

## **DAY 1 - Yom Shabbat, 19 Iyyar, 5781**

Weibeck came ashore long after the last local resistance had been overcome. Short, fat, bald, bespectacled Heinrich Weibeck strode ashore with the confidence of a conquering hero that he decidedly was not. A clerk beyond his pay grade, Weibeck passed his decades in military service year-after-year without making any decisions he could avoid . . . at least none that could be associated with him, if they went poorly, but for which he could claim credit if perchance they did inadvertently work out.

In 1996, Weibeck joined FAPI (Faschistische Arbeitnehmer Partei Inländische) at the suggestion of his commanding officer the same year he joined the Army. As a result, his career was enhanced and promotions came much more quickly to him than to his peers who had remained politically neutral.

Decades before his grand entrance on the stage of Newfoundland, then Hauptmann (captain) Heinrich Weibeck received orders from his post in Hanover to the Stadt of Hesse in Germany to help handle a sensitive mission for his nation. In the years before there was such a thing as a European Community or European Command, let alone the current European Collective, the German nation's Jewish policy vacillated between simply overlooking the matter to one of reeducation and eradication. When he arrived in Frankfurt, the prevailing policy was to reeducate (patriotism) and re-indoctrinate (conversion to Protestantism), while extracting payment in form of labor.

*Those intractable Jews*, Weibeck considered his problem . . . and then his options. He found his office in a new-remodeled, four-story, red-brick building in the heart of Frankfurt am Main. His immediate concern was to secure a location a dozen or so kilometers southwest of his headquarters next to the recently opened airport in the heart of the Frankfurt City Forest. The

burg of Walldorf would serve as the relocation center for the Jews who had offended the nation; but offended or not, Germany demanded their just due. The Jews would be worked – and then suffer more – before they were allowed to depart the camp or this mortal world, which ever was HIS pleasure.

He received a routine advancement to Commandant of the Mörfelden-Walldorf reeducation facility eighteen months after he posted there, and with a corresponding increase in rank. Heinrich Weibeck's career continued from one position to the next; nothing flashy, but steadily he rose up the ladder of success. As a newly promoted Brigadeführer (brigadier general) with Jew experience, as Gruppenführer (major general) Stephan Ostermann called it, he was given command of a division of KOS (kämpfen oder sterben) brigades in the east to aid their Japanese allies against the radical Chinese bandits, and with it a change in rank. Those in the KOS adopted an entirely different rank structure than their strictly-military counterparts. Showing progress on that front, now Gruppenführer Weibeck received orders to France for the impending invasion of England signed by Oberstgruppenführer (general) Ostermann. Two divisions of KOS and one of regular army were placed under his command. Even though his plodding skills allowed a portion of the British Army to escape into the Scottish Highlands, his after action cleanup of those political unreliaables placed him in the forefront of his current position, Governor of Happy Valley, Newfoundland.

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Feldmarschall Stephan Ostermann bent over the map table and examined the military progress, or more exactly the lack of it, in Newfoundland. Weibeck was his protégé and there was little doubt in Ostermann's mind that Horst Küssel would blame him personally, if the EC forces didn't break out of the OCP ring soon.

*Almost two year! Two years! And what do we have to show for it,* he seethed. The amphibious landing had been picture perfect, as had been the shock of the invading troops. The KOS had driven forty kilometers inland before the invasion stalled out . . . and then just sat there. Now, Ostermann was beginning to wonder if he'd chosen the wrong man for the job, and if he could replace him without incurring the wrath of Der Führer.

He doubted he could. Horst Küssel wasn't the military genius he thought he was, but when it came to understanding people, he had no equal. Weibeck wasn't his choice, it was Ostermann's, and he had to live with it . . . or die because of it.

"Generaloberst (general) Schultz, make signal to Happy Valley," he ordered his adjunct. "The EC Generalstabs (General Staff) expects to hear of a significant breakout within the week. End of message," Ostermann concluded. *That ought to get the fat fucker off his ass.*

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Corporal Ales' Drozd looked over at the sleeping forms of Privates Brigita Kalnins and Dzhabul Enkhtuyaa. They were locked in a platonic embrace of warmth and not lust, brought on by the exhaustion of war and the need to generate bodily heat.

*A hundred fuckin meters. Maybe. Maybe a hundred fuckin meters,*" his fatigued mind repeated itself. *And for what? A hundred meters of frozen dirt?* It was an unsettling thought when one considered the cost. And the cost remained on the field of battle, grotesque frozen forms some still clutching weapons of war, others grasping at fatal wounds. All dead, *dead or dying and beyond recovery,* and in some cases beyond caring.

Drozd slumped deeper into the comfort of his winter parka, alone with his thoughts and his memories. Neither gave him any consolation. He was sure the EC commander's decision to assault the ramparts of the enemy had been weighed by the command structure, balancing the

cost and the worth, and the potential gains had won on balance. But they had failed to take the objective and the cost had been murderous; so, his conclusion was that of any field soldier – the fuckers in HQ didn't know what they were doing.

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*Those daalz hins at Nahatahtabahogan (headquarters), don't know what they're doing,* Ohitika (lieutenant) Keezheekoni Akwesasne thought, picking the blood spatters from her blouse.

She smiled to herself. As an educated woman of the OCP's military, she obtained an education second to none, or so she believed. Akwesasne spoke Latin, of course, but also English, German, French and enough Chinese to get her in trouble. While Latin was the language of her nation, many words of origin – as she quaintly thought of them – had crept into the military language.

For instance, the army's military ranks were a mixture of Roman and indigenous names, although the navy had retained the original Latin rank structure. But owing to the influence of the first tribe named by Adahy to be defenders of the nation, the Navajo, many of their terms and phrases had seeped into the lexicon. Keezheekoni understood the native word *Nahatahtabahogan* was easily translated to the English word *headquarters*, and the double words in her mind tended to blend together. But that wasn't the end of the incongruity.

The tactics of the opposing forces were about as different as possible. The EC military practiced a concentration of forces – soldiers, artillery and aircraft at a single point – while the OCP preferred speed, flexibility and flanking maneuvers to counter and exploit the enemy. Which was right? The proof was in the outcome. At a brutal cost, the EC had gained less than a

hundred meters, paid for with blood, bone and sinew – it hardly seemed worth the price to the Ohitika.

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Huallpa Ozcollo, Apo-Mayta Suri, and Inti Cusi Huallpa joined the hundreds lining the rails protecting unwary sailors on the *Inka* from falling overboard. The three pilots knew each other vaguely from the ready room, but that was not to say they were friends. Rather, they were friendly, but only because they flew the weapons of war owned by Our Confederated Peoples.

"What have you heard?" fighter pilot Apo-Mayta Suri demanded of the other two. Naval ships, not unlike home for the aged, were stores of rumors.

Inti Cusi Huallpa answered first. "I got it from a pentacontarchos (second officer), who got it from a remige (sailor), who is an orderly to the Nauarchus Princeps (fleet commander) that the European Command has invaded the Waskar Island in the Atawallpa Archipelago and that Titu Manco Capac has a bit between his teeth to go after them. The entire fleet is sailing on the tide," he assured his listeners.

"A *pentacontarchos*, who got it from a *remige*, who is an orderly to the *Nauarchus Princeps*. Sotge!" Huallpa Ozcollo cursed shivering, not because he was afraid but because it was coming into winter in the southern hemisphere and he was thin blood by nature. "Did you listen to what you just said? I can get as reliable information from the sailor that braids my hair." Like many of his generation, he wore his hair long in the traditional fashion, even though it played havoc with trying to get his helmet over it.

"Put a cork in it," Apo-Mayta Suri said. "Have you got a better reason why we're surging?"

Ozcollo hacked and spit into the water far below. "No," he answered simply.

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Above deck, Titu Manco Capac stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Trierarchus (captain) Maricanchi Anyas, watching the activity on the docks below. They were not friends. A Fleet Admiral shunned making friend with a ship's captain, because such friendship made sending him to his death a more difficult task. So, while Titu Capac valued Maricanchi's abilities, he refrained from becoming his friend.

"It's going well, isn't it?" Capac asked rhetorically. Six hours into the alert and fifty percent of the fleet was manned and had taken on stores.

"Better than I would have guessed, Nauarchus Princeps," acknowledged Anyas. "All those extra hours of training are certainly paying off handsomely now."

Titu nodded his agreement. Subconsciously another reason for his aloofness was that there were so few of his rank. In all of the OCP Naval Groups, there were exactly six who had flagged to that rank. Many more - hundreds - had fallen short and retired as trierarchus, or even lower rank. That too was the nature of the business they'd all voluntarily joined.

"Check on what seems to be the delay aboard the Lotso (battleship) *Amerindian*," he ordered. "They don't seem to be loading as quickly as the other vessels."

"Yes, Nauarchus Princeps," Anyas rushed off to do his admiral's bidding.

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Trierarchus Maita Pata aboard the *Amerindian* was just about as angry as a man could be and still regain control of his emotions. His ship was the queen of the ocean, but right now she was but a whore to the sailors who manned her.

Not only was the loading slow, it was in the wrong order. Logistically, he needed those stores thought he'd need last loaded first, but much of the items brought to his ship was

completely wrong. For instance, the docks below him were awash with anti-aircraft rounds, there was one - count it - one case of shells for his main guns.

*If they want me to fight her, they're going to have to give me the ammunition with which to do the job,* Trierarchus Pata decided. He wasn't angry at his crew or even the dock workers; he was mad as he could be with the quartermaster who was sending the wrong items to the wrong ships.

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The sailors aboard the Lotsoyazzie (cruiser) *Tawantinsuyu* were not laughing at their bigger sister. The cruiser had enough of her own problems to worry about.

She made port fifty-three minutes before the alert was flashed around the fleet. But she did so after seven days at sea, so she arrived in port with near empty bunkers. The equipment and stores on the docks below were exactly what they needed to ship out against the enemy. And if they weren't lucky they might get a hundred kilometers before the turbine engines of the vessel coughed and died for lack of fuel. For reasons not made clear to her captain, one or the other fleet's oilers was not available.

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While the fleet was trying to escape the confines of the harbor, the beshlo (submarine) *Uturuncu* was far ahead of it, working to be the eyes and ears of its naval forces. The Captain of the submarine, Sinchi Yupanki, used his seniority to sprint ahead of any other OCP vessels in order to guard the southern entrance to the Slot between the major islands of the Atawallpa Archipelago.

Why had Yupanki elected to be where he was rather than much further north? It had nothing to do with a map, and a lot to do with instinct. He put himself in the shoes of the EC

admiral and came to the conclusion, he'd rather mount an invasion from a direction that wasn't likely - and which the OCP would guess - and attack from some unknown quarter.

As a result, he had the position he did - finally. He'd burned up a lot of diesel fuel to get here, but he guessed he'd find out if he was right or wrong pretty soon.

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Nauarchus Princeps Capac was not the only fleet commander to be watching the provisioning of his vessels. Großadmiral (analogous to a field marshall) Hans Jürg stood on the bridge of the *Graf Zeppelin* watching men and material being loaded from cargo vessels into warships via the docks of newly *liberated* Port Fitzroy, East Falkland Island. The renaming of the city and the archipelago had been the brain child of some functionary assigned to such idiocy in the bureaucracy of the European Collective, as if simply by renaming it they could claim it as if it had always been their own.

He'd love to claim he took the city and the port without firing a shot, but that wouldn't be quite accurate. There had been some resistance from the local militia, but nothing the marines of the fleet could not easily handle. Both sides suffered minor casualties; and perhaps the worst part of it was that the Governor had managed to escape – not by sea, of course, the EC fleet had that fairly well controlled even before the pacification and annexation proper had taken place. Rather, the man and his entourage had been last seen headed for Wickham Heights.

One of the many things that irritated Jürg about the Falklands, or as the locals called it Waskar Island in the Atawallpa Archipelago, was just that – that everything had two names. *For God's sake, the British had taken the islands more than a hundred years earlier, when this continent was embroiled in conflict with her northern neighbor, and held it until the unified*

*nation took it back. But I suppose it won't matter after we take all of the Falklands back into the EC. Then we can call it any damn thing we choose.*

Hans held in his hand a message from no less personage then that of the Führer, Horst Küssel, congratulating him on the returning the property of the European Collective in such a timely manner. *Seven weeks. Seven weeks since we sailed from the Azores and we have the East Falkland and tomorrow we shall sail again. This time south along the eastern coast, before turning north into the Falkland Sound. A third of the way up is Fox Bay and there we will begin our pacification of the Western Falkland. If all goes well, we will have lured out the OCP fleet and smash it in the process, and with it all their hopes of retaining control of their precious Atawallpa Archipelago, he smiled at the thought. Who knows? Perhaps we'll find them weak enough to mount an invasion of the mainland. The French did for a short time, and they're not half as skilled as the EC.*

“Pardon, Großadmiral,” the ship’s Captain interrupted his thoughts. “Konteradmiral (two star) Wolfram Koning on the *Admiral Raeder* begs to inform the Großadmiral that dinner will be at 1900 and wishes to know if the Großadmiral would prefer a local red or European white wine with the meal?”

A scowl ripped across the Admiral’s face. “Write this down. When given a choice, it’s always best to have the Rhine wines,” he said with a sense of satisfaction that he’d accomplished something.

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Twenty-two months ago, Hausis Chupco arrived in Shanawdithit, Beothuk Island full of anticipation and willing to renew her commitment to her fiancé, Sng Lenape. That turned out to be one day more than the European Collective had occupied the region.

She remembered it well. Sng had been . . . well, HOT in bed and she'd gotten up around four in the morning, thirsty for a drink of water from their marathon session of love making.

The moon was high in the sky and its reflection on the bay was a brilliant sight in the predawn hours as it reflected off the gentle swells that raced leisurely from the horizon to the shore. And then one dot, followed by another, followed by many more emerged from the horizontal haze to take form and mass and reveal themselves as amphibious landing craft.

“Sng! Sng! Wake up,” she said in genuine freight.

“Hmmm . . . leave . . . alone . . . sleep,” he muttered. Sex induced sleep prohibited a more coherent response.

Hausis raced across the room and shook her lover for all she was worth. “Get up!” she repeated in a panicked voice.

“What?” Sng finally said, gaining a level of consciousness he really didn't want to achieve this early in the morning.

“Soldiers. Soldiers in boats coming our way. Thousands of them!” her concern rising with each word and phrase she managed to utter.

Lenape rolled out of the bed naked and walked over to the window. He watched the scene for a moment before saying, “Local militia practicing,” he pronounced with an experienced eye. “Must be. If there was an invasion, they would have preceded it with a bombardment.”

And as if prophesized, the distant horizon lit up with a man made light of many cannons discharging simultaneously.

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“Cha,” Bornbazine Chupco placed his order for tea with the waitress, sliding into the chair next to Alikkees with a grace not often seen by such a masculine character.

Pushmataha looked over the top of her paper to greet her guest. Bornbazine was a bit of an anomaly at Radio Free OCP. As a male, Chupco represented one of a handful of men in an industry dominated by women. Alikkees wasn't sure the cultural reason for that, but she supposed ninety percent of the announcers were women; apparently, men had better things to do with their time.

“Well?” he questioned, stirring a small portion of natural sugar into his steaming mug of tea. “What do we hear from the boys?”

*The boys* were Chitto and Motavato Ben-David, currently assigned to the OCP forces in the area of Happy Valley on Beothuk Island. The four of them had attended Universita together. Alikkees fell in love with Chitto; Bornbazine with Motavato. Pushmataha felt a special kinship to the three men and enjoyed her position as the only woman among her band of men.

She shook her head. “Nothing. He never writes,” she ranted.

In response to her plight, Chupco reached inside of his jacket to produce a thin slip of paper. “From Motavato,” he said, smelling the essence of his lover on the single sheet of paper.

She reached across the table to claim the prize. She scanned the single slip of paper, ignoring the tone and words of love and passion, instead focusing on any news of how her Chitto was doing. Her reprieve didn't come until the last sentence. *Tell Alikkees that my brother sends his love; what she sees in him, I'll never know.*

“Aren't you due at the station soon?” Cheyanna Dakota said pulling a chair up to the table. “I'm not bossing you around,” said the station manager, “but you're the relief for the day shift.”

Pushmataha pushed her cup back and stood with a suddenness that would have startled anyone with whom she wasn't familiar. She bent down and kissed Bornbazine on the cheek and offered her hand to Dakota.

Cheyanna took her hand, but instead of shaking it, she pulled Alikkees closer to her, so that she could whisper in her ear. "I have an invitation to interview Rowtag Ohsweken," she muttered just barely audible above the din of the café.

The broadcaster pulled back to look at her boss' face. When one spoke of Dr. Ohsweken, one was speaking of a highly placed government scientist, which raised the question, *what in the name of Ha-wen-ne-yu does that mean?*

But Cheyanna refused to meet her gaze and dropped her hand without further words.

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"Brigadeführer Roux, would YOU please explain to me why the OCP's rabble holds the other side of the river?" demanded Heinrich Weibeck, the Governor General of Newfoundland.

*Why? Why, I thought you may already have figured that out, you portly bastard, you,* Aimée Roux almost, but not quite vocalized that response. "Governor General Weibeck, my men," she saw no incongruity using that word, considering 25% of her forces were females, "fight with the hearts of lions," she assured Weibeck.

"Then why is it your division hasn't dislodged these bandits?" Heinrich wanted to know.

"Because, Governor General, the indigenous people fight with the hearts of bears," she exhaled the words she'd only that moment visualized. "If they give up a single meter of ground, they make certain it's soaked in EC blood. The KOS hasn't been able to break their lines, neither has the air or mechanized forces. I'll need at least another three divisions here, and another air ground-attack wing."

Weibeck sat silent for a moment, as if he was considering her words. But he wasn't. He was considering his directives from Berlin. When he finally spoke, it was in more of a low whisper than a normal voice.

"Now, you listen to me, Brigadeführer," the Governor General hissed. "Either you will mount a *successful* attack, and do it soon, or I'll send you home in disgrace," his voice rose with each passing word.

"That is, of course, your decision to make," the Roux replied without recanting her position.

Seeing the uselessness of further bullying, Weibeck tried a different approach. "Aimée, I really don't want to criticize your efforts, but the pressure from back home – not to mention the ramifications for both of us, should we fail – causes me to be reckless with my words," he said in way of apology before continuing. "Continue to probe their defense. Maybe employ spies to find weaknesses you can exploit. In the meantime, I'll send a message to the Kreigs Staff and ask them to send us assistance once the southern front is secured. If we work together, we can work this out."

## **DAY 2 - Yom Rishon, 20 Iyyar, 5781**

Senior Taxiarchos (general) Abooksigun Toikiming studied the map before him. It wasn't the best illustration of his position possible, but it was good enough to tell him he was in deep manure and the pile was growing higher.

“What do we have going for us, Yoki?” he asked Migisi (colonel) Yoki Tekanatoken. The regimental colonel had held the OCP lines with not much more than her own will power – and that was beginning to fade, if Toikiming wasn't mistaken.

“The cold,” was the best she had to offer. “The cold has slowed them down. Their attack yesterday gained them less than a hundred meters. By the way, I've put Duplicarius (sergeant) Viho Wichiyena in for the Meritorious Service Award,” she spoke of the third highest decoration of the OCP.

“Oh?” was all Abooksigun managed in response. While in combat the MSA wasn't all that uncommon, nor was it that customary – and almost never awarded to an enlisted rank. It reflected leadership which far exceeded any reasonable expectations. By definition, that inevitably meant officers – and most of them posthumously.

“That crazy bastard mounted an assault against the EC all by himself, while they were attacking us,” Yoki said. “When it looked like there was no way we could hold the line, Viho showed with his personal bravery that not only we could, but we could roll them back, too.”

The Taxiarchos nodded his agreement. The *men* needed as many symbols of personal bravery as they could get in these wretched conditions. “I trust you cautioned him about excessive exuberance. It's one thing to be brave; quite another to be brave and dead.”

Yoki nodded her head. “I gave him a tongue lashing I’ll bet he hasn’t had in years,” she smiled remembering the choice rhetoric she’d used. “And I know it will make an impression on him that will last maybe one, but no more than two, days,” she laughed.

“Yes, well, try to keep him alive long enough for me to make the award,” Taxiarchos Toikiming suggested, but in way of dismissal.

The truth of the matter was that Abooksigun was up to his neck. While not subordinate to many in the OCP’s military structure, he still had to answer to the Stratego Megedagik Kanawha in the eastern capital of Potapoco (Baltimore). The Stratego had just infused his Hosts with additional manpower, multiple Leszyilbeshi 34 rocket launchers – with the latest and most accurate rockets, along with several batteries of Bealdohtsolani 83 mm artillery with which to shell the enemy.

Even as he stared at the map, a plan was evolving in his head. It was as if he could see the looming battle in three dimensions, and understood each move he and his opponent would make, what deception would pull the enemy off balance, and where best to move his Hosts to destroy the hated invaders.

As soon as Taxiarchos Toikiming could get everything prepared, he could use the rocket launchers against the center of the EC’s position. That, he hoped, would require the enemy commander to reorient additional forces to the center of his – *her?* – line. Sixty minutes after the first rocket landed on the enemy, his batteries of Bealdohtsolanis would shell the EC’s left flank (dahdikad) and unleash their entire Chaydagahis Tanks force, followed by the infantry (tanehnaldahi). Coordinated with the OCP’s air command (Wotahdeneih), which would fly close air support for the advancing army, Toikiming estimated his chances as one in three that he

could trap the EC and destroy it as an effective fighting force using this offense. *But perhaps there's a better way . . .* the thought dangled in his mind for a moment.

*Maybe.*

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“And Hauptsturmführer Rasmussen (captain) and more specifically Untersturmführer (second lieutenant) Dioli’s platoon should be charged with cowardliness,” Sturmbannführer (major) Gruber, Standartenführer (colonel) De Keizer’s adjunct, pronounced with an air of certainty. “The Hauptsturmführer was overly cautious and the Untersturmführer failed to follow his orders in order to protect his men. When I tried to ask him about it, he physically threatened me if I questioned any of his platoon.”

Even though De Keizer and Gruber were Germans, they spoke easily in English, the adopted language of the EC. The British may have been defeated in battle, but their global domination of trade compelled the entire continent to adopt their language, if not their leadership – that was reserved by the Germans.

That was fine with De Keizer, but the whole idea of having an alternative rank structure for the Totenkopfverbände’s Kämpfen Oder Sterben (KOS) Brigades was, he thought, just one more example of mindless German stupidity, and he didn’t believe he was thinking that just because he was a South African and not part of the official EC heart. In any other army he’d have been a colonel, or even the regular German equivalent of Oberst, *But OH NO! We have to call the Totenkopfverbände something entirely different.* That mentality even trickled down to the command structure. If Generalmajor had so much a platoon of KOS attached to his command, his rank would be immediately redesignated to Brigadeführer, which in theory carried with it just a tiny bit more authority than the regular army equivalent.

“Gunther,” *you spineless little shit*, Matthijs De Keizer didn’t add. “you have to appreciate the pressure these men are under,” *not that you’d take any of the risks that we – I – demand of our forces.*

De Keizer would have been delighted to have him disposed of, but he was Brigadeführer General, *damn it!* Roux’s personal spy – *or as she put it, he was there to keep an eye on things for her* – and made his adjutant without even consulting him. *Well, Aimée Roux wasn’t the only one who could play that game*, Matthijs thought. He too had his own spies *to keep an eye on things.*

“Standartenführer De Keizer, their actions undermine the efficiency of this military unit,” he protested. “If you do nothing, sir, you’re agreeing to their actions by your silence.”

Matthijs thought about his words long and hard before he said them. “Damnit, Gunther! You’re right! You’re always right!”

The Sturmbannführer beamed. The Standartenführer so seldom agreed with his assessment, it was a pleasure to hear the words flow from his lips.

“In fact, I’m going to have both men detained this very night, interrogate them myself, and determine if there’s enough cause for them to be court marshalled,” De Keizer said.

“I could ask no more, Standartenführer,” Gruber allowed. He’d never known the man to give into him so completely, he couldn’t but believe all of his hard work had finally born fruit.

“No. No. you could not, Sturmbannführer,” De Keizer agreed. “But I have something to ask of you.”

“Sir?”

“Well, since I’m detaining Rasmussen and Dioli, and we have an attack to mount tomorrow, I’ll need you to lead it,” De Keizer slammed shut the trap.

“Sir?”

“I have every confidence you will perform as an officer of your experience, training, and temperament would, Gunther,” *and pee and shit your pants, you bastard*, Matthijs said, knowing there was no way Gruber could wiggle his way out without exposing himself for the coward he was.

“Good day, sir,” De Keizer dismissed his stunned subordinate.

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Haym Solomon heard the tanks long before he could see them. The tracked vehicles with their turret mounted cannons had come into existence towards the end of the First War of German Aggression. Tanks then were old clunky things, nothing like the swift fighters of today.

Haym nudged his partner, Rachel Rickover, with his boot as soon as the first tank materialized in the darkened skies. She rolled over on her back and propped herself up on her elbows at his urging.

“What?” she asked.

“Tanks,” Solomon nodded in the direction of the sound.

“Theirs or ours?” she struggled to sit upright. Rickover was restrained by the winter sleeping bag that provided her some warmth while she tried to sleep. She recalled while she was zipping it up that she hoped she wouldn’t have need of getting out of it early.

“Hope it’s ours,” he handed her a canteen cup of hot tea. “Otherwise, we’re in a shitload of trouble.”

She continued to struggle further to get out of her sleeping bag, more encumbered now by the steaming mug of tea she tried not to spill all over herself and her equipment. She finally was able to free herself of further entanglement and stood upright.

She reached down, grabbed Haym's hand, and pulled him to his feet. "If you don't mind, we'll just stand here and wave as they roll by. The last thing we need for them to do is see shadows in the dark and think it's an antitank team."

While tanks were the later day behemoths of the modern battlefield, they were not impervious to rockets fired by tank destroyer teams. What kept them safe while moving at forty kilometers per hour – a skin of steel – melted like butter when punctured by the shape charge of a Chaydagahinailtsaidi 22 anti-tank rocket; and what was a safe haven quickly became a burning coffin.

"Wave at the nice men," she encouraged her partner as the first two tanks sped by. The third vehicle in line, however, pivoted on its right track to take up a position as a sentinel not three meters from the two. The tank commander stood in the cupola until the last of his unit rolled by, before throwing his leg over the side of the turret and dropping first to a track and then to the ground.

The handsome soldier bowed briefly, as was the custom, before saying, "I am Meoquanee (captain) Harkahome Uncas commander of this squadron of Warriors." Even as he was saying those words, he was coming to realize that the man and woman standing before him in OCP battle uniform were painfully blonde and pale of skin. That combination was not unheard of in Yvateamerika (North America), it was still uncommon for two such beings being together causing the officer to stare at the two for a long moment.

"I am Alfred Miller," said Haym, "and this is Astrid von Mainz," giving their aliases easily, dropping into his role play. "We're part of the inspector general's staff," he answered the question before it could be asked.

“I see,” Uncas said, not knowing he didn’t have a clue. “I’ve been informed that regimental headquarters are down this road?” he asked in the form of a question.

“Another six kilometers, or so ought to get you there,” Haym said good naturedly. “May Ha-wen-ne-yu be with you,” he invoked the traditional wish for good luck to the tank officer.

“As with you,” Uncas bowed, pulled himself up on the tank and dropped into his steel safe. The driver gunned the engine turned hard left, and sped off to catch up with others of its kind.

Both Rachel and Haym watched as the tank retreated into the enveloping darkness, until they were left only with the sound of the rumbling monster.

“Do you ever get tired of always being someone . . . something . . . you’re not,” Rickover asked her partner in all sincerity.

Haym eyed his partner. They were both KMAKA agents – an acronym for kimi, meaning secret and akicita for police – who had worked together on and off for five years. During that time, Solomon had played ten or twelve different roles – enough so that he couldn’t keep track of them all – half of those times on the European Continent. He’d been a Sturmbannführer during the English invasion, an Oberleutnant while trying to get a look at some of Germany’s secrets, a Spanish diplomat, an Italian screen writer, and even a Dutch gigolo. *And that was only on European grounds*, he thought to himself. There had been other assignments in his own nation for which he was less than proud. But, duty was duty, and he understood his to be the safety of a nation.

“Not really,” Solomon said at length. “I know who I am. More importantly, I know what I’m supposed to be doing.”

“Good,” she said taking his arm. “You can tell me while we walk to headquarters. We still need to find a way across the lines to the other side.”

“We’ll find it,” Solomon said, demonstrative of his confidence in his partner.