

Mike Watt had only been the captain of the USS *Minutemen* for a brief time. She was one of the new Balao-class subs making their mark on the war. He loved his boat – she weren't a ship – he'd smacked a guy in the mug once for calling her a ship – no, she wasn't a ship and definitely not no tugboat, 'cos the Krauts were completely aware of this new, prowling force of the seas.

Up on deck, the wind god blew an Artic breath across the bow, blasting two men's bearded, worn faces. From the crow's nest, they looked out upon the encroaching North Sea. Scanning the water for the enemy, only the desolate horizon prevailed.

"Think it's a wild goose chase?" asked Yeoman Dennis Hurley.

"Pert near," replied first mate Commander George Boon. "But I tell you what, if there's anyone who can get whatever the mission is about done, it's him."

"Why?"

"You ever heard of Jimmy Launders?"

"Nope."

"He's the British commander of the HMS *Venturer*. Happened in these parts up near Bergen. Launders actually sank a u-boat that was underwater while being submerged himself. Tremendous skill and lots of luck, but he did it. Sent old Korvettenkapitan Wolfram down to Davy Jones's locker. Before that, Watt shadowed him on some covert missions down in Nicaragua among other places, learned tons off that Brit. One thing's for sure, there's no doubt in Watt's ability."

Boon had no problems with the captain. The two men were actually best of friends. To allieve the stress of war, they'd argue the merits of Walt Whitman. Both thought of him as the greatest maritime poet, but they couldn't agree on which poem about the sea was best. (Their legendary arguments could be heard jostling through the metal confines – "While currently I'm partial to "To the Man-of-War-Bird", much could be said for "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life"... – "Nonsense, "Song for All Seas, All Ships" is by far the superior...)

At that instant, Hurley noticed something out of the corner of his eye – "Two o'clock, German cruiser!"

"Dive!" Watt ordered as the two men joined them down under. "Spot, you got anything?"

Ray Ginn, or "Spot" as he was nicknamed, was the radar operator. "1800 yards captain, and gaining." Being a joker at heart, the rest of the crew loved him. Instead of pinup girls adorning the walls of his cabin, he had a picture of Moe, Larry and Curly – he loved the Stooges. But now he was deadly serious.

"Take us to 400 feet and cut the engines," came the order.

After the alarms came to a halt and silence to regain composure took hold of the crew, they waited. The first of the depth charges were close.

"Go to 600 feet," came the whispered order, echoing as if it were the softest hammer banging the sides of the hull emitting ripples to notify their whereabouts to the encroaching Huns.

Just as they were starting out, a severe concussion rocked the port side.

"Fire in the engine room, Captain," came the report from Ensign Boucher.

"Get Mould, Hart and Norton down there or we'll have a lot of pink heads turning blue," came the command. The depth charges had stopped, halting some of the concern. They'd snuck past the deadly German warship. After a couple of minutes, a report came back that they could use some help down in the engine room.

"Get Meltzer down there now!"

"Damn, it must be getting bad down there if he's sending Meltzer," said Ensign Fogarty.

"Why," asked Coltrane.

"He's out for revenge. His brother was on a ship that was torpedoed by Comandante Stefano Albini of the Marconi-class da Vinci sub *Fugazi* of the Italian Royal Navy. Before going down, the ship was able to sink the big black Italian sub with a depth charge. Before joining the navy, Meltzer was in the Army Air Force. Shot down a ME 262 with his Mustang. He's out to kill as many of the Axis as possible. He don't fear nothin' – even the Reaper."

"Thought he had that cagey look in his eye."

"Yeah, but the funny thing is he's always pining for his gal – some broad named Henrietta Collins – showed me a picture once. Kind of a looker, but she had hands like a man."

Down in the engine room, fireman Meltzer closed the door and grabbed the firehose and got to work. He saved the lives of all the black gang that day, as well as the engines themselves.

The tension within the boat was mounting after the attack. Watt knew he had to do something. He took to the comm.

"I know some of you think this mission is impossible. But you know my motto – yank manana from the nada. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. The Krauts are up to some nefarious shit – and we've been pegged to stop 'em. Orders comin' straight from Admiral Roessler. We're tracking Captain Vernunftig of the Kriegsmarine who's commanding the *Corona* – yeah, the one that's sunk so many of our subs. They're headed north for Peenemunde with a cargo that could change the war. If there's anyone who has a problem with this mission, speak up now – let yourself be heard!"

"We're with you, captain!" responded Master Chief Petty Officer Raul Crawford, which was followed by a rousing chorus of cheers. He would of followed the captain anywhere – even if he'd been a bit embarrassed before. Once while going to the galley, he passed by Boon and Watt while they were having one of their Whitman conversations and they stopped him–

Watt: Hey, Raul, which do you think is the best poem?

Crawford: Actually, I'd say "One's Self I Sing."

Boon: What? Where you from anyways?

Crawford: From Ohio.

Watt: No wonder – you're a landlubber!

They all shared a laugh and even though his pride might have been a bit bruised, these types of exchanges really only cemented his loyalty toward his boisterous and jovial leader.

Before lying down at 7 bells, the captain took a moment to himself to reflect on everything – including all the men who'd been lost before and made a commitment to himself.

"Not this time Nazis..." thought Watt, reaffirming his personal pledge.

The *Minutemen* ventured north, tracking the elusive vessel. The German destroyer had no escort, trying not to garner attention. A veritable needle in a haystack.

Later, Boon bounded into the captain's berth, nearly falling on top of Watt who was asleep in his bunk, bellowing, "Eskimo!"

"Crimony!" yelled Watt, stirring from his nap.

"I figured it out! Eskimo! I was using that enigma machine the Brits let us borrow and broke the Krauts' code! The code's name is Eskimo – they're transporting a bunch of scientists – Sidney Von Vanian, Josef Von Strummer, Count Von Kirkwood and Cervena Von Danzig and a bunch of radioactive material. Something about all of them making some super bomb that could take out New York with the stuff. But the best thing is I got their coordinates!"

"Outstanding! I got a powerful hankerin' to send them sonsabitches on a hellride to the bottom of this big, beautiful ocean."

After traveling half a day, they arrived at the designated spot a little ahead of their German counterparts.

"Up periscope, Perkins!"

The periscope breeched the surface with the sun slightly behind their port side, practically invisible to the blinded cruiser. The German ship almost completely filled the lens. The hull floated like a mountain top perched on the water, ready for a monstrous, tectonic landslide.

Watt pressed the launch button, sending two torpedoes toward their unsuspecting target.

"Be seeing you," he whispered under his breath as the sea erupted into a fiery orange ball of flame and carnage.

"To the angels gate," Boon thought to himself as he felt the repercussion gently rock the sub.

"Now ain't that a hoot!" yelled Hurley amongst the other shouts and cheers.

Allowing himself a moment's respite, Watt made his way to the deck.

Acknowledging his crew had done an amazing job, a sublime grin floated over his face like the gravity of a rainbow subtly penetrating the roots of an ancient banyan tree. Recharged and ready for the next adventure his beautiful boat was going to take him on, he watched as a sole pelican landed softly on the bow.

I appreciate how busy you are, but if this brings you any enjoyment, I would be eternally gratified!

mike patten

Feedback is always appreciated!

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p.s. vernunftig means sensible in German