

Chapter X

Bordeaux

November 17, 1942 – 22 November 1942

At 0800 on Tuesday November 17th the Reprisal sailed from Porto da Praia De Victoria as a part of Task Force 35 under Rear Admiral Carlton Weston on the Congress. Task Force 35 consisted of the Congress, Reprisal, the cruisers Syracuse, Billings, and Cedar Rapids, along with nine destroyers, and the Yellowstone. At the same time, the air group began taking off from Lajes Field. The combat air patrol and anti-submarine patrol took up station and the morning search fanned out ahead of the task force. All other aircraft were brought aboard.

The task force sailed southeast, as is they were destined for North Africa, at 15 knots maintaining a zigzag pattern under the cover of a weather front. Once out of sight of Terceira, the Yellowstone and the destroyer Masters were detached to head independently for the predetermined fueling location. The air group maintained patrols and searches through out the day. Once the task force sailed past São Pedro Island six hundred miles southeast of Terceira, they rounded the island just after sunset and set a northeasterly course.

For the next two days the ships continued on their way toward the northeast. The weather front provided moderate cloud cover, enough to conceal their presence. The patrols and searches didn't come across anything that may have spotted the task force. Likewise, the destroyers didn't detect any submarine activity.

All in all, it was a routine cruise. The plan of attack was gone over again and again. Everyone knew their job. In the monotony of routine, Sheffield found himself thinking again. Geannie crossed his mind as always. He couldn't help but think about the letter that he had found and what she had told him.

Then his thoughts turned to Ramona and his promise to take her out to dinner. She was a good friend with whom he was comfortable and wondered if they might ever hit it off. But there was her mystery man. It probably wouldn't work out any way.

Then he wondered about Paula Drussel. He really didn't know her at all. He did enjoy her company on that one occasion. Perhaps if and when he returned to Norfolk, he would call on her. After all she did give him her telephone number and address, which he still had in his billfold. "I could at least drop her a line sometime." To think about someone other than Geannie was actually kind of liberating. But then he looked down at the wedding ring on his finger and his thoughts turned to self doubt and dismissed the notion of there ever being anyone but Geannie.

On the morning of the third day, the task force rendezvoused with the Yellowstone and spent the day fueling. After filling up destroyers and topping off the tanks of the larger ships, the tanker and it escorting destroyer retired to the southwest. Just after sunset, Task Force 35 rounded the northwest tip of

Spain and began a high speed dash for the launch position. The Billings and Cedar Rapids were detached to proceed further north into the Bay of Biscay to be in position to intercept any elements of the Kriegsmarine that may come out to challenge the operation.

During the night the weather front gave way to partly cloudy skies with a full moon. The Bat Team patrol was particularly vigilante that night. Meanwhile, the Cutthroat had arrived on station and waited at periscope depth, just below the surface, and watched for the prearranged signal to disembark the Marine Raiders.

Adriana Bessette sat alone on the beach watching the sunset into the Bay of Biscay. Adriana was the long time lover of Jean Laroche who at that moment was at his casino, pretending to be polite to the hated German occupiers. She waited for the moment when the two pairs of Nazi soldiers assigned to patrol the beach that evening would cross paths on the rise looking over the small cove. Right on cue she got up and plunged into the cold water so she would be soaking wet. Then she positioned herself as if she had washed on the beach.

As predicted, the four soldiers came down through the narrow clearing to the water's edge to investigate. With their rifles slung over their shoulders, one them rolled her over with the tow of his boot. Not only were they surprised to find the woman very much alive, but she was pointing a pistol at them. At the same instant, a dozen armed resistance fighters emerged from the tall grass. The Germans had no choice but to raise their hands above their heads in surrender.

The more aggressive resistance fighters were ready to shoot them on the spot. Adriana, now on her feet, intervened. "We don't want to alert anyone with gun shots." A heated discussion ensued briefly, until Adriana, who was in charge prevailed. "We could use their uniforms." she suggested. One of the men who spoke German ordered the soldiers to remove their uniforms. The frightened young men complied.

Adriana, not certain what to do with them just yet, ordered that they be bound and gaged. Perhaps they had information that would be helpful. As the prisoners were tied up, others left the beach and ran back to La Gringe to retrieve the two German Army trucks that had been stolen sometime earlier. They had been hidden inside of a haystack for a purpose such as this. In the meantime, Adriana built a small campfire on the beach.

Watching for the signal through the Cutthroat's periscope, Commander Halvesten saw what he was waiting for, a small fire on the beach. He ordered the submarine to surface, but lay low in the water. He had two reasons, one was to present a low profile in the faint light. The other was to make it easier to launch the LCRL's.

Private Seth McClury was glad to have a breath of fresh air as the Marines began breaking out the rafts from where they were stowed and taking them up on deck, with the help of some of the Cutthroat's crew. Seth and others inflated the rafts and tied them up next to the submarine's hull.

They all went below and came back up on deck with the rest of Marines with all of their gear. The two smaller rafts which were tethered behind two larger boats were loaded with the two thirty caliber machine guns, explosives, ammunition, and other supplies.

The Marines, wearing fatigue caps rather than helmets and with blackened faces climbed into the rafts, ten men each, and cast off. As they paddled the thousand yards toward the beach, the Cutthroat stood by with her three inch deck gun to cover the beachhead until the area was secure.

Once ashore, the first order of business was to secure the landing craft. Seth and some other men drug them up off the beach and stashed them in some tall grass where they would be out of sight, yet easily assessable. While they were busy with the rafts, Captain Danpora, the platoon leaders, and sergeants conferred with Adriana and the resistance fighters. She was a petite woman in her mid thirties who spoke very good English and was quite fond of Americans. She and Jean had spent one summer touring the United States thirteen years earlier in 1929. The three German speaking members of the company were given the uniforms that had recently been worn by the four prisoners. The fourth went to one of the resistance fighters.

While going over their respective targets, the weapons platoon went about setting up their thirty caliber machine guns in order to cover the retreat. The prisoners were interrogated to see if they knew anything that would assist in the mission. The youngest and most frightened was very willing to cooperate. He revealed the password for the night that would get them through the one checkpoint they would have to pass through. He said that the next patrol wouldn't be there to relieve them until dawn. He also said that he would rather be shot or taken prisoner than returned to the Army. He was convinced that he would be treated better in a POW camp than the way he was treated in the Army.

With the beachhead secured and the plan for the raid all laid out, the rest of the raiders crowded into the back of the two army trucks for the hour ride to Bordeaux. The men in German uniforms drove the trucks. One resistance fighter went with each platoon as a guide. Adriana and a few of her men remained at the beach along with Captain Danpora and his staff. The rest of the resistance fighters had the assignment to take out the anti-aircraft batteries that defended Bordeaux.

The ride into the city was bumpy, yet uneventful. Security at the one checkpoint was lax and the two trucks were simply waved through without having to stop. The trucks drove on through the night and eventually pulled off the road into a secluded wooded area just outside of the city. The two platoons split up and set out for their receptive targets. At points along the way, three man fire teams were deployed to cover the retreat. The object was to not fire a shot unless absolutely necessary. The mission was to be carried out

in silence.

At the radio station, the 2nd Platoon had no problem attaching their explosives to the tower. After setting the timers, their mission was accomplished and they made their way back to where the trucks were parked. The 1st Platoon, on the other hand, had a much more difficult time. The power station was in a more heavily guarded area, with foot patrols and searchlights. At one point the advance squad was sniffed out by German shepherd. As the dog's handler went to investigate, the German speaking Marine from Minnesota and the resistance fighter, each wearing German uniforms, stepped out into the light where they could be seen. When confronted, they explained that they had been out on the town and were trying to take a short cut back to the barracks and got disoriented. The dog handler bought their story and pointed the way to the barracks and let them go.

With that close call out of the way, they slowly advanced toward the power station. Once they arrived, there were two guards on foot patrol that had to be taken care of, quietly. Once their bodies were drug off into the underbrush, the same two men in German uniforms stood in for them as not to arouse suspicion. Seth's fire team secluded themselves behind a three foot rock fence to cover the demolition team as they cut their way through the chain link fence and plant their charges on the transmission lines leading from the plant.

After setting the timers, the team began making their withdrawal, the two German impostors brought up the rear. As they withdrew to meet up with the first fire team, all was going well. That is until it was noticed that the guards were missing and the fence had been cut. Being undermanned and without an officer present, a half a dozen German soldiers lead by a sergeant picked up the trail of the saboteurs and gave chase.

They were hot on the Raiders trail and opened fire. Seth and his fire team returned fire to cover their comrades. For Seth, shooting at silhouettes in the moonlight didn't seem like he was shooting at people. They were more like the black paper targets they had shot at on the practice range. Once the advance squad reached the fire team's position, they took cover and opened fire on their pursuers. One marine was wounded in the process of taking out the German squad. The brief firefight bought them enough time to regroup with the other fire teams and return to the trucks.

The shooting alerted the Germans that something was wrong. Because most of the officers were sleeping off hangovers and the number of men available due to weekend leaves, they were slow to get organized and respond.

With both platoons reunited at the trucks, they had to wait there as other vehicles rushed by on their way into the city from the outlying areas. No one seemed to notice anything out of the ordinary by the two army trucks parked in the woods. After an hour of waiting, the coast seemed to be clear so they loaded up

and began the trip back to the beachhead. It was then just after five o'clock in the morning. The delays had taken them most of the night to accomplish their mission. The explosives were set to go off at seven, a half an hour before sunrise and shortly before the air raid.

The two trucks made their way to the coast. On the way they passed a few random vehicles going in the opposite direction. They managed to continue on their way without raising suspicion. That is, until they reached the checkpoint that they had so easily passed through on their way in. This time the guard was standing in the road signaling for the trucks to stop.

Rather than slow down to stop, the driver of the first truck sped up. The second truck followed suit. The guard frantically waving both arms, barely jumped out of the way in time. The lead truck crashed through the arm lowered across the road, the second truck was right behind them. There was some sporadic gun fire coming from the guard station. Fire was returned by the Marines from the rear of the second truck.

The guard post called in the incident. The slow responding Germans regrouped and formed a quickly thrown together company of approximately eighty men from various units, all under the command of a Senior Lieutenant, the equivalent to a 1st Lieutenant. They had no idea who they were up against, assuming it was the French Resistance. The slow response gave the the Raiders enough time to reach the beachhead before being overtaken.

As Task Force 35 made their high speed dash into the Bay of Biscay, Sheffield got what rest he could in his emergency cabin, adjacent to the bridge. At three a.m. the ship began coming to life as the plane handlers began fueling and arming the planes for the attack. Sheffield monitored the progress as the work proceeded in the darkened ship. Lit only by the full moon, the flight deck was alive with activity as planes were brought up from the hangar and moved into position.

The pilots and air crews were served a hearty early morning breakfast before reporting to their respective ready rooms. The weather that morning called for a few high clouds. The wind was out of the west, which meant that the task force would have to steam away from their objective while launching the strike. Admiral Weston would have them withing a hundred and twenty miles before needing to reverse course and head into the wind.

As the pilots were being briefed, Sheffield made the rounds to each ready room, giving his pep talk. As he looked around the men assembled in each room, he couldn't help but wonder which ones wouldn't be coming back. He took his responsibly seriously. In the end, it was his attack plan. If it was flawed, men would pay with their lives. It was risky enough even if everything went off perfectly. The thought weighed heavily on his mind as he made his way back up to the bridge.

When notified that everything was set to go, he had a message flashed to the Congress. In unison, the ten ships reversed course and sped up to twenty four knots. Illuminated only by moonlight, the first plane rolled down the deck and into the air at 0503. First off were the F4Fs, followed by the SBDs of the bombing and scouting squadrons, and last of all, the TBFs. The spares that were pressed onto service for patrol duty would not be launched until sunrise. It took twenty minutes to clear the deck. As the strike group headed east, the task force continued west in order to stay out of range. There was nothing more to do except be ready for anything that might happen and wait to recover the returning aircraft.

The Raiders had enough time to get out of the trucks and take up position on the beach to repel the Germans who were rushing into position. Their rubber boats were already in the water, tied up to logs on the shore. The four German prisoners were in one of the smaller seven man rafts. They either had to kill them or take them with them. The risk of them falling back into the hands of the Germans and identifying the resistance fighters was too great. It was especially important that Adriana's identity was not made known. If she was discovered, it wouldn't be too hard to point the finger right at Jean. Given the choice between execution and being taken prisoner, all four of them chose to finish out the war as a prisoner of war.

Commander Halversen was watching through his periscope as the trucks drove down onto the beach. He gave the order for the sub to surface. Not knowing that trouble was afoot, he also ordered the gun crew to stand by. No sooner than they were on the surface, the situation was apparent. The Marines were in a fire fight with the Germans who had the higher ground above the beach. Fortunately the narrow opening didn't allow them to storm down on the beach. Commander Halversen gave the order for the deck gun and the two twenty millimeter guns to open fire.

The incoming rounds from the Cutthroat off shore and the marine riflemen and the two thirty caliber machine guns on the beach were enough to keep the Germans from advancing. Each round from the submarine's deck gun threw sand in the air, which showered down on the Marines and the Germans alike. Nevertheless, the Marines who had taken cover behind logs and under the trucks began suffering casualties. The sand made it hard for the Marines to see who they were shooting at.

As the Marines were pinned down on the beach, Private McClury wondered to himself, "Am I ever going to get off this beach alive?" Where in the world are the planes that Uncle Sheffield was sending to cover our retreat?" Then an image of Emmeline's face came into his mind. "We haven't even been married for three months yet. I can't leave her a widow now. I have to get through this for her, for us."

Then he remembered something that his father-in-law, Walt had told him. "In all my years as a pastor, I never prayed as hard as during the war in France when our artillery unit came under fire by the

Germans. Shell after shell rained down on our position and men were dying all around me. Hunkered down the best I could for protection, I prayed my heart out that God would spare me. There was no kneeling down, bowing my head, or folding my arms, but my eyes were clenched shut. When the shelling stopped, I was still alive. I offered another prayer, a prayer of gratitude.”

Right there behind that log, clutching his rifle in his hands, Seth prayed like he had never prayed in his twenty two years. He prayed that his life would be spared and return to his beloved Emmeline.

In an answer to that prayer, for a brief instant the sand and smoke cleared. He saw a German soldier stand up, ready to throw a grenade in his direction. Seth could see the man's face clearly, unlike the silhouettes he had been shooting at earlier. He instinctively took aim and pulled the trigger. He saw the man drop his grenade where he stood, grasp the left side of his chest with his right hand, dropping the grenade, and fall dead. The grenade exploded, tossing him and his squad into the air.

Captain Danpora had his radio operator call in the air cover they were promised. The planes were just few miles off shore and told him to hold on for five more minutes.

As round after round came in about every four or five seconds, the Germans began looking for other ways onto the beach and cut off the still unidentified enemy on their flanks. To their great astonishment, they came under fire from four fighter aircraft. In the pre-dawn light they couldn't make out who they were. With gunfire from the offshore submarine, and now being strafed from the air, the Germans were being decimated and had no choice but pull back. The fighters chased them back down the road away from the beach.

The Marines gathered their seven dead and thirteen wounded and got into their rafts and began rowing toward the Cutthroat as shells continued to whistle over their heads. The resistance fighters gathered their casualties and the weapons and equipment bequeathed to them by the retreating Americans and made their escape.

The Cutthroat continued firing on the retreating Germans even as the Marines were brought aboard. Only then did Commander Halversen give the order to cease fire and for the sub to come about and began making their way away at high speed on the surface. He determined it was best to get out as fast as they could. Eighteen knots on the surface would get them a lot farther than six or eight knots submerged. Later that day, the bodies of the seven dead Marines were buried at sea.

The strike group crossed the coast at the point where the Marines were evacuating the beach. The eastern sky began to show the tell tail signs of the impending sunrise as the sky began to lighten. As they approached Bordeaux, they could see the blacked out city and the fires from the burning power plant and radio station.

The main strike group flew on as the torpedo bombers and their escorts swept in on the unsuspecting air base. The eight Wildcats made a strafing pass riddling the parked aircraft with bullets. Behind them, the fifteen Avengers flew in tight formation over the airfield, dropping a total of sixty – five hundred pound bombs. Just for good measure, the fighters doubled back and made another strafing pass before heading back out to sea on their return trip to the carrier. This flight completed their mission without suffering any losses. It would be a while before that airfield would put anything into the air. By the time they could, the Americans would be out of range.

At the same time the Seahawks were working over the Bordeaux-Mérignac Air Base, eight Wildcats made their first pass taking down the dozen or so barrage balloons over the submarine pens. From fourteen thousand feet, the two squadrons of dive bombers pushed over and commenced their dives, The Crusaders concentrated on the submarine pens. The Scouts selected their targets from the seven or eight freighters tied up at the piers along the west side of the river and the submarine tender and her brood of submarines tied up to either side. Others went for the locks, docks, fuel tanks, warehouses and whatever they could find.

The resistance fighters had done a good job of neutralizing the bigger anti-aircraft guns. After the first few dive bombers had made their drops, lighter anti-aircraft guns, mainly from the ships and patrol boats opened fire. The fast moving planes in steep dives proved to be difficult targets. One was unfortunate enough to take a direct hit, killing the pilot and setting the engine on fire. As the others released their bombs and pulled out of their dives, the doomed Bombing Eleven SBD exploded with its bombs still attached as it crashed to the roof of the submarine pens.

The rest came under fire after releasing their bombs and leveled out. The next fighter sweep attempted to take out the small weapons fire. Within four minutes, it was all over. The two squadrons withdrew and headed for home as well. One aircraft from Scouting Eleven was trailing smoke as they headed out to sea. Others had been shot up and were riddled with bullets. Beside the Crusader SBD that was lost, one radioman was known to be dead. Three other radiomen and one pilot had been wounded.

Minutes later, they caught up with the torpedo bombers as they headed back out to sea, on their way home. They had been pretty lucky so far, but they were still one hundred fifty miles from where the ship was supposed to be. It would take just over an hour to make the trip. In that amount of time, anything could happen.

The commotion over Bordeaux drew all of the attention on the ground for miles around. No one noticed the Avenger making its landing approach to the obscure abandoned airstrip that was now nothing more than a pasture. Commander James easily located it by the landmark provided by the French

Resistance. As his plane came to stop near some isolated out buildings, several people emerged from them. His TBF had been modified with the bomb bay rigged to secure a stretcher for the for the injured airman. On this mission the radioman and gunner were left behind on the ship. In their place, one of the ships medics came along instead.

Commander James put his plane down while the two escorting Wildcats flew cover above. He kept his engine revved and his feet on the brakes as the medic made a quick observation of the injured man. Over the roar of the engine, he directed the members of the resistance cell to begin securing the stretcher to the specially installed mounting brackets. Just then a machine gun burst caught a woman at the rear of the crowd killing her.

Seeing the muzzle flash, the observant fighter pilots made a strafing run on the ridge from where the gunfire came. As the Wildcats climbed into the sky, three of the resistance scrambled up the ridge where they found a squad of four German soldiers, One was dead, two were wounded, and a three others were fleeing the scene. After a brief exchange, all of the Germans and one Frenchman were dead.

After securing the stretcher in the belly of the Avenger, the medic and the other survivor, a Royal Air Force Captain, boarded the aircraft. The medic resumed his position in the ball turret and the Captain sat in the radioman's seat, behind the pilot. With all aboard, the Avenger turned around and raced through the open pasture and climbed into the sky. Once airborne, the escorting Wildcats took up position off the either wing. The entire rescue took less than five minutes.

By now the sun was climbing into the sky, illuminating a beautiful, clear autumn morning. Up ahead, the strike group was regrouping for the flight back to the ship. The rescue party rejoined the formation as it crossed the coast line. The ever vigilante fighter pilots stood guard two thousand feet above the formation of dive bombers and torpedo planes as they flew above the blue water of the Bay of Biscay.

Several miles out to sea, the returning strike group came across the Cutthroat on the surface at high speed. The pilot of the damaged Scouting Eleven Dauntless radioed the squadron commander that he wasn't going to make it much farther and that he was going to ditch just ahead of her. He dropped out of formation and gradually descended until he was only several feet above the water as he flew past the submarine. With his wheels up, the pilot killed his engines and glided onto the surface, coming to a stop in the swells. As their aircraft began to settle in the water, the Cutthroat slowed down and altered course slightly and came to a stop near the two men bobbing the water, being kept afloat by their Mae West live jackets. The plane with only the tail section above the water made a final plunge. Once the pilot, radioman/gunner were brought aboard, Commander Halversen ordered full speed ahead.

They had achieved the objective with the loss of only two aircraft in the swift surprise attack. Six freighters were left burning and sinking in the shallow river. One gasoline tanker had exploded in massive fireball. The submarine tender along with four submarines were damaged. Two others appeared to have been sunk. The submarine pens and locks were not destroyed, but enough damage was done that repairing the structures would take some time before they would be repaired and completed.

The raid was sure to draw a response and they were still over one hundred miles from the task force. The raid indeed caught the attention of the Germans up and down the French Coast. They determined that the attacking aircraft were too small to have come from England. They had to have come from one or more aircraft carriers. The only place they could have come from was to the west, in the Bay of Biscay. The only question was, were they British or American? No one knew.

All up and down the coast, the Germans were putting planes into the air. From an airfield a hundred kilometers north of Bordeaux, fifteen Me109s were closing in on the retiring raiders while a dozen more and thirty five Stukas went looking for the carriers waiting to recover them. Farther up the coast, fifteen Heinkel He 111 twin engine bombers fitted with torpedoes also joined the hunt. Not knowing the exact position, the Germans made an educated guess. Using simple geometry they had a good idea.

With the Luftwaffe taking to the sky, the Kriegsmarine sent an emergency dispatch to the three U-boats returning to their bases on the French coast. Two others were quickly dispatched for immediate sortie from La Rochelle.

Fifty miles out over the Bay of Biscay the twelve Wildcats brining up the rear could see fifteen Me109s approaching from the west northwest. Needing to maintain the tactical advantage, they remained above the rest of the flight until the swift Messerschmidts were ready to pounce.

A few minutes later the Me-109s began making their run on the Avengers in the rear of the formation. As the ball turrets and belly guns began to exchange fire with the German fighters, the Wildcats dove into the fight. They opened fire as the trailing Avenger began smoking, lost altitude and fell behind.

In their first pass, the Wildcats downed two Messerschmidts. Now that they had given up their advantage of altitude, the more maneuverable Germans had the advantage. In the ensuing dogfights, two Wildcat and two more Me-109s were shot out of the sky. The Luftwaffe airmen were caught off guard by the unique maneuver known as the Thatch Weave, which had been perfected in the Pacific. The maneuver left little chance for even the most skilled opponent to escape.

The leading Wildcats out ahead of the formation came around to engage the remaining Germans who had concentrated on the SBDs of Scouting Eleven. In an exchange with the rear seat gunners in the Dauntlesses, one more 109 was shot down with the loss of two of the dive bombers.

Once the Wildcats regrouped, they again went after the Messerschmidts. The dog fight cost three

more Wildcat and three Germans. Out of ammunition, the Me109s broke off the engagement and headed for home. The strike group continued on their homeward flight.

Captain Brason and those on the bridge and in other areas throughout the ship listened intently as the battle unfolded. So much was going on at once. It appeared that this round had cost one Avenger, three Dauntlesses, and five Wildcats, including one of the precious Alleycats. On other side of ledger, it appeared that eight Me-109s had been shot down.

The human toll was uncertain. The eight planes lost represented eight pilots and four crewmen. From information gleaned over the radio, at least two Wildcat pilots and the pilot and radioman of one of the Scouts SBDs did not survive. That left ten men unaccounted for. That didn't count the pilot, radioman lost over Bordeaux. Another pilot and crewman were known to have been picked up by the Cutthroat. After the engagement broke up, names were placed with those killed or missing. Sheffield was relieved that his longtime friend, Cowboy, was not among them.

Sheffield's thoughts took him back to that morning just short of one year ago when as a passenger in the rear seat of an SBD they approached Oahu. He relived the events beginning with when he noticed that something was wrong. The reality of what was happening came all too clear when the two Dauntlesses were jumped by Zeros. It all happened so fast. He clearly remembered shooting down two attackers before the plane he was in was shot down. He vaguely remembered bailing out of the stricken plane. He vividly remembered parachuting to earth and watching the squad of Marines racing to the spot where he was about to touch down. He was glad that he had the presence of mind to put his hands in the air until he could identify himself. He wondered how long it took them to get back to camp after he had commandeered their jeep.

That was the best part of that day. It only got worse. The horrifying image of Geannie's bullet riddled and blood splattered car came to mind. She loved that car. She was always so proud of how she picked it out and purchased it all by herself. The last thing that he plainly remembered was the life going out of her broken and bloody body as he held her in her arms. The rest of that day was a blur. He remembered that Romona was with him and how she stitched up the wound that he received. At the time he didn't know that he had been injured. It had healed long ago and he rarely thought of it. His heart was taking much longer to heal. In fact, reliving the experience wasn't helping.

His thoughts were quickly interrupted as he was jerked back to reality and the situation at hand. "Radar has bogies at one-two-zero forty miles out, sir." he heard someone say.

At the moment the four Wildcats that had just been relieved from combat air patrol were being recovered. One of them was already aboard. Captain Brason had orders for Commander Whitouse, "Bring the rest aboard and have those planes serviced and and sent back up as soon as possible. Have the fighter

director send out the welcoming party. Oh and Seymour, tell the returning strike group stay clear of they area as an attack is imminent.” He took a deep breath and said to those on the bridge. “Here we go. This one is the real thing gentlemen. Sound general quarters.”

All stations were already half manned, and in just under ninety seconds all stations reported, “Manned and ready for action.”

The next few minutes were critical. The remaining three were Wildcats recovered. While their aircraft were being serviced the pilots quickly had a bite to eat. Once the planes were fueled and resoptted for launch, they took off again to meet the on coming attack.

While they were being launched, the other four Wildcats had already engaged the twelve escorting ME109s. Being outnumbered three to one, two Wildcats had been shot down, taking one Messerschmidt with them. In the meantime the thirty five Stukas pressed on.

By the time the other four Wildcats met the Stukas, they were within range of the five inch anti-aircraft guns of the task force. The Wildcats flew on to the aid of their comrades, letting the ships take on the enemy dive bombers.

It was now six against eleven. Two more Me-109s fell victim to the Thatch Weave and then two more which evened the odds. Seeing so many of their number falling before the inferior American fighters, the Germans broke off in retreat.

At five miles out, the five inch guns of the task force opened fire, filling the sky with black puffs of flak. Six planes where shot down at a distance as the rest bore in on the eleven ships. As they came in range of the forty millimeter guns, ten more planes fell from the sky.

Nineteen Stukas pushed over into steep dives and descended on the squirming ships below who raced in all directions at speeds in excess of thirty knots. Not all of them could concentrate on the carrier, so six had selected he Congress as their target.

Captain Brason skillfully handled his ship as the Stukas descended on it. His quick reaction threw the twenty millimeter gunners off their targets as they too had joined the fight. Nevertheless they and the gun crews of the other ships in the task force shot down four more before they could release.

The Gremans were at a disadvantage as compared to American dive bomber pilots. The Americans were trained to attack fast moving targets while the Germans were accustomed to attacking fixed ground targets, but with deadly accuracy.

Of the nine bombs released, eight fell harmlessly into the sea. However, one did hit the flight deck about midway between the island and the bow. It was at such an angle that the bomb bounced off the flight deck and exploded about fifteen feet in the air. Those on the bridge were virtually eye level with the blast. The burst sent shrapnel in all directions, killing seven men at their gun mounts, twenty one others were

wounded.

The outer bulkhead of the bridge was peppered with shrapnel, breaking out two windows. The wounded included the helmsman, who was standing directly in front of Sheffield. He caught the wounded man as he was knocked off his feet by flying glass and helped him to the deck. Another man took the helm as two others moved the wounded man out of way. Sheffield told them to take him to his emergency cabin until he could be taken to the sick bay.

At the same time all of the bombs dropped on the Congress missed the target with three of the Stukas having been shot down before dropping their bombs.

While the attack on the task force was in progress, the aerial battle to the northeast continued. In the end, two more Wildcats were lost to three Me109s. The last of the surviving twelve Stukas formed up with the five remaining Messerschmidts and withdrew from the area. The four Wildcats still in the air broke off the pursuit and reformed above the task force.

With the immediate danger over, the all clear was given and the returning strike group began coming aboard. The first to be recovered were the escorts from the strike group. They were immediately taken below and refueled and rearmed in preparation to relieve the combat air patrol aloft. The Wildcats were followed by the Dauntlesses and then the Avengers. One shot up Avenger flown by a wounded pilot crashed into the sea on its landing approach. As the plane sank, the gunner pulled the wounded radioman from the plane. The pilot went down with the plane. The two survivors were promptly plucked out of the sea by the Watson.

As soon as the rescue plane was aboard and spotted forward, a medical crew which had been standing by, removed the wounded airman. He was taken directly to the sickbay, accompanied by the medic and the RAF Captain.

Once all of the strike group had been taken below, a relief combat air patrol of eight Wildcats were refueled, brought up to the flight deck, spotted, and launched, along with six Dauntlesses to relieve the anti-submarine patrol. With the flight deck cleared, the four fighters aloft, and the morning anti-submarine patrol were were recovered.

Meanwhile to the north, the Billings and Cedar Rapids went undetected by German aircraft. Their float planes spotted the German cruiser Munich and four torpedo boats at flank speed on an intercept course with the retreating task force. The two cruises altered course and increased speed to head them off. It didn't take long to close the gap and make contact with the enemy. The Billings and Cedar Rapids, each with eight six inch guns having a longer maximum range and rate of fire than the Munich's eight one hundred fifty millimeter guns opened fire first and quickly found their target.

Within minutes the overwhelmed Munich attempted to break off and withdraw, but not before getting

off a few salvos herself. The first straddled the Cedar Rapids. The second found its mark as a shell struck aft at the stern and passed through the hangar and out through the hull, causing nothing more than a puncture. With the Munich on fire and sinking, the Billings and Cedar Rapids withdrew, leaving the torpedo boats to pick up the survivors.



As The Reprisal and her escorts sped west at 24 knots to get out of range of any further air attacks. But not before the fifteen He111s found them. The fresh combat air patrol dealt with the unescorted bombers, shooting down four of them. Anti-aircraft picked off three more. The remaining eight continued on their approach and dropped their torpedoes from port, four at the Reprisal and four at the Congress.

Once again, Captain Brason maneuvered the ship with a hard turn to port. Four torpedo wakes were observed passing harmlessly by. The Congress wasn't as lucky. Like the Saratoga, she had a wider turning radius and was unable to complete her turn to port before taking a torpedo just under her superstructure. The resulting explosion sent water high into the air, which showered down onto the deck. The giant ship slowed with a five degree list to port. One more Hinckle was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and two more by the combat air patrol as they made their withdraw.

With this second attack over, the task force was now out of range of any further air attacks. The only worry now were any U-boats certain to be on an intercept course. Admiral Weston ordered Captain Brason to continue without the Congress and three destroyers. They would catch up once they could bring the flooding under control. Fortunately the torpedo struck behind the magazine and forward of the boiler rooms. Her wound was not fatal.

Once out of danger, there was time to assess the results and the costs. Seven ships and two submarines had been sunk. Several other ships and patrol boats had been damaged. The lock and submarine pens were damaged and would take time to repair. In the meantime they were of no use to the enemy. Of the German planes that counter attacked, forty were shot down and several more were either damaged or destroyed on the ground during the raid on the air base and the cruiser Munich had been sunk. An untold number of German soldiers, sailors, and airmen were lost and soldiers had been taken prisoner.

Of the fifteen planes lost, eight pilots and two crewmen were known to have been killed. Five pilots and four crewman were uncounted for. The pilot, radioman, and gunner of one Crusader Dauntless were known to be on the Cutthroat. One fighter pilot was known to be on the Kirkman and The two crewman of the Avenger that crashed were known to be on the Watson.

Of the planes that returned, three pilots and six crewmen were wounded and one crewman was

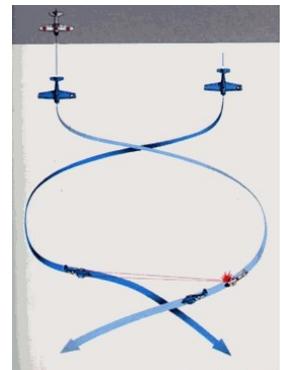
dead. Several aircraft needed to be repaired before being returned to service. One Scout Dauntless and one Wildcat were damaged beyond repair and were cannibalized for parts. Aboard the Reprisal, seven men had been killed and twenty one were wounded. Of the wounded, two more died of their wounds.

Other losses included those killed or wounded aboard the Congress. She would have to return to the East Coast for repairs. Of the Marines, seven were killed and thirteen wounded. The dead and wounded among the French Resistance was unknown.

In the end, it was a both a tactical and a strategic victory. Tactical in that the losses were far less than enemy losses. Strategic because the objective of the mission had been meet. It was also a morale victory as well, for those who participated and more importantly, for the folks back home.

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The Thach Weave was a beam defense position aerial combat tactic developed by Lieutenant Commander John S. Thach. It was executed by two fighter aircraft side-by-side. When an enemy aircraft chose one fighter as his target (the "bait" fighter; his wingman being the "hook"), the two wingmen turned in towards each other. After crossing paths, and once their separation was great enough, they would then repeat the exercise, again turning in towards each other, bringing the enemy plane into the hook's sights. A correctly-executed Thach Weave (assuming the bait was taken and followed) left little chance of escape to even the most maneuverable opponent. It was executed for the first time in combat at the Battle of Midway.



In March 1945, Wildcats shot down four Messerschmidt Me-109s over Norway

The raid on Bordeaux is fictional. However in December 1942 British commandos disembarked from a submarine and traveled down the estuary to Bordeaux and attached explosive charges to several ships. In August 1942 US Marines delivered by submarine raided the Japanese held island of Makin.

Jean Laroche and Adriana Bessette were the French couple that Geannie encountered bathing in the Firehole River in Yellowstone Park during the Great Western Adventure of 1929.

