. "Shall we begin?"

Schloss Konigsfels, near Dusseldorf, 18th March 1944, 1900 hrs.

Social gatherings, Haussner reflected, were one of the more tedious duties he had to undertake. His aide, von Schleich, was in his element, playing the part of host with practised ease. The guest were mostly civilians, well-bred scions of noble families whose influence had protected them from the rigours of war. It was a group of people that Haussner had very little

time for. He contented himself with the bare courtesies that he was obligated to present through his residence at the Schloss, then sequestered himself in the library.

A knock on the door brought him out of his reverie. "Enter!" he ordered.

Von Schleich came into the room, the genial smile he had worn all evening dropping away as if it had never been. "I overheard part of a conversation some of the guests were having about Nordhausen. I thought I'd bring it to your attention due to its proximity to Dora-Mittelbau," he began without preamble. "It was something about a surprise visit to the research facility by a small Turkish delegation, with the intent of convincing the Turks to enter the war on our side. It's apparently being kept quietly unofficial which is why we haven't caught wind of it through official channels. Might it cause a problem?"

Haussner stood up slowly and wandered over to the bureau closing a book he had been browsing. "Two and a half thousand years ago a Chinese general, Sun Tzu, wrote a book called 'The Art of War', as relevant now as it was then. In it he said: 'all warfare is based on deception'." He turned back to von Schleich, a sardonic grin on his face. "I long ago gave up believing in coincidence, Erich. Consider: the pressure I've been putting on Colonel Hogan; our recent guest, Captain Mallory, with his background in the Mediterranean theatre of operations; and now a surprise and very hush-hush visit by a Turkish official. I think it all adds up to make a much larger picture than we're seeing at the moment. It is arrogance itself to believe that we are the only ones capable of deception. Check with Berlin - see what they know about this visit. Use whatever channels you deem necessary, on my authority. While you do, I think I might take the opportunity to mingle with our guests."

Less than half an hour later, Haussner had the answers he needed. Von Schleich came into his superior's temporary office just as Haussner slammed down the telephone. "There is a fault on the telephone lines between here and Nordhausen, in fact between here and everywhere I've tried to call in Northern Thuringia, including Kaunstein. I tell you again, Erich, there are no coincidences. Gather as many troops as you can but we leave for Nordhausen in ten minutes. Schnell!"

Scientific Research Establishment, Nordhausen, 18th March 1944, 2200 hrs.

As the tour had progressed, Hogan found himself half wishing that he had brought Carter with him. While most of the detail had gone over his head, he was sure that Carter would have found it all incredibly exciting. The mental image that he had of an ebullient Carter would not have fitted in well with the seriousness that the rest of the group was displaying. Mallory's explosive's expert, Dusty Miller, could be as inscrutable as his Commanding Officer, but Hogan could not miss the way he had taken in the lab set-ups and the comments that Steur had made.

The mood of Steur's reception was muted and uncomfortable. The need to preserve secrecy warred with the apparent need to convince the Turkish delegation that the technological and scientific advances being made at Nordhausen would be sufficient to turn the tide of the War back in Germany's favour. Mallory, in his guise as Oberfuhrer Herzig, worked the room. He lacked the relaxed personable nature that Hogan easily displayed, but he had done enough intelligence work not to make a slip. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a man standing at the edge of the room with a face that nagged at his memory. He took a second look. As if sensing his regard the man turned and met his gaze, and Mallory could see the same sort of vague recognition echoed in the man's eyes.

Then the memory clicked - Kluge - Gestapo - Stalag 11, where he had been disguised as a WGB Major, not an Oberfuhrer-SS. Mallory crossed the room, hoping, praying that he had a few more seconds before the Gestapo agent remembered where they had briefly met before.

Mallory could see the realisation crossing Kluge's face as he got near him. Using his body to hide his actions from the rest of the room, he slipped a fine bladed knife from its purpose built sheath on his left forearm. To a casual observer it looked as if he had done nothing more threatening than scratch an itch on his left hand.

Kluge opened his mouth to give the alarm but before he could say anything, he felt a sharp pressure in his side. He looked down to see the dull gleam of the blade that was being pressed against him. "Shall we step outside?" suggested a soft, conversational voice. Numbly, Kluge obliged. He had looked into the eyes of killer many times before, and he was all too aware of the danger he was in. Kluge was a fervent Nazi, but where his own safety was concerned, his political loyalties were... flexible.

Hogan had seen Mallory escorting someone out of the room. Whatever the tough façade the New Zealander projected, he knew the rib was still causing him trouble, and would for several weeks yet. Against Doctor Freiling's advice, he had taken a combination of stimulants and painkillers to keep him on his feet for the Nordhausen mission. Hogan had not even bothered trying to talk him out of it - he knew enough that it would have been a waste of

time. His musing was brought to a swift halt by a new arrival to the reception being introduced to Kinch. Hogan wandered over to join them. The picture of Professor Paul Venner that London had sent was a few years old, but unless Hogan was very much mistaken, it was he.

As he neared the group he could see the disapproval radiating off Steur as well as the black dressed man who hovered at Venner's side. For his part, Venner looked about as impressed by the gathering as if he were a guest forced to sit in at a chimp's tea party.

"I have been informed," noted Venner, "that I am supposed to impress you with the overwhelming superiority of German ordnance in order to convince you to join in on their side. Quite why you would want to do so is beyond me. As far as they're concerned, you're all untermenschen anyway, or weren't you aware?"

"Shut up, Venner! You're nothing more than a filthy Verrater!" hissed Schaub, his ever-present Gestapo shadow.

"Traitor? I'm not German, so how on Earth can I be a traitor by not toeing the Nazi party line? Do try to be accurate, Schaub. If you can't manage to say anything sensible, why don't you just be quiet while the adults are talking," Venner looked around arrogantly at the supposed Nazis listening to him, "or am I making assumptions about the general maturity of the gathering?"

There was a moment of horrified silence as Steur struggled to decide whether to evict Venner immediately or apologise to his esteemed Turkish guest. For their part, Hogan and Kinch were fighting to keep from laughing at Venner's irreverent attitude. Either the man had a death wish or he was secure enough in the knowledge of his importance to the research going on at Nordhausen that he felt he could say what he liked.

It was Kinch who rescued the situation, knowing that they needed to keep Venner around, knowing that for the moment anyway, as Mehmed Ferid Pasha, he had enough authority to direct the level of the response to Venner's recklessness. "We should try to oblige the Professor, should we not. Perhaps we could all leave the name calling to the Kindergarten where such things belong." A general mumble of acquiescence met Kinch's words, while Venner merely frowned in consideration of the alleged Turkish envoy's rebuke. Kinch continued, "You are English, I understand, Professor. I went to University in England myself, Trinity Hall, Cambridge - long before the War, of course."

It took a considerable effort of will on Venner's part not to react to Mehmed Ferid Pasha's words. He was himself a graduate of Cambridge university, and before moving to teach at Oslo, he had done much of his research there. Trinity Hall was small and friendly enough that he felt if the Turk had gone there, he would at the very least have been familiar with the man's name. He was not. In which case, he had to consider why he was lying. Self-aggrandisement? Possible, but unlikely. A claim to have graduated from Cambridge was easy enough to check if anyone cared to. It had to be something else then. Time to test the waters. "I was at Cambridge myself some years back while I was reading for my doctorate."

Kinch smiled. It could have been taken as a smile from the discovery of a shared background. It was more a smile of relief that Venner knew that things were not quite as they seemed. He turned to Steur and the others. "Gentlemen, would you excuse us. Since returning to Turkey I have had little chance to reminisce about the time I spent in Cambridge. Professor?"

"Certainly, Your Excellency," agreed Steur. The others nodded their accord, but Kinch and Hogan both noted a ghost of suspicion cross Schaub's face.

Hogan turned to Miller who had stood by silently throughout the reception, and muttered, "See if you can find Captain Mallory. He went out a while back now escorting some kraut - probably Gestapo. Tell him we need to get a move on. Steur might be impressed by Kinch's act, but Schaub looks like he's beginning to figure out something hinky is going on."

"Right, Colonel," said Miller and left to find Mallory.

Guest Quarters, Scientific Research Establishment, Nordhausen, 18th March 1944, 2240 hrs.

From the moment he realised that Oberfuhrer Herzig was not who he pretended to be, Kluge had been waiting for the man to make a mistake, to slip up and give him a chance to raise the alarm. It had not taken him long to come to the conclusion that whoever he was, 'Herzig' knew what he was doing.

"Where is Doctor Edith Windermere?" The man's tone as he asked the question was flat, almost disinterested. Kluge got ready to offer a scornful refusal, when he felt the knife move from his side down to his crotch. His questioner's pitiless eyes seemed to bore into his. Kluge could feel the pressure of the knife, a tacit reminder of the penalty for a wrong answer. He was in little doubt that Herzig was capable of carrying out his threat.

Bereft of the support of his troops, Kluge's resistance wilted. "She's in room seven of the guest quarters," he said sullenly.

Herzig/Mallory moved so that once again they stood alongside each other, the knife once again pressing into Kluge's side. "Show me," he ordered.

Kluge had no choice but to oblige. Less than five minutes later, Kluge had dismissed the Gestapo on duty - at Mallory's urging - and had taken him to room seven. He opened the door and was propelled into the room with the urging of Mallory's knife. In a chair opposite, looking up from the book she had been reading with a startled expression, was Edith Windermere. Mallory pushed the door closed behind them. "Get a coat, Doctor. We're leaving!" said Mallory. Edith, recognising her visitor from his visit to Stalag 11 under the guise of Major Heiden, put on her coat. She glanced over at Mallory who had been waiting, keeping his eyes on Kluge. "Wait for me in the corridor please Doctor," he said, "I will join you momentarily."

Edith left the room. She had a fair idea of what he meant to do, and while she did not consider herself sentimental, she felt a pang of remorse about the apparent casualness with which 'Heiden' or whoever seemed to approach the task. Moments later the door opened and Heiden stepped into the corridor, his expression unreadable. "My name's Mallory, Doctor Windermere. It's time for you to go home to England."

Scientific Research Establishment, Nordhausen, 18th March 1944, 2300 hrs.

Hogan frowned slightly as he saw Miller returning on his own, but noted automatically the attaché case he was now carrying. He had watched earlier as Miller had packed it with a selection of the explosives that London had air-dropped for them. Hogan moved to join him.

"Colonel, Captain Mallory's got the lady hidden in the car under a blanket. He's taken the rest of the explosives and is starting to set them. I'll need about fifteen minutes to get this lot in place. The timers are set for midnight. Hope you're as ready to go as you said you were," drawled Miller.

"Just got to detour that Gestapo watch dog that seems to be attached to the good Professor's coat-tails. What was his name? Schaub?" replied Hogan. He noticed a discomfiting grin appear on Miller's face.

"A job for Andrea perhaps, Colonel?" Miller commented. Hogan suddenly felt a twinge of sympathy for Venner's Gestapo minder. A part of him wanted to ask Miller about what had happened to the man Mallory had escorted from the room less than an hour earlier. Another part of him, the wiser, more cynical part already knew the answer. As Miller left to plant the explosives, Hogan made his way across the room to where Andrea was hovering close to Kinch and Venner.

"Professor," said Hogan, speaking in English, keeping his voice low. "I hope you haven't left the tap on because we're leaving this party in just a few minutes."

"How? I mean, what about Schaub, the rest of the Gestapo? We're in the middle of Germany! Good God, what about my niece, Edith? She's..."

"...in our car," finished Hogan for him, cutting off Venner's protestations, "and Professor, much as I appreciate an enquiring mind, unless you've got something relevant to add, now is not the time for it."

"Understood," said Venner, all business. "Anything you need me to do?"

"Not right now, Professor. For the moment, just do as your told and with luck we'll all get out of here in one piece," said Hogan. "Andrea, could you take care of Schaub - quietly. We can't risk raising the alarm."

Andrea nodded. He wandered over to where Schaub stood at the side of the room, glowering in Venner's direction as he stood talking with 'Major Schmadeke' of the Luftwaffe and the

presumed Turkish envoy. Hogan could not tell what was said, but moments later Andrea went outside followed by Schaub. He waited, but neither returned.

The schnapps and beer were both flowing freely, overcoming the previous disquietude of the scientists who had been coerced into attending. Inconspicuous amidst the growing noise and chaos, Kinch, Hogan and Venner slipped outside. Andrea, Miller and Mallory were waiting for them by the car. Hogan gazed at Mallory, noting the slightly hunched way the man was standing and the tension in his face. Doc Freiling's painkillers finally wearing off, I guess, mused Hogan, but all he said was: "Done?"

Mallory's eyes met his. "Done!"

Hogan glanced down at his watch as the others piled into the car. 2319 hours. Assuming the timers were working, that gave them forty minutes to get clear. Hopefully long enough to get past any security cordon that gets thrown up once the place blows. To the accompaniment of salutes from the guards on the gate, the car left the Nordhausen facility.

Forty minutes later, the explosives went off. Kinch paused the car for a moment as they looked back at vivid orange glow that lit up the night sky behind them. "They really needed some better storage protocols from some of the chemicals there," observed Venner dryly.

Security Checkpoint, Road between Dusseldorf and Nordhausen, 19th March 1944, 0045 hrs.

Haussner was fuming. He had stopped at many of the checkpoints along the road in the hope that the phone lines would be repaired. There was the best part of a division of the Waffen-SS waiting for the word only a few miles away from Nordhausen at Kaunstein. For all the use they would be, they might as well have been on the Russian Front. As it was, he had no more than a couple of dozen men with him in the truck behind.

Von Schleich came out of the blockhouse with a haste which had Haussner immediately on his guard. "The phone lines to Nordhausen as well as Kaunstein are still down, Standartenfuhrer, but as you ordered I questioned the local security services. There are reports from around Scherfede that would suggest a light plane, probably a Lysander, has put down somewhere nearby." Haussner knew as well as von Schleich what that meant. The

British used Lysanders to ferry agents into and out of Europe. That a Lysander was apparently on the ground, waiting, meant only one thing: a pick up.

"Coincidence again, Erich?" questioned Haussner with a grin.

"I take the point, Standartenfuhrer," nodded von Schleich. "One of the Feldwebels stationed here used to live near Scherfede. He says he can think of only one place that's level enough to land a plane as well as being anywhere near a road."

"Get the Feldwebel in the car, now! Tell him he's volunteered to guide us there." Haussner's gaze fixed von Schleich, his eyes blazing with an urgency the latter had seldom seen. "I don't intend to lose this one, Erich."

Field outside Scherfede, 19th March 1944, 0230 hrs.

At the time he had received them, Hogan had thought the instructions to find the rendezvous point with the plane taking Venner and Edith back to England had been overly precise. After fifteen minutes searching for a farm track off the main road, he found himself wishing they had included something more comprehensive than the sketch map he had been given. Mindful of the rough surface, Kinch coaxed the staff car down a track that was clearly intended more for tractors than cars. At the appointed place he stopped and flashed the headlights twice before extinguishing them. From a nearby thicket a torch flashed twice in reply.

A dark stillness settled over the field. The full moon overhead lit the field in monochrome shades of charcoal, the tops of the trees forming indistinct smudges against the sky. As his eyes adjusted to the night, Hogan stepped out of the car and gazed around the field. There was no trace of a plane. He turned around, thinking he heard movement. Mallory and Andrea were gone from the car.

The torch in the thicket flashed again, somehow communicating an impatience at odds with Hogan's growing sense of unease. He looked left and right, wondering where Mallory and Andrea were, wondering how far he could trust them to watch his back. Based on what he had seen and heard of them, he had a high opinion of just how good they were, but he did not

know them, not like he knew Kinch, Newkirk or the others. His people he would have trusted implicitly. However good Mallory and Andrea were, they were still outsiders and Hogan had learned the hard way not to trust outsiders.

This time, though, he knew he had little choice. He took a few deep breaths, checked the gun that was tucked in his jacket pocket, and started walking towards where he had seen the light. The field was newly ploughed, rutted and uneven. The comforting bulk of the car receded behind him, as he walked alone feeling horribly exposed. With every step he felt his muscles tense, waiting for the hail of bullets his nerves were screaming was only seconds away.

The noise from ahead of him of a gun being cocked was almost anticlimactic. He stopped, pulled out his own gun and pointed it in the direction of the sound.

"Do you come here often?" Hogan paused as he heard the first part of the recognition phrase. The voice was female, low and sultry with the hint of another accent. Spanish?

"Only in the Springtime," he said as the code required, then asked his check question, "What's your favourite drink?"

"Tequila Sunrise!" came the reply. Hogan thought he could pick up the faintest ghost of laughter in the woman's voice as she said the words. He watched as a dark shadow detached itself from one of the trees and moved towards him. "Did you manage to get the packages?"

"Both safe and in the car," he confirmed. "Where's the plane?"

The torch in the woman's hands flashed twice sharply, then twice again. On the other side of the field Hogan heard the roar of an engine kicking into life. Almost simultaneously he heard the shrill 'bleep' of an owl followed seconds later by the familiar staccato rattle of machine gun fire coming from the direction of the track they had driven up. "Ah, damn!" he said, then all pretence at stealth forgotten, he yelled back towards the car, "you two, get over here - fast!"

Two black shapes detached from the black bulk of the car and struggled across the field at an unsteady run. Hogan took their arms and virtually threw them at the woman. "Get that plane

moving and get the Hell out of here. We'll cover you as long as we can." The woman simply nodded and sped back in the direction of the waiting plane. Hogan watched them for a couple of moments, finally able to see enough to recognise the expected silhouette of a Lysander, and then returned to help the others.

By the time he got back to the car, Kinch was revving the engine while Miller was firing at a sea of approaching torches that were bobbing towards them. Behind him he could hear the sound of the Lysander's engine crescendo as it prepared for take-off.

"Getting a bit hot here, Colonel!" Kinch shouted.

No kidding, thought Hogan as he felt what had to have been a bullet pluck at the sleeve of his jacket. Just got to give them a few more minutes to get airborne. Like ghosts materialising from the ether Mallory and Andrea appeared beside the car. Mallory had one hand clutched to his side, his teeth clenched, his eyes fever-bright. "It's Haussner and a handful of SS," he gasped.

Andrea took over the report: "We got most of them, but there were many sets of headlights in the distance. Reinforcements, I think. We must go now if we are to get clear."

"Agreed," said Hogan as he watched Andrea ease Mallory into the car.

He watched as Miller handed Mallory some pills. "You carry on like this, boss, you're gonna get yourself so banged up that even ol' medicine man Miller ain't gonna be able to put you back together again," Miller drawled, exasperation barely concealing his concern.

"Sorry, Dusty," said Mallory, swallowing the pills. He sagged in relief when the car finally cleared the rough track and got onto the smoother road.

Behind them, the Lysander lifted off, clawing for the darkness of the open sky. The roar of the engine rapidly faded as it swung around and headed North-West, towards England.

Haussner could only stand and watch. Waves of pain emanating from his side reminded him that he had not escaped the skirmish unscathed. Haphazard beams of light from torches dropped when the shooting had started cutting across the field. The dead and wounded lay around as if no more than toys scattered by a child's tantrum. His aide, von Schleich was nearby, his blood looking black in the moonlight staining the top half of his grey tunic. His gun was still clutched in his hand.

Mindful of his own wound, Haussner bent down to check on his condition. Von Schleich was unconscious but alive. Behind him the last echoes of the plane's engine had drifted into a silence that was only now being broken by the sound of the awaited reinforcements. Far too late to do anything but gather up the dead and wounded, as had evidently been his opponents' plan.

They had escaped. Heedless of his own dignity, Haussner sat next to his aide, covering him with his own greatcoat. The long threatened rain was finally beginning to spit down. He ignored it: his eyes peering into the night sky in the place where he had last seen the plane. An unwilling, oddly self-deprecating smile quirked at the corner of his mouth as he reflected on the events of the past days. He had lost. It had happened rarely enough in his life for it to be an unusual sensation.

Then an awareness his own situation dawned. His superiors were not forgiving of debacles such as this. He had never bothered with the political intriguing of his peers. To a significant extent, his own untenable position had been of his own creation. He had always been too arrogant to walk the narrow party line that others had done. His own ability and reputation had long protected him from the machinations of his critics. After this, he reflected, a transfer to the Russian Front would be far from the worst outcome.

He thought on what he had unearthed. He had most of the pieces now and had enough clues that he could guess the rest with fair certainty. The tactician and strategist in him could not help but appreciate what he figured Hogan and his men had built under the noses of the Third Reich. He could see it all in his mind, each piece interlocking with the next. He could see it, but he had no proof, just coincidences, instincts and deduction. For the official enquiry into the fiasco he had participated in that was doubtless coming, it would not be enough. His superiors lacked the imagination to conceive the scale and elegance of the set up he had found.

His opponents had played the game well. It would do him little good to reveal his suppositions and deductions, only to let petty minded thugs such as Hochstetter take any of the credit. At his heart he was selfish. If he would not be allowed to win the game, he would

not allow small-minded bureaucrats to benefit from his genius. Conversely, he had developed a regard for his enemy; a higher regard than he had for many of the people to whom he reported. Who could say, but perhaps they would meet again, if he survived the enquiry. He hoped so: it had been a pedestrian war otherwise. Until then, he would keep his silence, he silently averred.

Truck on the road to Hammelburg, 19th March 1944, 0500 hrs.

Hogan and Mallory sat in the cab of the truck. The others were in the back, changing for their return to Stalag 13. The Lysander was uniquely qualified for the kind of work it did, but it was limited in how many people it could carry. Neither man envied the journey that Edith or Venner were undertaking. Flying back to England at several thousand feet in something that was little more than a motorbike sidecar attached to one of the wheel struts of a plane might have been quicker than the pipeline through which Hogan sent people back to England, but it was considerably less comfortable. They drove slowly along the rough, muddy back road as the rain beat on the windscreen. The ancient trees soared upwards nearby on either side of the truck. In the pre-dawn blackness it was like driving down a tree lined canyon, somehow removed from the rest of the world.

For a long while neither man spoke. Each had developed a respect for the other's abilities. Equally, each realised that while they might be colleagues and work well together, they were likely never to be friends. On some things their views were worlds apart. To Hogan's way of thinking, Mallory was too capable of being ruthless, too comfortable with the dirtier side of fighting that the war sometimes called for. The New Zealander was far too willing to use and discard people in pursuit of the greater goal. It was one thing to shoot someone in the heat of combat, to kill them before they managed to kill you or your friends. To kill - assassinate - someone in cold blood was something quite different. It was an aspect of the war he hoped he would never become comfortable with. Nonetheless, he was very glad indeed Mallory was on his side.

Now it would just be a matter of meeting up with LeBeau, Carter and Newkirk, getting changed and letting Mallory, or rather 'Sturmabführer Heiden', corrected Hogan mentally, return them to Stalag 13 after their presumed bout of questioning by the SS. Then, back to the normal routine of helping downed Allied flyers to get out of Germany, with a bit of opportunistic sabotage thrown in for variety.

Stalag 13, tunnels under barracks 2, 19th March 1944, 1000 hrs.

The underground radio room was crowded to capacity with Hogan, his staff and his three visitors who had just returned to the camp through the emergency tunnel.

"London confirms the safe arrival of Doctor Windermere and Professor Venner, sir," reported Kinch with a smile that was echoed by the others in the room. "There's an additional message for Captain Mallory to report to Commodore Jensen immediately on his return to England, something about another 'little job' the Commodore needs doing."

Miller looked despairingly at Hogan. "I don't suppose you've got any job openings here, have you?"

Hogan did not trust himself to answer.

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GLOSSARY AND HISTORICAL NOTES:

Comparison of (officer) ranks: American / German Regular Army / SS / RAF

2nd Lieutenant / Leutnant / Untersturmführer / Pilot Officer

1st Lieutenant / Oberleutnant / Obersturmführer / Flying Officer

Captain / Hauptmann / Hauptsturmführer / Flight Lieutenant

Major / Major / Sturmbannführer / Squadron Leader

Lieutenant-Colonel / Oberstleutnant / Obersturmbannführer / Wing Commander

Colonel / Oberst / Standartenfuhrer / Group Captain

[The SS placed an extra rank between these grades - Oberfuhrer - normally translated as Senior Colonel.]

Brigadier-General / Generalmajor / Brigadefuhrer / Air Commodore

Major-General / Generalleutnant / Gruppenfuhrer / Air Vice Marshal

Lieutenant-General / General (der Infanterie, etc.) / Obergruppenfuhrer / Air Marshal

General / Generaloberst / Oberst-Gruppenfuhrer / Air Chief Marshal

The English army ranks are identical to the American ranking system with the exception of Brigadier-General which in Britain is just Brigadier.

-English/American Abbreviations:

ARP: Air Raid Patrol. Locally raised groups whose duty it was to sound air raid alarms and all clears, and to generally take care of the civilian population during air raids.

NAAFI: Navy, Army and Air Force Institute. (i.e. The commissary)

OSS: Office of Strategic Services, an American organisation created late in WWII, and the fore-runner of the CIA

SBS Special Boat Service, the less well known Royal Navy analogue to the SAS.

SOE: Special Operations Executive, British administered behind-enemy-lines organisation - provided significant support to, amongst others, the French resistance. Winston Churchill's instructions to the SOE were to "set Europe ablaze".

WAAF: Women's Auxiliary Air Force, functioning largely in a support role on the home front.

-German Abbreviations:

RfSS: Reichsfuhrer-SS, Himmler's title as commander of the SS, also used as a cuff badge to denote the members of Himmler's staff.

SA: Sturmabteilung, Stormtroopers, the first armed wing of the Nazi party, they lost considerable influence after the SS was removed from their control in 1933, and their founder - Ernst Rohm - was assassinated on Hitler's orders in 1934.

SD: Sicherheitsdienst, the Security Service, a sub-division of the SS which had assumed many of the functions formerly held by the Abwehr, the intelligence division of the Wehrmacht.

SS: Schuetzstaffeln, Blackshirts, initially founded as Hitler's Personal bodyguard and under the aegis of the SA. They were removed from the control of the SA in 1933, resulting in a substantial rise in their influence.

WGB: Wurttembergische Gebirgsbataillon, the German army's elite mountain troops.

HISTORICAL NOTES:

The SS was broadly divided into two groups: the Waffen-SS and the Allgemeine-SS.

The Waffen-SS (literally: Weapon-SS), acquired the title Waffen-SS in 1940. During the war, it was subordinated to the orders of the Armed Forces High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht), though it was never an integral part of the Wehrmacht (Regular German Army). At its height, the Waffen-SS numbered some 910,000 men but that figure was only a tenth of the size of the Wehrmacht at its peak size. A more relevant statistic is that in 1943-44, the Waffen-SS divisions totalled a quarter of the Panzer (armoured) forces of the army.

The Allgemeine-SS (literally: General SS) was much less high profile than the Waffen-SS. It was made up to some extent of people who had failed - for whatever reason - to get into the Waffen-SS. The majority, however, had decided to stay with the largely part-time and generally unpaid local units of the Allgemeine-SS. It was, however, a highly influential force including members from every walk of life, from factory workers through to scientists and aristocrats. By 1944, 25% of the leading personalities in Germany were members of the Allgemeine-SS, some as regular members, others as "Ehrenfuhrers" or honorary officers. Through it, Himmler controlled over 500 factories as well as numerous other businesses, all of which contributed to the financial independence of the SS.

The Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) was the Reich Central Security Office. It controlled the Security Agencies of the Third Reich: the Kripo, the Gestapo, and the SD. Between them, these agencies ran foreign and domestic intelligence operations, espionage and counter-espionage, dealt with both politically and non-politically motivated crimes and kept track of public opinion of the Nazi regime.

The V-2 Rocket, part of whose research and development makes up the subject matter for this story, was first fired in earnest on September 6th, 1944 with two rockets shot at Paris. Both failed in flight. On September 8th, the first V-2's were fired at England. Of about 4000 V-2's fired, only about 1500 reached their targets, causing some 2500 fatalities. The Vergeltungswaffe-2 (Vengeance weapon-2) did not fulfil German expectations due to weaknesses in the technology and its late appearance in the course of the war.

Towards the end of 1944, Nazi scientists were working on rockets developed from the V-2 technology. These were code named A-9: an improved V-2 which would be the second stage to a booster rocket which was designated A-10. With this, the Nazis planned to attack the continental United States. Fortunately for the American civilian population, the war ended before any of these new terror weapons were ever launched.

The Nazi operation at Kaunstein was real. The death toll over the period October 1943 to March 1944 was nearly 3000. A further 1000 workers died on the trip back to Bergen-Belsen. At the height of its productivity, the slave labour workforce of up to 40,000 made up to 600 rockets per month in addition to other munitions. The overseers at Kaunstein were a mixture of SS, SD and civilians. After the war, the survivors of Kaunstein reported on the torture and punishment meted out there, and at the pile of corpses that would accumulate next to the first aid station every day.

The Westland Lysander found extensive employment in the support of resistance groups with the delivery of equipment and the transport of agents, particularly in Northern France where it was within range of England. It was a rugged aircraft, able to cope with the rough landing fields demanded by the covert nature of its work, and capable of take off from a very short runway. It was only used for small scale jobs. For larger drops, converted bombers were used by the British such as the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley whose effectiveness as a bomber had proved to be less than predicted. The American forces used the C-47, the military version of the ubiquitous DC-3 Dakota.

NB.

The lines Haussner quotes:

To set the cause above renown,
To love the game beyond the prize,
To honour, while you strike him down,
The foe that comes with fearless eyes.

are from "Clifton Chapel" written by Sir Henry Newbolt.

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