

CHAPTER TWO

Team James

August–September 1944



AS FLIGHT LIEUTENANT Simon helped me jam my chute into a sack, men dashed into the weedy meadow to smother the signal fires. Several cargo pods had drifted into the hardwood forest to the left, but squads of *maquisards* were after them.

Once I was free of my harness and had pulled on my rucksack, Jacques and Tony trotted up. Simon welcomed them. Jacques grinned in the starlight, clearly pleased to be back in France after almost four years in exile. I helped Tony load the clumsy Jed radio valise into his rucksack, then slid a magazine into our team submachine gun and shouldered the weapon. We were ready to move out.

Simon had been in the area with the SOE Tilleul mission since July, and he led the way along a dark forest trail that climbed away from a steep escarpment above the Corrèze River.¹ So far we'd only exchanged brief but warm greetings with the Maquis soldiers. It wasn't a good idea to hang around a drop zone drinking toasts to de Gaulle, Roosevelt, and the King. But I noted that these troops were well armed and trained. They kept a good interval in their column along the trail and were wary enough to send out flankers right and left and push a point squad ahead.

On our first break, Simon took us down a path to a limestone outcropping that overlooked the valley.² The sky had cleared and a lopsided setting moon lit the landscape.

"There's the road," he said, pointing toward the faint ribbon of Route Nationale 89 curving away from the river below. "Tulle and Brive are on the river, beyond that ridge, and Egletons is on another ridge beyond the head of the valley."

"What's the nearest enemy position?" I was well aware that this was not another realistic training scheme in the Highlands.

"Egletons," he answered. "Twenty kilometers from here. But all the local German garrisons are surrounded. They won't come out at night for fear of ambush. Egletons is a tough nut, though, Lieutenant. A reinforced company of Hun infantry, with at least a platoon of SS. The proper lot of machine guns, several anti-tank guns, and maybe some mortars. They've also got a wireless, so they're in contact with their division HQ in Clermont-Ferrand."

Jacques crouched beside me, frowning with concentration. Clermont-Ferrand was the headquarters of the Wehrmacht's specially trained anti-Maquis unit in the Massif Central. They had light armor, trucks, and even their own spotter planes. His initial joy at returning to France gave way to the serious and unforgiving business of guerrilla warfare.

Simon pointed southwest down the valley. "The German garrisons at Brive and Tulle are larger, but we also have more Maquis companies surrounding them." He grinned in the moonlight. "They don't have a wireless, either, and we've cut all the phone and telegraph lines. Poor buggers don't know what we're up to."

That would explain the size of the signal fires at the drop zone. But we were only fifty kilometers from a large, well-equipped German anti-guerrilla force. Here in the Corrèze, the enemy was temporarily held at bay, but not yet defeated. As team leader, I couldn't be lulled into the dangerous fallacy common in guerrilla outfits: Because the enemy has not yet reacted, it doesn't follow that he *will* not.

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ON Simon's suggestion, we set up our first "PC" (*poste de commandement* in Maquis parlance)³ in an old fieldstone farmhouse near the forest hamlet of Chadebec, on the edge of the thinly populated Plateau de Millevaches. As the name implied, the region was rugged upland pasture, with thick stands of oak—an excellent terrain for the Maquis. The Tilleul mission had been rotating its own PC through neighboring villages and hadn't used this farm for two weeks, so we felt relatively secure.

Just after dawn, Captain Wauthier's SAS party came out of the nearby woods and joined us in the milking room of the whitewashed stone barn for a tactical conference. His team had landed without injury on a narrow drop zone across a steep ridge and had marched for hours to get here. Unfortunately, three of their cargo pods had burst and one had drifted to the other side of the valley. They'd lost valuable weapons and ammunition. We spread our maps on a rough-planked cheese table and, with Simon's help, drew up an estimate of the local enemy order of battle.

Outside, Wauthier's troopers and several squads of Maquis kept perimeter

guard. The Maquis soldiers were from the group that had met us, a Gaullist Armée Secrète (AS) unit called the Corps Franc de Tulle. There were about 3,000 men in this outfit, under the command of an energetic former French regular army officer whose nom de guerre was Captain Hubert.

He arrived in a battered Renault soon after Wauthier. Our escort party, Hubert said, were his best-armed and most disciplined troops. They carried captured German Mauser rifles, Schmeisser submachine guns, and a few British Sten guns and pistols. Some wore tattered wool uniform jackets, several had military caps, and all wore tricolor armbands emblazoned with the Cross of Lorraine, the symbol of the FFI.

Unfortunately, Hubert said, only about a third of his men had weapons. The best-armed local Maquis unit, Simon explained, was commanded by Patrick, chief of the AS in Corrèze. On July 14, Bastille Day, the Americans had conducted a massive daylight supply drop to the Maquis in central France. Here in Corrèze, over seventy B-17s had roared across the high plateau, just above the treetops, dropping hundreds of cargo canisters.⁴ Patrick had exercised the commander's prerogative by equipping his own unit first. His men were now fully armed with rifles, Sten and Bren guns, grenades, and pistols, even a few bazookas and British Piat anti-tank weapons. With 2,000 men so well equipped, Hubert said, Patrick had blocked Route Nationale 89 with permanent ambushes in three places. He had Brive completely ringed, and had sealed the southwest entrance of the Corrèze valley. The smaller Duret AS group—almost as well armed as Patrick's troops—had closed the northeastern approach to the valley near Ussel.

Hubert made his first direct appeal for weapons. He understood that, as team leader, I'd choose the drop zone for the next weapons delivery, so he took Simon, Jacques, and me aside and spoke slowly, hoping I would understand every word. "*Monsieur le Lieutenant,*" he began formally, "my men have waited patiently. All the other units are now very well armed." To emphasize the merit of his case, he added that many of his troops had been languishing in these forests for three years, because they had been among the first Maquis who had formed among escapees from the Nazi Blitzkrieg, seeking refuge in this remote area of then Vichy France. But they were among the last to be armed. "My men are ready to fight the Boches. But we cannot do this with naked hands." He spread his callused fingers wide.

"We must make a detailed list of your requirements," Jacques assured him, "then contact London."

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HUBERT opened his tattered leather map case, a relic of his army service before the Capitulation. "*La voilà.*" His arms and equipment needs were

neatly typed on rough notepaper and stamped with the official seal of the Corps Franc de Tulle, FFI, which appropriately bore the crowned image of Liberty.

Jacques and I were impressed. Hubert was a serious, professional soldier.

"There is another matter," Hubert said, choosing his words carefully. "The Franc Tireurs et Partisans is now here in force, especially south of the highway, in the hills around Egletons, the area which had been mine." These FTPs, he added, were commanded by a former schoolteacher and army corporal who used the decidedly unproletarian *nom de guerre* of "Colonel" Antoine. He had 5,000 troops, and most were as well armed as Patrick's troops, having received massive American airdrops on Bastille Day, when they'd been operating in the Department of Lot-et-Garonne to the south. "Antoine is not at all interested in cooperative operations," Hubert said, not hiding his distaste. "He is very *politique*. . . . He wants a public victory over the Boches. But he certainly does not want to share that victory with us."

Hubert's warning was clear. Unless his group was brought up to the armed strength of the FTP, the Communists might gain all the credit for liberating the central Corrèze, which they would no doubt use to further their postwar political agenda. The FTP, of course, had been willing to fight hard and take casualties when their leaders felt confident they could inflict a public defeat on the Germans. And there was no doubting the bravery of individual FTP soldiers. Since the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the French Communists had thrown their support wholeheartedly into the anti-Nazi resistance. The alliance between Communists and Gaullists, however, was strained.⁵

But there was more to Hubert's anxiety than political concerns. The night before, Colonel Rivier, the FFI military commander for Region 5, had issued an order from his secret headquarters near Limoges. Major action by the Maquis in the region was imminent. The American Third Army under General George Patton had finally broken out of Normandy and was racing east between the Loire and the Seine. Patton's right flank was already badly exposed and the situation would only grow worse as the American armored columns plunged ahead. (General Patton, however, wasn't overly concerned; in typical fashion, he told an aide: "Let the other son of a bitch worry about flanks.") The FFI had been given the important task of protecting Patton's right flank by blockading the German forces south of the Loire and west of the Massif Central. But that would require carefully coordinated action. If independent, politically motivated groups like Antoine's FTP refused to cooperate, Hubert warned, the Germans could squash each pocket of resistance in turn, and also decimate the civilian population through savage reprisals.

"You know about Oradour and Tulle?" he asked, searching our faces.

Before leaving England I'd read reports of massacres in central France, but I wasn't sure of the details. Flight Lieutenant Simon now provided them, speaking in his typically understated regimental manner.

"Just after D-Day," he began, "some of the local lads got a bit too eager. They attacked the German garrison in Tulle. It was a fair botch-up, I'm afraid. But at the end of the day, they captured the barracks and seized a good supply of weapons."

Hubert's English was good enough for him to follow, and he continued in French. "The *salles Boches* fought hard." He shrugged, a gesture of muted Gallic respect. "There were casualties. When the Germans surrendered, many of the men found Milice and Wehrmacht security police among them." He looked away from us. "There were executions . . ."

Simon assured us that Hubert's unit had not been involved. "It was the FTP," he finally said. "Antoine's men."

Hubert nodded and continued in French. The SS Das Reich Panzer Division was transiting the Corrèze en route to Normandy, two days later. But the Maquis were harassing them with ambush and sabotage. The Germans were very frustrated because the rail lines had been cut and they couldn't transport their tanks by train. They unleashed a series of reprisals. The day after the Maquis attack, the Germans sealed the town with their armor. They were going to shell Tulle to rubble, with the population in the buildings, but the *préfet* intervened, pointing out that many local people had tended the German wounded. Hubert's eyes grew moist. "So *les salles Boches* showed their gratitude . . ."

Simon was looking away as he recounted the details of the retribution. They rounded up all the men in the yard of the arms factory. The SS had already decided to execute 120 hostages, but they had trouble deciding who should be hanged. Some of the men were skilled workers from the factory, and others were actually pro Vichy. But they finally sorted out their victims, and began hanging them from lampposts and balconies in the town square. By the end of the day, there were almost 100 men hanging like bullocks around the square.

As Simon spoke, Jacques grew silent and pale, then a ruddy anger spread across his face and his eyes, normally lively, became chilly and distant.

"Oradour-sur-Glane was even worse," Simon continued. Units of the same division, he explained, transited Limoges toward Normandy. An SS major commanding a battalion was abducted from his staff car on a highway near Limoges by the Maquis. The Germans were frantic to recover him, but he had disappeared. Someone implicated the small town of Oradour-sur-Glane as the home base of the *maquisards* who'd seized the German officer. It was June 10 and the village was full of people from Limoges

buying food from the weekly market. There were also hundreds of school-children there, some evacuees from Lorraine, and others assembled for their summer physical examinations. "The SS jammed all the men into garages and barns, and the women and children into the town church. They locked the church door."

Hubert's face was wet with tears now.

"They machine-gunned the men in the barns, then burnt the buildings, with the wounded still alive," Simon related flatly. "They used some kind of incendiary device on the church. It was covered with flames quite quickly. Any women or children trying to escape were machine-gunned. Then they looted the town, and winkled out a number of people hiding in cellars and attics. When they left, the town was dead."

"How many were killed?" I asked.

Simon shook his head.

Hubert finally said, "Hundreds."⁶

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LATER that morning, messengers arrived from Maquis units to the north. An American OSS Operational Group had blown the rail bridge near Salon La Tour between Brive and Limoges. Other Allied saboteurs had knocked out the hydroelectric plant at the Marege dam, cutting off power to the arms factory in Tulle and to the electrified rail system all the way to Bordeaux. Maquis company commanders from various units were requesting explosives to blow the bridges on Route Nationale 89 in the Corrèze valley.

I hadn't slept in almost forty hours, and cups of bitter ersatz coffee had little effect. But I was able to keep tactical considerations foremost. If we blew those bridges, German troops retreating from southwest France—or offensive units headed toward Patton's exposed flank—would be funneled toward the more open country north of the Massif Central. But if Route 89 were kept open, enemy units would be attracted to the narrow Corrèze valley. From what I had seen, this was excellent ambush country. By drawing the Germans into this trap, we'd simultaneously achieve two objectives. I consulted with Jacques and we issued our first orders of the campaign. The Maquis were to maintain their pressure on the German garrisons, but to leave the highway bridges intact.

That still left the problem of balancing the strength of Antoine's FTP forces with well-armed, better disciplined AS units. Fighting drowsiness, Jacques and I conferred with Captain Wauthier, compiling a detailed list of weapons and munitions needed to beef up the SAS team and equip Hubert's companies. Wauthier's plans were to move across the Massif Central to the Department of Haut Vienne to reconnoiter the area and carry out additional

sabotage and harassment, thus helping funnel German units into our killing zone. A regular officer trained at St. Cyr, Wauthier seemed a little too prone to do things by the numbers; Jacques told me later he found the captain too traditional for effective guerrilla action. Wauthier said he needed light mortars, command-detonated road mines, and more Bren guns for the job. We decided to piggyback our initial Maquis arms request on his first resupply airdrop.

Working doggedly with Jacques and Tony, I wrote out our long message and encrypted it from page two of my one-time-only code pad. I'd used page one of the flimsy little "Bingo" book for our first message to London, announcing our safe arrival. These pages were supposedly edible paper which would quickly dissolve in your stomach, and they burned with sudden smokeless flame.

Sometime around noon I looked up from my maps to see Jacques and Tony staring toward the nearby farmhouse kitchen. A tantalizing, strangely familiar aroma filled the warm afternoon: hot butter and eggs. Monsieur Etien, our local host, arrived with a copper skillet heaped with the largest, fluffiest omelet I'd ever seen. He set the skillet on the map table, and proceeded to cut wedges from a thick, dark loaf of bread. In England, our food ration had included one "egg" a week, but it was often in powdered form. We fell on the food like refugees and washed down the meal with harsh *vin ordinaire*.

Well wine and dined, I crawled into my sleeping bag late that afternoon for a few hours of rest. Jacques and Hubert were still deep in discussion, and Tony was diligently tapping out our long, coded message, the Morse dots and dashes sounding like distant birds through my stupor. But as tired as I was, sleep did not come quickly. The horrible images of refugee women and children trapped in a burning church and of young men hanging like sides of beef in a village square could not be swept away by a few enamel cups of red wine. This limestone barn was less than a hundred kilometers from similar barns where the Nazis had burned those poor people alive.

At twenty-three, I was at war with a cruel and dangerous enemy from whom I could expect no mercy.

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OVER the next two days, Jacques and I reconnoitered the area. As Simon had told us, the German units in Brive, Tulle, Egletons, and Ussel were holed up in heavily defended barracks, with sandbagged windows, barbed-wire entanglements, and machine-gun emplacements. Maquis units were set up behind roadblocks and barricades around each town. The French tricolor

flew from many liberated buildings, but the civilian population was subdued and wary, despite the bright August sunshine and the promise of imminent liberation. Obviously the ghosts of Tulle and Oradour haunted the region.

Hubert's people informed us he had gone up to Egletons to meet with his two company commanders, who had joined an uneasy alliance with seven of Antoine's FTP companies that were tightening their grip on the town.

Jacques and I decided to go there ourselves the next day, once we had sorted out the SAS airdrop and had a final tactical conference with Wauthier. So far we had not met Antoine personally, only his rather surly company commanders, who seemed to relish speaking in fast, slurred, barracks patois that Jacques had almost as much trouble following as I did. Clearly, these men did not appreciate taking orders from a Gaullist officer and an American lieutenant. But they were openly curious about the possibility of an airdrop.

Hubert's local commander, Laurence, warned us not to discuss this in any detail. "The FTP are treacherous," he said. "They have set up their own false drop zones for *parachutages* in the past, tricking the RAF into dropping them arms destined for *l'Armée Secrète*."

I thought about the inevitable confrontation with "Colonel" Antoine. Jacques, Tony, and I each carried a Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) identity tag printed in English and French and signed by General Eisenhower and de Gaulle's intelligence deputy, General Marie-Pierre Koenig, which gave us freedom of movement in occupied France and authority over FFI units when we were relaying Koenig's orders. In theory, the FTP was a willing partner in the FFI alliance. But I knew alliances were often matters of convenience for the Communists. Bouncing along the rutted lanes on a wheezing *gazogene* farm truck toward the drop zone, I recalled my first encounters with Communists, when I was an ROTC cadet at UCLA. As a freshman in 1939, I was denounced as a "militarist" by the Communist student organization. That was during the weird two-year period of the Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact, when the American Communist Party followed Moscow's orders to propagandize for strict American neutrality. In effect, the Communists on campus harangued everyone who would listen about the evils of aiding the British imperialists (who, they neglected to add, stood alone against Nazi Germany, Russia's erstwhile ally). Then, in 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and the student Communists suddenly did an about-face, proclaiming the guys in ROTC heroes in the sacred global struggle against fascism.

Casey had warned us that the Soviet embassy in Switzerland, not de Gaulle's headquarters in London, had secret military command over FTP units in France.⁷ I intended to test Antoine's loyalty to the FFI as soon as possible.

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I HAD just bedded down after dawn in our new command post when Jacques shook me awake. After hiking all night from another drop zone near the village of Chamberet, I was stiff and groggy. The SAS airdrop had been late, and the cargo pods were again scattered into the surrounding forest. Wauthier complained his men weren't yet fully equipped for their mission. Beyond that, my team had received none of the weapons I'd requested for Hubert. Now we had a visitor, Lieutenant François Sarre-Demichel, Patrick's regional intelligence officer, whose *nom de guerre* was Coriolan. He was an anti-Nazi Austrian who had been active in central France for several years, working under commercial cover and traveling widely through occupied Europe. His German, of course, was native; his French and English were fluent. Moreover, Coriolan had a sharp intellect and the requisite shrewdness and audacity to be a first-class clandestine operative.

As I tried to wake up over a tepid cup of ersatz coffee, Coriolan briefed us on two important new developments. At five that morning, the BBC had broadcast an order from General Koenig to all active FFI units. They were to "attack between the Loire and the Garonne all German garrisons, however important they may be." Koenig had given a similar order just before D-Day in Normandy; London would not have risked another major uprising unless the second invasion were imminent.

But Koenig's order was not the only news. Coriolan had people inside the FTP units. They had just alerted him that Antoine had moved forward in the night to attack Egletons, without warning Hubert of this operation, even though two of Hubert's companies held down a sector of the encirclement. This uncoordinated advance had backfired. The Germans had fallen back to a fortified position in the *Ecole Professionnelle*, a three-story complex of reinforced concrete and stone standing on a ridge on the eastern edge of the town. Hubert added that the well-disciplined AS troops in the other garrison towns were conducting coordinated attacks on the isolated German units. Only in Egletons was the enemy able to seek refuge in an almost impregnable position. Worse, this garrison had radio contact with the regional German HQ.

Our next move was obvious. We had to get to Egletons to coordinate the attack, and to prepare to ambush the inevitable German relief column. Coriolan, Jacques, and I studied the map while Tony took down our long-wire antenna from the nearby apple trees and packed up his radio. Coriolan was needed in Tulle and would use his ancient motorbike to get there over backcountry lanes and trails. He stressed that there were collaborators and Milice spies in the hills. So the three of us would have to hike all the way

to Egletons, twenty-five kilometers as the crow flies, but more like fifty using Maquis trails to avoid detection.

We marched all day, up and down the rocky limestone ridges above the Corrèze. Hubert provided a ten-man Maquis escort, who once again showed their training and discipline. The most dangerous part of the march was crossing the river on a stone bridge near a ruined Romanesque church, five kilometers northwest of Egletons. The burly Maquis sergeant in charge of our escort dashed across the span first, his Sten gun at high port, heavy German potato-masher grenades swinging from his belt. After checking the roadside for ambushers, he signaled us to cross.

Slogging through the steep fields of hay stubble toward the town, we heard the unmistakable clatter of Bren guns, answered by the deeper pounding of German machine guns. On the edge of town, we passed through one flimsy FTP roadblock, more a token than a serious deterrent to the Germans. The men at the barricade were sullen and suspicious of our team.

It was dark when we entered the district of the school. The firing had fallen off, but occasional orange tracers looped down the dark streets to ricochet wildly off the steep slate roofs. Hubert had his PC on the ground floor of a solid fieldstone house with a walled garden, about 500 meters down the wide road from the northwest corner of the school. His two companies held positions in neighboring houses and along a sunken road to the left. Antoine's troops were concentrated in pockets facing the other three corners of the school compound.

Jacques and I checked Hubert's perimeter, then set out in opposite directions to link up with the FTP. But we both decided independently this was a risky maneuver, after being challenged and shouted back by Antoine's sentries hidden in nearby gardens.

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DAYLIGHT came, windless and clear, and with it the predictable fusillade of uncoordinated fire from the FTP. Their Bren guns were chewing up the school's stone facade, but causing no real damage. Once more we set off to conduct the type of reconnaissance needed for a proper attack plan. As we moved cautiously from garden to garden, Hubert's troops left their positions to shake our hands and embrace us. Their eyes gleamed with pride as they reached out to touch the Cross of Lorraine patch on Jacques's uniform. I was glad now that I'd insisted the team keep their uniforms as clean as possible, that we wash, shave, and brush our hair—in short, that we look like soldiers.

Hubert's men appreciated our presence, but, as we sprinted across the street and under the dusty plane trees, it became clear that Antoine's troops resented us.

"*Qui passe là?*" they shouted—"who goes there?"—challenging our passage into their sector.

"Two officers of the FFI," Jacques responded, glaring at a bearded fellow who brandished a Sten gun and blocked the path around a garden shed. "Where is your commander?"

The man scowled, then deigned to nod toward a bullet-pocked house nearer the school.

Keeping low, we dashed from one garden wall to the next, aware that this end of the street was visible from the top floor of the Ecole Professionnelle. Now the houses were pitted from the heavy machine-gun fire of the previous afternoon, and the pavement was littered with glass shards and splintered stone. We tried to be as quiet as possible, but our boots crunched on the debris. To make matters worse, the FTP troops in the surrounding houses were yelling out the shattered windows, once more challenging our right to pass through their sector. Jacques said it was better to just ignore them.

We crept through a cabbage garden and dashed for the back door of the tall house closest to the school. There was an attic window in the peaked slate roof that overlooked the school courtyard, 200 meters away. I left Jacques to guard the ground floor, while I crept up the narrow stairs like a burglar.

The attic was low under the dusty roof beams. The small square window opened easily. I lay to one side and carefully raised my face to look outside. We'd been trained at Milton Hall to make quick, accurate reconns, and I tried my best to do so now. The trick was to focus your gaze like a camera lens, to clear your mind of conscious thought, to allow the image to engrave itself on your brain as if it were photographic film. I scanned the school's walls and courtyard across the road, noting the timber barricades, the up-turned concrete slabs, and the heavy furniture blocking the windows. Shadows moved in the shrubbery, probably a machine-gun crew. I was about to look again when angry shouts erupted from below. Men were arguing loudly in French, and I heard Jacques's distinct "*merde, alors.*" Then I saw movement from the corner of the attic window. Antoine's ill-disciplined men were stupidly pointing up here, as if to spot for the German gunners. I was stunned; this was like the "bungler" training exercise at the Congressional Country Club all over again. But those shadows across the road were not blasé Ivy League psychologists, waiting to see how I'd react to this unexpected nuisance.

I rolled away from the window and scuttled crablike toward the attic stairs. Just as my boots hit the second-floor landing, the Germans opened up on the attic window with at least two machine guns. The bursts of steel-jacketed rounds smacking the slate roof sounded like the house was being slammed by giant hammers. I was down the stairs and out the back door before the enemy gunners lowered their aim and swept the front windows.

Jacques was crouched near the back step, gripping a Sten gun, his face a mask of frustrated anger.⁸

I clapped him on the shoulder. "Let's get the hell out of here in case the Krauts've got a mortar over there."

With a flat crack and a monstrous crowbar clang, a 37mm anti-tank gun cut loose from the school and blasted a hole clear through the slate roof above. We were showered with fragments of slate tiles, but otherwise unhurt. I'd been crouched up there less than a minute before. I gazed at the splinters spiraling away in the early morning light. My first combat action was not going to be an easy fight.

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HUBERT, Jacques, and I waited more than thirty minutes for Antoine to join our tactical conference. We were well protected in a small fieldstone barn on the other side of the sunken road. There were a row of masonry houses, two lines of thick chestnut trees, and these heavy barn walls between us and that anti-tank gun. We'd come to the logical conclusion that taking the school would be impossible with the weapons on hand—Bren and Sten guns, rifles and pistols, and a few hand grenades.

We could see only two alternatives: a long siege, or a quick, perfectly coordinated attack, supported with mortars and bazookas.

Antoine's chief of staff appeared around eight. *Le Colonel*, he explained, had been called away on urgent military matters. But Antoine had left orders for the siege to continue indefinitely. After all, "there's SS inside!" the man proclaimed, grinning like a pirate. The idea of pinning down a company of despised Nazi SS troops was appealing to Antoine. This was the type of grand gesture that would reap political fruit.

He wouldn't listen to our arguments that a siege of several days was bound to provoke a violent response from the strong German garrison in Clermont-Ferrand. He had his orders, and that was good enough. After sponging some American cigarettes "for his *camarades*," he left.

But Jacques and I wouldn't accept this stupidity. Captain Wauthier had received a second airdrop of men and munitions during the night; we'd heard the drone of low-flying Liberators over the plateau around 0300. His SAS unit probably now numbered thirty, and they had Piats and mortars. They could help us break this siege in a few hours and, in the process, pick up some badly needed anti-tank guns and some heavy machine guns for their ambushes farther north. Jacques wrote out our request for support to Wauthier, and Hubert dispatched a runner.

Maybe we could steal an hour's sleep while waiting. But that proved impossible. With Germanic precision, the first Luftwaffe planes arrived at exactly 0900. There were three of them, Heinkel 111 medium bombers—

fast, lean, twin-engined planes with gracefully tapered wings. They clattered right over the rooftops, then banked out above the valley and lined up for their bomb run. Hubert's men shouted the warning, and we dashed to the edge of the sunken road. The first plane dropped a stick of heavy bombs, probably a 200-kilo high explosive, which blasted a smoking furrow through the line of stone houses facing the school. We were deafened by the shock waves and shaken like rag dolls by the concussion. Shrapnel whined and crackled across the roofs. As the Heinkel passed overhead, we saw the flickering orange flame from its tail gun, and tracers glided into the street.

We clambered into the relative shelter of the sunken road and up the opposite bank. The second Heinkel was leveling off at about 200 feet, lining up on the houses in Antoine's sector. To our amazement, we saw several FTP troops run into the center of the road and blaze away with Sten guns and rifles at the approaching bomber. As they did so, they came under machine-gun fire from both the school and the plane's nose gunner. But they held their ground. You certainly couldn't fault their courage. Their judgment, maybe, but not their guts. Three men fell, either hit or finally taking cover. The bomber swept over them and unloaded two heavy tan bombs that tumbled into a garden beyond a cross lane. A moment later, they exploded with a shimmering blast that blew leaves off the trees above us.

Jacques and I saw what was happening. "Delayed-action fuses," I shouted. The Luftwaffe was using about a two-second delay on bomb detonation, so that the low-flying planes could escape the blast. If we could coordinate the ground fire against the planes, the bombardier's aim might be thrown off, and we just might be able to protect these frontline positions.

Jacques rounded up four FTP Bren gunners and I recruited four from Hubert's sector. Once we got them assembled in the sunken road, I gave the instructions while Jacques shouted the translation. The bombers were making slow, single-bomb passes now, working from a lazy orbit above the valley. This road was parallel to the school, and the planes passed directly overhead. Jacques's gun team would take the far end; mine was near the junction of the sunken road and the lane to the PC barn. As a Heinkel approached, we would judge its altitude and speed and hold up our fingers to signal the gunners the number of plane-length "leads" to give the aircraft before firing: Two fingers equaled two leads, and so on. A clenched fist meant no lead at all.

The next Heinkel lined up right above the sunken road, flying below 200 feet. I watched the sun glint on the plane's greenhouse nose. I could see the two pilots in their leather helmets. The Bren gunners crouched beside me. I stepped into the middle of the road and held up my index finger. "Fire!" I shouted.

The gunners raised their heavy Brens and fired quick five-round bursts.

As the plane blasted by overhead, I saw dark clumps of rounds strike the left wingtip. The pilot had banked right at the last moment and most of our fire had thrown left. We sprang for cover as the German tail gunner swept the sunken road.

The next plane was not so lucky. It roared straight toward us, even lower than the last. I could clearly see the bombardier's face in the glass nose. Jacques was on his feet, his clenched fist waving. "No lead!" I yelled. My men pounded the Heinkel with accurate, coordinated fire. The Bren fired a .303 round, the same as the Spitfire. In effect, we'd ambushed the plane with the firepower of an RAF fighter, shooting at point-blank range. Glass flew from the nose. Holes tore open in the plane's green belly. The right engine nacelle was pocked with Bren rounds, and dark oil streamed across the wing root.

Banking sharply left, the German pilot aborted his bomb run and gave his plane full throttle. Only the left engine responded. Smoke trailed in a thick, oily stream from the right wing. The men cheered.

I climbed to the crest of the sunken road and watched the Heinkel limp north above the Corrèze valley, slowly losing altitude. The men were still howling their wild pleasure. My heart thudded in my throat and temples. My breath was ragged. I was caught up in the savage rage of battle.

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CAPTAIN Wauthier's SAS platoon arrived around 1300, sprinting the last kilometer into town under strafing from three Focke-Wulf 190 fighter-bombers that had suddenly rolled out of the blinding midday sun. Wauthier brought word from Coriolan that the Heinkel we'd hit had crashed and burned near Ussel. But these Luftwaffe pilots did not make the same mistake as their colleagues.

While the fighters strafed our forward positions, we held a quick war council in Hubert's narrow barn. It was agreed that Antoine's plan for a prolonged siege was dangerous folly—the Germans wanted to hold Egletons because of the town's commanding position above the Corrèze valley; otherwise they wouldn't have continued to expend so much air support to protect the school. We could soon expect an armored relief column from Clermont-Ferrand. Therefore, we had to either strike fast, using the SAS heavy weapons to prepare the assault, or regroup to ambush positions along Route 89 northeast of town in order to intercept the threatened German column.

Wauthier had trained his men to precision. Even Antoine's independent troops were awed by these French SAS in their red berets, who moved like a pack of hunting cats, indifferent to the strafing and fragmentation bombs from the Focke-Wulfs. Wauthier's NCOs now took charge. They'd received

two-inch British mortars in the airdrop, but only had about a hundred rounds of ammunition for them. We decided to lay down a mortar barrage on the school courtyard, to drive the enemy indoors, so that we could move our Bren-gun positions forward and dig them in. While Wauthier prepared his mortar pits behind the first row of houses, Jacques left to find the elusive Antoine. He would try again to convince him to work with us on a coordinated attack, or, failing that, to get his agreement to lend us troops for the ambush positions north of town.

Tony set up a radio in my forward command post, a house one street in from the school. I then moved up to the steep-roofed house that had taken the anti-tank fire that morning. This time the FTP soldiers in the garden included the Bren gunners from the sunken road, and they greeted me with warm smiles, not surly threats. Their sergeant, a tough young kid who enjoyed flourishing the Communist clenched-fist salute, would be my relay to Wauthier's mortar men. I crept up the attic stairs gingerly and slid onto the floor, keeping as low as I could. The planks were thick with broken slate and splintered wood from the 37mm round.

Wauthier's first mortar round dropped cleanly into the center of the courtyard, and I saw German soldiers scurry for cover from shallow rifle pits in a hedgerow. I shouted down the staircase to correct fire twenty meters right and then forward. The next round exploded on a timber barricade near the school's long administration wing. More enemy troops dashed for cover. I was enjoying myself, getting even for the pounding we'd taken from the planes that morning. And the Focke-Wulfs overhead were actually muffling the sharp chug of the mortars. Ten rounds later, the mortars were dropping devastating fire on the outside positions, just as we'd hoped. Now I directed them to hit the slate-and-timber roof of the school to drive the German machine gunners down from the upper floors. Wauthier sent several phosphorus rounds after the high explosive, starting fires in the smashed roof timbers. That would give the bastards something to think about.

But I got overconfident and forgot the Germans would be searching for the mortars' forward observer. I also forgot that I was silhouetted against the 37mm exit hole as I stooped to peek out the circular entrance hole on the front of the roof. The Germans reminded me of my negligence. Machine-gun rounds bracketed the shell hole, smashing the slate tiles and ricocheting loudly through the attic. I was hit. One moment I was crouching at the hole, the next I was sprawled on my back, my skull ringing like a gong. It was as if someone had thrown a bucketful of rocks in my face. I felt the blood, warm and salty, on my right cheek, then saw thick, dark drops raining on the floor. My hand went to my ear and came away sticky red. There was blood all down the front of my para smock now. The pain began after the initial shock, hot and persistent. I got control of my breathing and took

stock. My head moved all right on my neck, and there was no spurting arterial blood. So I must have been superficially gouged by slate and bullet fragments.

The machine gun had shifted to a lower floor and I stole one last glance toward the school. It was then I saw the snout of the 37mm anti-tank gun moving beneath a camouflage net in the hedgerow only seventy meters away. The crew wore floppy camouflage jackets and had leaves on their helmets. But they were clearly exposed. Without seriously considering my actions, I dropped down the stairs and sprinted to the back garden.

The FTP soldiers were shocked at my appearance and came forward to provide aid. But I had other things in mind. I snatched up their Bren gun and a spare thirty-round magazine. Too dazed to get out the proper French, I mumbled something about "*le canon Boche*" and jogged away to the side of the garden. From there I sprinted to the cover of a wide, bomb-blasted plane tree thirty meters down the street. I caught my breath and hefted the heavy Bren gun. When I came out from the cover of the trunk, I knew I'd have the enemy gun crew in easy range. The worst of the bleeding had stopped, and I could breathe through my nose to steady my chest.

There was no sense waiting. I slid around the trunk and leveled the gun's long barrel, sighting on the hedgerow sixty meters away. Even with their camouflage, the German gun crew were visible. I fired four long bursts, shucked out the empty magazine and jammed in the fresh one. Men were falling around the gun as they struggled to turn it toward me. One tall German raised his rifle, then flew backwards, his arms extended. I fired until the second magazine was empty. I don't know who shot at me as I dashed back for the cover of the house. But I wasn't hit. In the garden, the FTP troops took back their Bren gun and washed my bloody face with water from a bucket. They stared at me with wide, nervous eyes. I sat with my back against the cool stone wall, gazing at the billowy clouds in the afternoon sky, feeling my heart slow in my chest.

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AT sunset, we met again in Hubert's command post. Wauthier had stopped firing after I was wounded, but he only had around twenty mortar rounds left. Jacques had not found Antoine, but his company commanders had agreed to follow Wauthier's command. Now he laid out his attack plan. The SAS Bren teams had moved well forward along the school's left flank during the mortar barrage. Unfortunately, they'd lost one experienced trooper, shot through the head, and another had been seriously wounded. But these gun teams were now in place to sweep the school courtyard. Wauthier had written a formal request for an RAF bomber strike on the school to come

the next afternoon at 1700 hours, and Tony was now transmitting the message to London. Just before the air strike, we would drop back two streets. Then the SAS would open up with their mortars and Piat anti-tank weapons, to drive any Germans from their foxholes back into the school. RAF Mosquito bombers would then dive-bomb the buildings. As soon as they were gone, Jacques and I would each lead a company of *maquisards* into the rubble to finish off the enemy garrison.

Wauthier had more faith in London than Jacques or I had. The munitions we'd requested for Hubert had still not arrived on the second SAS drop. And London hadn't even acknowledged our request. Obviously, they were preoccupied with other operations. While we met in the barn, the BBC announced exactly what those preoccupations were. Allied armies under General Alexander Patch had invaded the south of France at dawn that day. And Maquis units "cooperating with Free French, British, and American advisers" were conducting widespread offensive action in south and central France to support the invasion. We were only one of a hundred such units.

I took a handful of aspirin and drank two cups of wine to ease the pain of my torn ear and cheek, then gratefully crawled into my sleeping bag. Maybe I'd have an easy night. I certainly needed the rest.

But the night was not restful. German spotter planes dropped flares over the town. Enemy machine guns traded fire with the SAS Brens, as the Germans tried to push out new positions on the edges of the school grounds. I dozed as best I could with tracers smacking the barn roof and men pounding by in the lane shouting. Finally, I got up before dawn, washed my wounds and shaved around the bandage, then put on a clean shirt. I was just cutting a wedge of cheese for breakfast when the barn was rocked by a massive explosion. The Luftwaffe was back, this time with more Focke-Wulf fighter-bombers.

With the sun well up, the planes used it to full advantage, climbing high and dropping straight down, their engines screaming. They alternated hitting our positions with small fragmentation bombs, incendiaries, and walloping 100-kilo high-explosive bombs. Sometimes they'd roar in at treetop level, strafing with 20mm cannons. This air support was perfectly coordinated with the enemy garrison in the school, who used the attacks to shift their heavy machine-gun positions.

The day ground on with no sense of actual time, only noise, heart-pounding exchanges of fire, and stolen moments of rest in smoky cellars. Fires were burning on several streets. The FFI aid station on the edge of town was filled with moaning, wounded soldiers. During lulls in the bombing, the shocked civilians retreated further to the outskirts, but were afraid to risk crossing the open fields to the shelter of the surrounding forest in daylight.

At the appointed hour that afternoon, Antoine's and Hubert's companies

fell back two streets. Wauthier's mortars opened up, and his courageous troopers moved forward to fire their Piats. As planned, the enemy retreated into the school. But the only planes overhead were German. The Heinkels were back, protected by Focke-Wulfs. There was little we could do but keep down and wait for darkness. We met in the barn again at sunset. I was groggy, my head pounded, and I was almost deaf from bomb concussions. The situation in Egletons was a stalemate.

But there was some good news. Coriolan had sent us a runner who announced that Duret's group in Ussel had breached the enemy's defenses and the Germans there had surrendered. Even better, the larger enemy garrisons at Brive and Tulle had agreed to unconditional surrender, after being surrounded by Patrick's troops and Hubert's other companies. Actually, the man added, there was *one* condition: Coriolan had promised the Germans an American officer would accept their surrender, an assurance against Maquis reprisals. I was the only American officer in the Department of Corrèze, so the job fell to me. While Wauthier and Jacques planned the next day's action, Hubert and I drove south in his shaky little Renault.

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My memory of that night is a splintered mixture of pain and jubilation. Somehow I managed to doze while the rickety little car bore south along the river. On the outskirts of Tulle, we got out and hiked around the town center, wary of snipers in the moonlight. The German commander had agreed to surrender at dawn, but there were rumors of dissenters in his ranks, poised for a breakout from the besieged garrison. A *gazogene* farm truck took us to Brive, where again we got out at the first Maquis roadblock. I arrived in the town square just as the German infantry *Hauptmann* ordered his three companies to stack their weapons before the beaming ranks of Patrick's AS troops. I signed an ornate document in French and German, which I was told guaranteed the prisoners the protection of Supreme Allied Headquarters. As soon as I did so, the tense ranks of German troops visibly relaxed. They were actually joking as the Maquis led them away to the improvised POW camps in the surrounding hills.

I awoke in the cab of the *gazogene* at dawn, blinking at another pastel summer morning. Hubert found some reasonably palatable ersatz coffee in a cafe on the edge of Tulle. I drank it and changed my bandage, then followed him through the narrow medieval streets to the village square. As we waited for the German commander to appear, Hubert pointed out the overhanging balconies where the SS had hung their hostages two months before. Once more, I signed for SHAEF. Once more, the Germans smiled with relief that their war was over. Hubert grinned for other reasons. The weapons of the

Tulle garrison went directly to his men—rifles, machine guns, a 75mm field gun, and cases of grenades.

On the road back to Egletons around noon it became clear that this part of the operation was still not going well. A Maquis road watcher flagged us down, warning that the Luftwaffe was strafing anything that moved along the highway. Hubert and I wearily hiked the rest of the way to town, keeping to the trees for cover.

We entered town just as the Focke-Wulfs swept past on another run, plastering the streets with fragmentation bombs and 20mm cannon. For the next twenty minutes we inched forward from house to house until we reached the site of Hubert's headquarters. The barn was a smoking heap of rubble. I found Tony with Wauthier in a nearby house, whose flaming roof beams had collapsed. All the windows were blown out and there were cracks in the walls you could see through. Tony was crouched in a corner with his earphones perched atop his head, patiently tapping out another message from Wauthier to London.

"*Il est formidable,*" Wauthier said, pointing at Tony. He explained that the young American sergeant had remained faithfully at his radio post, transmitting important messages, even as the house took direct hits from German bombs. I looked around the walls above Tony's head. The plaster was scarred with deep shrapnel gouges. Tony tapped his Morse key, a cigarette dangling from his lips, his eyes rimmed with fatigue.

I found Jacques at Antoine's command post down the street. The FTP commander himself was now present, a stocky little guy with a loud voice and intelligent dark eyes. Something extraordinary had happened in my absence. One of Antoine's runners had arrived from Tulle with a shocking intelligence report: Instead of surrendering, he announced, the German garrison there had supposedly broken free and were now en route to relieve the siege of Egletons, threatening to take our positions from the rear.

I sat down hard on a German ammunition box. "That's not true, *Chef Antoine,*" I said. The rumored dissenters among the Tulle Germans, I explained, had indeed surrendered with the rest of the garrison at dawn. I myself had seen them disarmed and marched away. But Antoine was not convinced. He insisted there were "others," who had escaped in the night and infiltrated the forest behind us. Further, Antoine was now thinning out his companies to establish ambush positions above the highway between Egletons and Tulle, in order to intercept these phantom Germans.

To compound the confusion, Lieutenant Coriolan arrived on his crackling little motorbike. He had valid intelligence that the German relief column from Clermont-Ferrand was finally en route: a force of 2,000 heavily armed men in 150 trucks, and two armored cars with automatic cannons.

Wauthier, Jacques, and I immediately saw the danger. But Jacques and

I also saw the opportunity. The captain wasn't convinced, but my partner and I were sure there was time to establish ambushes on the twisting, forested curves of the highway between Ussel and Egletons. But someone had to maintain pressure on the Germans here. We needed Antoine's well-armed men both to beef up our ambushes and to hold the line around the school. Antoine sat impassively, smoking a hand-rolled cigarette of black tobacco as we frantically studied our maps. He had already given his orders, and he wouldn't back down.

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TONY and I remained in the forward positions near the school after Jacques and Wauthier moved up the road to set their ambushes. With darkness, the Luftwaffe finally gave up. The town hall was ablaze several blocks away, and shattered houses smoldered around us, exuding the acrid stench of the incendiaries. But there were no civilians left in town to fight the fires. They'd taken the Maquis wounded with them as they fled to the hills. Even the Germans inside the school were quiet. They'd obviously received radio messages that relief was en route. I had great faith in Wauthier and Jacques, but I knew they alone couldn't stop such a heavy column. When the last of the civilians were reported gone, I ordered the few remaining FTP troops and Hubert's walking wounded to fall back to the cover of the forest.

Tony and I sorted through our gear to lighten our load. We took the radio, our codebooks, some emergency rations, and our tightly wrapped bundles of hundred-franc notes. At the last minute, I jammed several extra Sten-gun magazines in the deep pockets of my smock. A *maquisard* led the way through the burning streets. We marched up steep pastures, through stands of hardwood, along dark forest trails. We avoided hamlets and farmhouses. We walked all night. I was a zombie, lifting one heavy boot before the other, my mind floating free of my aching body. Several times Tony shook me awake as I stumbled on the path, actually marching in my sleep.

Away to the northeast, we heard the now-familiar rattle of heavy machine guns and the dull rumble of land mines. Jacques and Wauthier were giving them hell up there. Sometime before dawn, our Maquis guide led us off a farm lane to a stone barn. He told us to hide in the hay, then disappeared into the darkness. I did not need a formal invitation. I burrowed into the musty stack, and pulled hay behind me like a mole going to ground. That's the last thing I remember about that long night.

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TONY woke me late the next morning. Birds were singing in the sunshine. My back and legs ached, but I was rested.

He grinned. "We had visitors last night," he said, munching a chunk ofhardtack. "The Krauts pounded on the farmhouse up the way, yelling about escaped Maquis. The farmer told 'em there were no Maquis in the area. They didn't come down here."

While I'd slept, a German patrol from the relief column had swept the countryside. But Tony kept guard, his Sten gun cocked, grenades lined up before him. He swore he would have woken me had the situation been serious.

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As planned, we joined Wauthier and Jacques at a ruined forest church on the western side of the Corrèze valley. They were exhausted but quite pleased with themselves. It had taken all of Jacques's persuasive powers to convince the cautious Wauthier to split his unit into small ambush teams. But once he did, their ambushes between Ussel and Egletons had destroyed one armored car and knocked out six trucks. They counted at least twenty-five enemy dead and many wounded on the highway. The German relief column had not reached Egletons until dawn. Coriolan's agents reported that the enemy garrison in the school had loaded thirty casualties onto the convoy before the trucks departed for Tulle. The fortress we had struggled to take was now empty. But Hubert's troops had linked up with Antoine's ambush positions and together they continued to harass the German column. On last report, the battered relief force was moving back north, having reached Tulle at least one day too late.

Hiking along a forest ridge that afternoon to outflank the German column and establish more ambushes, we heard the deep drone of aircraft engines over the valley. A line of eight sleek, camouflaged RAF Mosquito bombers roared by above and wheeled with sharp precision toward the smoking town of Egletons. Each twin-engined bomber banked sharply and unloaded its bombs on the school. We sat wearily as the planes wheeled back again, pulverizing the now empty German redoubt. We couldn't help but admire their technique. But their timing was lousy.

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THE siege of Egletons and the surrender of the German garrisons in the valley together with the aggressive ambushing by the FFI and SAS along Route Nationale 89 had combined to take the fight out of the enemy in the region. Moreover, the Maquis had captured the weapons of over 2,000 German troops and were dug in strongly in all the former German-held towns. Corrèze was liberated.

But we kept Route 89 open as an enticement for the German First Army

Group, still in garrison in southwest France. Over the next ten days, Jacques and I trained Antoine's and Hubert's troops in the use of the captured weapons and dispatched demolition teams to blow the bridges on the side roads above the highway. If the Germans retreated this way, they'd have to use the Route Nationale, and the Maquis were waiting for them.

Hubert still had six unarmed companies of troops. Day after day we radioed London, begging for an airdrop to equip these eager Maquis soldiers. Being a veteran regular officer, Hubert understood the importance of harassing the Germans farther north, of keeping them below the Loire and away from Patton's flank. Hubert had taken over a fleet of captured German trucks and scout cars, and he proposed equipping a highly mobile *Battalion de Marche* to hit the retreating German columns in the valleys of Creuse, Indre, and Cher to the north of Limoges.

Hearing nothing from London on this matter, I took the team up to Limoges to confer with Colonel Rivier, the regional FFI commander. He immediately saw the value of Hubert's plan and authorized the operation to begin as soon as possible. The only problem was arms. Hubert needed bazookas, machine guns, and mines to do the job well. Again, we badgered London for these weapons, but to no avail. The OSS/SOE bureaucracy was obviously overwhelmed by the Maquis uprising and the related arms requests from Jedburgh Teams and Operational Groups supporting the resistance. In the end, Hubert had to disarm six of his ambush companies to equip the mobile battalion. This was a sad commentary on Allied responsiveness. I knew full well there were thousands of tons of munitions earmarked for the Maquis in depots in England. But the bureaucrats couldn't see clear to get them aboard planes.

(Nevertheless, Hubert's battalion was able to harass the German retreat for weeks, and even captured the key road junction of Issoudun. Decades later, when I was involved with supporting guerrilla fighters in other parts of the world, I remembered this bitter lesson: It isn't so much what you promise the men in the field that's important, it's what you deliver. And I learned to act first, then inform headquarters.)

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WE linked up with an SOE operations team, led by a dashing French major whose nom de guerre was "Popeye" Revez (Jacques Robert). His team had been betrayed twice by collaborator Gestapo informants and had narrowly escaped capture. Their last escape was late one night when they fled a farmhouse in their underwear as the Milice were kicking down the front door. While Revez's local Maquis helped train Hubert's mobile group in a forest camp near Guéret, Revez, Jacques, and I took off on a series of

breakneck reconnaissance missions, scouting the highways and side roads of the Creuse, Indre, and Cher valleys for Hubert. We had a fast, 1939 Citroën *traction-avante*, which we used to great advantage.

Paris had been liberated ten days before, and the German units in central France were streaming east on every open road to escape encirclement by Patton north of the Loire and by Patch in the Rhône valley. We never knew when we'd encounter a German column, even on rutted back lanes. However, we quickly learned that the Wehrmacht maintained its predictability, even in retreat. To minimize Allied air attack on their convoys, the vehicles were staggered by time intervals—"serials" in military language. The convoys all move west to east, so we'd enter a village on the north-south road and watch for the German convoy. Once we got the timing of their serials down, we'd simply slip our Citroën into the interval and cruise along unscathed, marking our maps with the best ambush positions.

After being strafed by P-47 Thunderbolts, however, I decided to paint a large U.S. Army white star on the Citroën's roof. This didn't deter the Air Corps very much, but it gave the local French people a real thrill. As tough as he was, Revez never got used to my yelling, "Hey, honey, how're you doing?" to the local ladies as we rolled through their villages in the middle of the German convoys.

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BACK at Guéret we found Hubert's road companies at the peak of training and efficiency. They had managed to scrounge more weapons too, so Revez dispatched them into the Indre and Cher with orders to hit the major German convoys from the ambush positions we'd scouted. Coriolan arrived, as always energetic. True to form, he saw beyond the immediate tactical situation and proposed a fascinating new operation. He was in contact with large numbers of French *resistants* in Austria, French who had escaped forced labor in the Reich and had taken to the Tyrol Mountains. He proposed forming a new Jed team (or teams) to drop into these mountains and organize the unarmed Frenchmen into the type of Maquis we'd developed in the Corrèze. Alternatively, he suggested forming a column of fast, lightly armored vehicles to actually enter and harass the German retreat convoys using our audacious "serial" techniques.

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THESE proposals interested London and I found myself flying out of le Blanc, a captured Maquis airstrip north of Limoges, aboard a blacked-out RAF Hudson after dark on September 10. That night I actually slept between

clean sheets in a Mayfair hotel room. Unfortunately, the air raid sirens interrupted my well-earned rest. London was in the middle of the buzz bomb and V-2 Blitz. The echoing explosions and pounding of the anti-aircraft guns made me feel right at home.

The next day on Grosvenor Street, Casey and British colonel Carleton-Smith listened with considerable interest to Coriolan and my proposals. The light-armored column, they said, was a splendid idea, but such an operation would have to be approved by the Free French, so that idea disappeared into the bureaucracy of the Allied command.

OSS headquarters was, however, intrigued by the Austrian-resistance Jed Team concept. I was told to find another Jed officer and return to France as soon as possible to recruit candidates for the program.

My good friend Adrian Wise, now a major, was back at Milton Hall, debriefing from his two months inside Nazi-occupied Brittany with Team Frederick, one of the bravest, most effective Jed outfits in France. As I expected, Adrian loved the idea of the Austrian operation. He took charge of logistics, organizing a Hudson flight back to le Blanc in three days' time.

Meanwhile, we decided to unwind in London. We had plenty of cash in our pockets, and there was only so much champagne you could drink, so one afternoon we found ourselves on the second floor of his Savile Row tailor, being fitted for dress uniforms. The air raid sirens droned for the tenth time since lunch, announcing the arrival of yet another buzz bomb. The staid, elderly tailor raised his gray eyebrows wearily, displeased with the interruption.

"Carry on, Mr. Maxwell," Adrian said. "I shouldn't think they're aiming at us."

"Quite, Major Wise," the old man said.

But the German robot bomb in question was, in fact, headed our way. As we stood at the large windows, the rasping, putt-putt of the buzz bomb grew louder, followed by the smacking AA guns in Green Park. We listened to the drone of the buzz bomb until the engine cut off. When the silence reaches you, you know that the bomb has gone into its dive. The blast finally came from across the park, rattling the windows.

The tailor never missed a beat as he marked the rich dark wool of Adrian's uniform blouse with his fine chalk.

Late that same night, Adrian and I were in Mayfair as the pubs were closing, strolling through the warm late-summer blackout toward Oxford Street. I was just saying something amusing about the Maquis when the whole world blazed with a giant welder's torch. We both hit the greasy pavement. A glowing shock wave swept past, followed by a double blast-furnace roar. We got to our feet. Two blocks away, flames swept from a shattered pub. The front of a taxi was wedged into second-floor rubble. A

V-2 warhead had exploded, just south of Hyde Park, followed immediately by a second blast that rocked us like a thunderclap, the sonic boom from the descending missile.

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WHILE Adrian and Coriolan recruited candidates from the local Maquis, I drove the Citroën back to Corrèze to check on the ambush positions we'd established. I found Hubert's people in good order, but Antoine's FTP seemed to have quit the military fight to concentrate on the political struggle. They'd taken over Tulle and had the arms factory running again, having actually resorted to armed threats to force the engineers and technicians to work for them. Antoine himself was not interested in the tactical picture. He had orders from elsewhere to produce armaments for use after the war.

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TEAM James returned to Milton Hall for debriefing on September 26. We'd been in the occupied zone only seven weeks. On our first morning back, I was told of the unit's casualties. Among my friends, Larry Swank had been killed in an operational accident in Haute Savoie; Major John Bonsall's entire team had been wiped out; at least three British-led Jed Teams had been ambushed and killed soon after landing. Cy Manierre was known to have been captured in eastern France, and to have been savagely tortured by the Gestapo. The SOE actually had agents inside Cy's prison in Alsace, trying to stage his escape, but he was too weak from torture to respond to their signals.⁹

As I sat down on my old cot that afternoon and began opening my mail from home, I felt as if a weary old man had taken the place of the eager boy who'd once slept here.



OSS CHINA
1945