

## The Further Adventures Of The USS Flyswatter

### Part I

*November, 1942*

Captain Joe Tormolen lay back on his cot. He desperately wanted and needed to sleep, but it would not come.

Tormolen had been able to sleep on pretty much any ship he'd been on, in any climate. It was almost a matter of pride to him. But this tiny cot, in this Quonset hut, on the island of New Caledonia – this was worse than any ship he'd ever sailed aboard. He had grown used to sleeping aboard a ship – the slow rocking, the quiet rattle of the engines, the muffled tramping of countless feet, all the little things that served as a reminder to his subconscious that he was surrounded by steel, stubbornly bobbing atop the seas.

He found himself missing the Argonne. The sub tender had been an utterly inadequate flagship for Admiral Halsey when he first took command of the theatre. She was cramped, slow, and woefully un-air-conditioned, but at least she was a ship. Tormolen had not grumbled when Halsey announced he and his staff were going ashore, but he wished he had.

Tormolen found himself thinking back to his first cruise at sea. A freshly-minted ensign, he had been assigned to the battleship Arkansas. He'd been walking around the ship late one night when he stumbled across an illicit poker game.

His first instinct had been to break up the game, but he'd let the chief who seemed to be running it persuade him to let it go. Instead, Tormolen had watched, fascinated – he'd never played poker, and the intensity of the players had him quickly enthralled.

The game eventually came down to two young seamen, and the pots kept growing. In the final hand, there was more cash piled on the table than Tormolen had ever seen in one place. Just as the sailors were about to settle that final pot, however, Tormolen's lieutenant came looking for his misplaced ensign. The lieutenant confiscated the pot and the cards, blistered the ears of the chiefs who had been standing around encouraging the young players, and led Tormolen straight to the captain's quarters.

The captain had not been pleased to be presented with the news, and immediately ordered Tormolen back to his quarters – with orders to stay there until he was summoned. Joe closed the door behind him, leaving the two officers to quietly discuss the matter.

The next afternoon, that same lieutenant had showed up at Tormolen's quarters and escorted him back to the captain's quarters.

“Mr. Tormolen, would you care to explain what you were doing at that poker game last night?”

”Sir, I discovered it underway while walking the ship, and should have put a stop to it immediately. But I let myself be persuaded that it was harmless, and instead watched it.”

The captain humphed. “Well, at least you aren’t dumb enough to lie to me. Tell me, Tormolen, do you play poker?”

”No sir, last night was the first time I even saw a game being played.”

“Do you know why gambling is forbidden on Navy ships, and especially on mine?”

“No, sir. I had never thought to question the regulations.”

“Let me explain it to you, Mr. Tormolen.” The captain took an envelope out of his desk and handed it over. “Count this.”

It was the pot from that final hand. Tormolen counted it, as ordered. It was, indeed, far more money than he’d ever seen in one place, let alone held.

“That, Mr. Tormolen, is about four months’ pay from each of those two idiots who were in that final hand. If Lieutenant Whedon hadn’t broken up that game, one of those men would have lost pretty much every penny he owned.”

“Sir, that was their choice. If a man wants to risk...”

”I don’t recall asking for your opinion, Mr. Tormolen. As I was saying, one of those men was about to lose every penny he owned. That would have caused a great deal of resentment between two men who one day might need to depend on each other for their very lives. More importantly, it would have driven a wedge between two of my crew, and I can’t afford to have two men hating each other when they should be thinking about their duties to this ship.

”I can’t keep the men from gambling when they’re ashore, but I can keep them from doing so on my ship. And anyone who tries to get around that – even if it means standing by and staring like an idiot while it goes on – will get my shoe up their ass as far as I can kick it.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, Tormolen, do you know what I’m going to do about this whole sorry mess?”

Tormolen saw a court martial in his future. Or, at least, a captain’s mast. “No, sir.”

“We’re going to pretend this never happened. After you leave, the senior chief is going to come in here and take that envelope. After we take 20% of it for the Crew Fund, we’re going to split it right down the middle and lock it in the ship’s safe. Once we get back to shore, those two sailors in that final hand will be given that money.

“The only reason I’m not taking any official action, Tormolen, is because of you. There is no way I can punish a single one of the players without punishing you even more severely, and I’m not going to put that kind of a black mark on your record on your very first tour at sea.”

Tormolen felt himself sag with relief.

“I want you to understand the price of your future, Mr. Tormolen. To preserve that career, I am choosing to not discipline six crewmen who most likely desperately need it. I am letting them off, because there is no way I can come down on them like they deserve without destroying you in the process.

“This doesn’t mean that the whole matter is whitewashed, Mr. Tormolen. I’m putting those six men into a single work gang. That gang is going to be getting the nastiest, most disgusting, most back-breaking details I and the senior chief can find. And would you care to speculate what officer is going to be assigned to supervise this gang?”

The following months had been the worst of Tormolen’s young life. From holystoning the decks to cleaning the bilges to painting the hull to scouring the heads, he had led the poker party on a tour of the worst places aboard the Arkansas. When he had been transferred of the battleship, he had left with a thorough knowledge of the less-than-glamorous workings of the Arky – and a lifetime loathing of poker.

Then, four months after he left the ship, he heard through the grapevine about a murder aboard the Arkansas. Sickly, he had looked into the story, and it was just as he has feared – one of those two men in that last hand had killed the other. A gambling debt was supposedly involved.

There was no way Tormolen could know if the killing might had been averted, had he shut down the game as soon as he stumbled across it. Maybe, maybe not.

It was that last hand that kept coming to mind. It seemed the perfect metaphor for the fighting going around Guadalcanal. Neither the United States nor Japan had intended to make the Solomon Islands the crucible it had become. Neither nation had expected to pour as many men, planes, and ships into the pot, constantly raising the stakes and sinking more and more and more resources into the fight. The butcher’s bill was already far higher than any other battle, and there seemed no end in sight. The determining factor was turning out not to be numbers, or technology, or tactics, but simply a matter of who was willing to shed the most blood.

As of this moment, neither side was even considering folding.

## **Part II**

Captain Tormolen stepped into the room in the house that had previously served the French Consul General that served as the main meeting area. Admiral Halsey was already there, as usual. Tormolen took a quick glance of the reports from the overnight fighting.

First up, more Marine casualties ashore on Guadalcanal. Once again they had kept the Japanese from retaking Henderson Field, but at a terrible cost, and the airfield had been battered once more.

The Japanese had managed to bring another convoy down the Slot. The Tokyo Express was keeping the Japanese going. All day, the Americans brought in their reinforcements, and the Japanese tried to stop them. At night, the Japanese brought in their reinforcements, and the Americans tried to stop them. So far, it was a savage stalemate, with the only changes being to the casualty counts – the numbers of men killed and wounded, planes shot down, and the numbers of ship sent to the bottom.

Ever since Halsey had taken command of the Southern Pacific, the morale of the men had improved remarkably. But so far, that had yet to translate into actual gains. Tormolen feared that the “bounce” that

Halsey's arrival had triggered would fade into renewed cynicism and despair if the fierce warrior did not deliver some tangible results – and soon.

“Joe! Get over here – we've been waiting for you!” Halsey's bellow echoed off the walls, their once-pristine paint now marred with maps and charts and – in one place – plans and charts drawn right on the surface.

“I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know I was needed any sooner.”

“I didn't send anyone for you because I figured you'd need all the rest you could get. Pack a bag, son, you're going out to sea.”

“Sir?”

“You're going back to the Manchester. Stark's come down with appendicitis, and you're going out to take his place.”

“Sir, Commander Washburne is the Manchester's exec. Why isn't he getting command?”

“Because Captain Washburne isn't aboard her. He left a week ago, heading stateside for his own command. His replacement's been delayed, so right now the Manchester is missing her two top men. I can't move up any of her other officers without leaving a gap in her command structure, so the best solution is to put another officer in command temporarily.”

Tormolen was overwhelmed. “But sir, after my last visit, Captain Stark and I didn't part on the best possible terms.”

“You two might not have gotten along famously, but he has a hell of a lot of respect for you. You know the Manchester better than any other officer available, both the ship and the crew, and you've got a solid, permanent assignment here, so you're not likely to grow too attached to Stark's seat. Most importantly, we need every ship, and we can't afford for the Manchester to sit at anchor while we wait for her new exec to show up, and then learn the ropes.

“The docs say Stark should be fit for duty in about three weeks or so. You'll be acting captain until then. If Commander Serra does turn up, you can get him up to speed and -- if he can handle it -- put him in charge of the Manchester and come back here. Or you can stick it out until Stark's back on his feet. Until then, Joe, the Manchester will be yours.”

### **Part III**

Over the past few days, Tormolen and the Manchester had gotten acclimated to each other. Captain Stark was well-liked as well as respected, and – in these odd circumstances – that helped Tormolen's assimilation go more smoothly. Everyone aboard not only knew that his presence was temporary, but that he had been Stark's choice. Coupled with the fact that many of the crew remembered Tormolen from his stay a few months ago at Midway, and it was quite possibly the smoothest transition in Navy history.

Naturally, there were still some rough spots. Tormolen had never held a command before. His last two promotions had come from shore duty; he'd left the command track while still a Lt. Commander – first to the Bureau of Construction and Repair (which became the Bureau of Ships), then to Admiral Halsey's staff. He wasn't used to the nigh-absolute power a captain wielded aboard his ship. It was a heady experience, checked only by the nigh-absolute responsibility that accompanied it.

That was fine in the abstract. On a more concrete level, Tormolen was finally feeling like he belonged at the conn of the Manchester. The crew responded instantly to his commands, and his officers promptly (but respectfully) let him know when he was about to make a mistake. Most importantly, they had developed a very high level of respect and trust that let them work together virtually seamlessly.

But the grace period Admiral Halsey had granted the ship was over. They'd had their "shakedown," and now were expected to resume their duties as a fully-functional warship in the United States Navy.

*(Original ending goes here)*

At the thought of Admiral Halsey, Tormolen found his eyes drawn out the bridge window, to the Enterprise. Halsey himself had sailed down from Noumea on the Big E. He had tried commanding from the rear, and didn't care for it. So now he was where he had to be – right in the thick of things.

Then Tormolen re-read the dispatch they'd received a couple of hours ago. Last night, Admiral Callaghan had led most of his screening force into the Slot to intercept the Japanese. Two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and eight destroyers had challenged the Japanese in the dark, where the enemy had a decided advantage.

And they'd won.

Callaghan most likely wasn't expecting the Japanese to send a battleship into the crowded waters of the Slot, but they had. And his forces had not fled from the challenge. They sank one destroyer and took enough of a chunk out of the battleship – it was, apparently, one of the four Kongo-class vessels originally built as battlecruisers, but refitted and reclassified into a full-fledged battleship – that when morning came, aircraft from the Enterprise and Guadalcanal's Henderson Field had finished her off. And the supplies the battlewagon had been escorting never landed.

But at one hell of a price.

It was still unclear exactly how many American ships had been sunk and how many had been crippled, but only one cruiser and one destroyer were still reporting as fit for duty. And Admiral Callaghan was confirmed among the dead.

The Japanese had been stopped last night, but it had taken nearly everything the Americans could throw at them. If they tried it again, it would be hard – Halsey's cupboard was almost bare.

The words of the ancient Greek general Pyrrhus came to mind. "Another victory like this one, and I am undone."

**(End Part III)**

(Original ending of Part III)

*And their first challenge was tonight. The Japanese had been steadily reinforcing Guadalcanal with what had become known as the “Tokyo Express.” Every night, it seemed, Japanese destroyers and other fast ships would race down the Slot, dump cargo and reinforcements into the ocean off Guadalcanal, then race for home. In the daytime, the Americans did just the opposite.*

*This mirrored perfectly the tactical situation: the Americans controlled the daylight hours, thanks to having air superiority. But at night, when the planes were grounded, the Japanese – who had spent years and years perfecting the art of night-fighting – ruled.*

*That situation had led to turning Guadalcanal into a 2500-square-mile meat grinder.*

*Tonight, though, the Americans would be looking to break the cycle.*

*Admiral Callaghan would be leading a force of two heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, and eight destroyers into the deadly waters north of Guadalcanal in hopes of surprising the Japanese. If the Americans had any luck, they would put enough of a hurting on the Japanese to slow down the constant resupply of their forces on Guadalcanal, and give the Americans the chance to get ahead.*

*While keeping a confident, resolute façade for his crew, Tormolen had his doubts about the Manchester’s effectiveness in the fight. She had never been intended to face other surface ships, and certainly not at night. On the other hand, she was sailing alongside the Atlanta and the Juneau. The Manchester had been designed as an enlarged version of those ships. If Callaghan thought those ships were suitable for the battle, then the Manchester was even more so. And while the Manchester’s 5” guns were relatively small, she still had a truly formidable punch – she could fire almost a ton of shells on her broadside every four seconds or so. Over a minute, that gave her – at least on paper – the power of a battleship.*

*Of course, that was on paper. In practice, it didn’t work out quite as well. A dozen five-inch shells hitting in the same spot didn’t have anywhere near the destructive potential of a single fourteen-inch battleship shell.*

*Luckily, the Japanese had been relying not on battleships, but on destroyers and cruisers – and they were much more thin-skinned than battleships. Against those, the Manchester’s guns could wreak considerable havoc.*

*As the sun neared the horizon, Tormolen ordered the Manchester into formation. Callaghan had split his forces into three elements – four destroyers in the van, the six cruisers in the middle, and the remaining four destroyers bringing up the rear. The Manchester was last in line for cruisers, trailing the Juneau.*

*Tormolen also questioned Callaghan’s deployment. Tormolen had had a little experience with the new SG radar that was being phased in, and was mightily impressed. Five of the ships in the group were equipped with it, but all were assigned to the rear half. It seemed as if Callaghan either didn’t understand or didn’t trust the new radar, and was preferring to rely on the older SC systems that the ships he’d chosen to lead the group were using.*

*But Tormolen kept his concerns to himself. He was not only the newest member of the task force, he had only held command for a few days. He wasn't on Bull Halsey's staff any more, where dissent was not only tolerated, but actively solicited. He was the captain of one ship in a task force, and the most junior at that. Once he had a battle or two under his belt, he'd feel more comfortable raising his voice.*

*The Manchester slid easily into formation, off the Juneau's stern. From the rear, the similarities between the two ships was apparent. Tormolen studied the three-tiered 5" guns on the stern that had inspired the design of the Manchester and marveled. He'd spent many an hour poring over the plans for the Juneau (well, technically, her sister, the Atlanta, four ships ahead in the formation), working out how to enlarge her into an even more formidable platform. The final design for the Manchester was 100 feet longer, 10 feet wider, and 4,000 tons heavier, but he'd added another four turrets on the beams, increasing the firepower by 50% over the Atlantas. He recalled the aphorism he'd tossed at his staff while they tried to squeeze every single gun they could on the Manchester – "nothing succeeds like excess."*

*They'd taken his words to heart, and the Manchester turned into a veritable porcupine, with gun barrels sprouting out of almost every inch of deck. And she'd shown the value of those guns at Midway, when she'd shot down nearly every attacking Japanese plane that had ventured near, earning the nickname "The Flyswatter."*

*Unfortunately, enough had managed to drop their payloads in time to cripple the Manchester's charge, the Yorktown, and leave her vulnerable to the Japanese submarine that had finished her off, but the crew had taken that failing as a challenge. Their already-superb marksmanship had gotten even better, the lookouts even sharper-eyed, and the radar operators even more perceptive. Tormolen almost pitied the next Japanese pilot unfortunate enough to fly into the range of the Manchester's guns.*

*Tonight, though, she wouldn't be facing planes. The Manchester's five-inch guns were officially rated as "dual-purpose," meaning they were considered effective both against aircraft and ships. Tonight, the latter part of that designation would be put to the test.*

*Tormolen was confident this was a test the Manchester would pass.*

#### **Part IV**

As the day wore on, the news kept getting worse. The Juneau was gone – destroyed in a single cataclysmic explosion. Four destroyers were also resting on the newly-named "Ironbottom Sound" – the Cushing, the Laffey, the Barton, and the Monssen. The Atlanta was badly mauled, and not expected to make it. The San Francisco – Callaghan's flagship – had had her topside ripped to shreds, but her hull and engines and weapons were still mostly intact. The Portland had taken at least one torpedo, and was under tow. The destroyers Sterett, Aaron Ward, and O'Bannon also were seriously hurting. In fact, the only ships still effective combat units were the light cruiser Helena and the destroyer Fletcher.

Tormolen had only met Callaghan a couple of times, in passing, but had been impressed with him. He had definitely been of the old school, trusting in his ship's guns and armor to face down the enemy. And by all reports he'd gone down swinging.

Oddly enough, Tormolen most keenly felt the loss of the Atlanta. During the Battle of Midway, he'd had a few chances to see the ship that had inspired his design of the Manchester.

The similarities were obvious – the three 5” turrets fore and aft, rising up from the main deck towards the middle of the ship -- were an unmistakable signature of both vessels. But that was where the similarities largely ended. While the Atlanta had one more turret, amidships and towards the stern on each side, the Manchester had another three on her beam – with the center one raised to fire over the other two if necessary.

To accommodate the extra main guns, as well as the slew of smaller weapons, the Manchester was almost 80 feet longer, 10 feet wider, and displaced 4,000 tons more than the Atlanta. He recalled the motto he had impressed on his team when they questioned his determination to cram as many weapons on the ship as could fit: “Nothing succeeds like excess.”

Still, he was deeply concerned. Callaghan and his forces had, indeed, stopped the Japanese from their combined resupply/bombardment run down the Slot, but it had cost them Callaghan himself and most of his force. The next time the Japanese ran another Tokyo Express, what would Halsey have to stop them?

Just then Tormolen got a hint of his answer: an inquiry from the Enterprise about each ship’s fuel status.

He stepped to the intercom as he read the message. “Engineering, this is the captain. What is our current bunkering?”

“We’ve managed to run pretty lean since our last refueling, Captain. I put us at about 82% of full.”

“Excellent, Mr. Book. Sparks, pass that information back to the Enterprise. Oh, and take note of how the other ships answer.”

## **Part V**

“Captain! The order’s been given. Admiral Lee and the Washington are to lead a force into the Slot tonight. It’ll be the Washington, the South Dakota, and four destroyers.”

“So the Old Man’s going for broke. Sparks, get the Enterprise on the horn and see if I can talk to Admiral Halsey directly.”

”Sir, they say Admiral Halsey can talk to you in about 20 minutes, and he can spare you no more than five.”

Tormolen knew that if he was going to persuade Halsey, he’d have to do it quickly – or not at all. “That should be enough.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Joe, I’m up to my ass in work here. Make it quick.”

“Sir, I am formally requesting that the Manchester be assigned to Admiral Lee’s task force for tonight’s mission.”

“Thought that was what was up. Sorry, Joe, I can’t spare you. Without Lee’s battlewagons, the Enterprise’s anti-aircraft defenses are seriously depleted. I need the Manchester right her to keep the Japs off our only carrier.”

“Sir, I understand that. But...”

”Also, Joe, your ship is barely armored and carries nothing bigger than popguns. A whole lot of popguns, I’ll admit, but popguns. Lee’s going hunting for a battleship and cruisers, and your guns won’t be much more than nuisances against them.”

“Sir, I admit the Manchester couldn’t do much more than mess up the paint on a Kongo. But they’ll have smaller ships with them – light cruisers, destroyers, and transports. The Manchester could mop up the floor with those ships. Especially those with torpedoes that could go gunning for Lee’s battlewagons.

“I know the Manchester’s guns are fairly small, but we’ve got a broadside of about half a ton of steel, and we can pump out about 15 broadsides every minute. Also, they’re officially rated as ‘dual-purpose,’ meaning they work just as well against surface ships as they do planes. We can chew up pretty much anything the Japanese have short of a battleship, meaning we can keep the heat off of Lee. We didn’t design this ship as just a carrier escort. Battleships are capital ships, too, and they could certainly use a little extra help in this fight.

“Finally, sir, I know that you picked the cans to go with Lee based on their fuel state. They’re from four different divisions, so it’s obvious that that was the sole consideration. Well, we’ve got over 80% bunkerage, more than plenty for some serious maneuvering.”

There was a long pause – long enough that Tormolen was fearing that Admiral Halsey had stormed off from the radio in disgust.

“All right, Joe, you’ve sold me. I’ll tell Ching Lee that you’ll be tagging along, too, and he can figure out where to put you in his formation.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Don’t thank me, son. I have a hunch that I’m not granting you or your crew any favors for doing this.”

Tormolen then opened up the intercom.

”Attention all hands, this is the captain. So far, we’ve spent the entire war playing defense, letting the Japanese take their best shots at us. Tonight we go on the offensive. We’ll be joining Admiral Lee and the battleships to go into the Slot and keep them from getting to Guadalcanal.

As you all know, the Japanese have been using these ‘Tokyo Express’ convoys to bring in reinforcements, supplies, and to bombard our boys on the island. The Marines are counting on us to keep the Japanese away, and I know the Manchester will not let them down.”

## Part VI

Captain Joe Tormolen gazed at the stern of the South Dakota, a thousand yards dead ahead, and grimaced. There, seemingly mocking him, sat the “hip pocket” mounts common to all the fast battleships – “bathtubs” of steel containing a quad mount of 40 mm cannon. It was those mounts that had inspired him to push for the fantail battery of the Manchester – which he had called the “Stinger” but the Manchester’s crew called the “Flaming @\$\$hole.”

The battleships had catapults and a crane on their fantail, but the Manchester had no such structures – nor did it have a hangar belowdecks, as it carried no aircraft. So Tormolen had commandeered all that free space to put five mounts along the stern, with one on each corner, one on each side just forward of the corner mounts, and one dead center of the squared-off stern. Then, to maximize the field of fire, he’d put those corner mounts up on six-foot-high pedestals so they could shoot over the other mounts if necessary.

He hadn’t thought it through fully, though.

Those high mounts tended to eject their empty shell casings right on top of the sailors manning the lower mounts. The gunners had riveted some sheet metal to deflect the casings off their buddies, and that had been a help.

The other problem wasn’t one so easily resolved, though.

The South Dakota displaced 35,000 tons. That was a lot of mass to move around, and it made the ship, overall, a lot more stable of a gun platform. The Manchester had only 10,000 tons to soak up the motion of the sea, the vibrations of her engines, and all the other little factors that added up to bounce a ship around. No wonder the Manchester’s captain had ordered those mounts abandoned when the ship was at speed or in rough seas – all they could achieve was to waste valuable ammunition.

Admiral Lee’s reaction to being assigned the Manchester had been tough to read. Tormolen had never had any dealings with him before, and couldn’t tell if he was pleased or disappointed to have the ship. He’d already set up his formation – the four destroyers out in front, his Washington next, and the South Dakota in the rear. He’d put the Manchester where she would cause the least disruption – behind the South Dakota. Tormolen wasn’t quite certain whether she’d actually do any good, should they run into the Japanese, but he knew they’d be ready.

He’d already outlined his plans to his crew. Once the enemy was sighted, the main guns would all focus on a single enemy ship. They’d ignore any battleships, but any cruisers or destroyers would be attacked, going after the nearest first and staying on that target until it was out of action. The 40mm guns would seek out enemy destroyers on their own and make their lives difficult. And the 20mm guns would be left unmanned – the gunnery crews had been assigned to lookout and damage control duties.

And those lookouts would be spending most of their time watching for torpedoes. As they had learned from the scuttlebutt, the Japanese torpedoes were fast and had long legs – and the sailors who fired them were very, very good at night fighting. Tormolen could only hope that the task force would sight the Japanese and keep them at enough distance to ward off any torpedo attacks.

Night was falling, and the task force had many miles to go before they would reach the waters of what many were calling “Ironbottom Sound” in bitter memory of all the ships that had already been sunk there.

After tonight, he mused, how many more would join them?

## **Part VII**

Tormolen forced himself to stay where he was. Every instinct in him pulled at him, drawing him to go out on the bridge wings himself and join the numerous lookouts all trying to spy the enemy through the dark. But his training told him that his place was here, on the bridge. He ought to be near the radar set that could see through the night far better than any human eyes. Near the radio, which would bring word from the other ships, ahead of the Manchester. And at the place where the reports of all those lookouts dotting the superstructure of the Manchester, many younger and keener eyes all just as keen to spot the enemy as Tormolen himself was.

But it all came down to a matter of trust. Tormolen had to trust his radar set – and its operator. He had to trust the other ships, their radio sets and operators, and his radio set and operator. He had to trust his lookouts, and the system set up to get their reports to him accurately and quickly.

Further, he had to trust that Admiral Lee knew what he was doing, and was as well served by his little fleet as Joe hoped.

Something in him rebelled against all that trust. He wanted to put all his faith in his own eyes, his own ears, his own judgment.

But against that were his years of training and discipline and experience. It had been drilled into his head time and time and time again that the Navy was a team, that it took a whole crew to fight a ship. A commanding officer had the duty to trust his crew, to rely on them, or he was doomed.

And all the while telling him to trust all these people, the Navy also kept pounding into him that the captain had absolute authority and absolute responsibility for his ship. It was a dichotomy that Tormolen had never really fully appreciated.

The quarter moon gleamed off the relatively smooth sea. Off to the right, he could see the hulking shadow of Savo Island, a darker black against the black of night. He could barely make out the massive South Dakota almost dead ahead. Objectively, there was no way he could know if the Japanese were out there. But his gut said they were, and that they would find them.

Or, worse, be found by them.

“Sir, flash from the Washington! Enemy ships to starboard!”

Tormolen snapped out of his reverie. “Radar, focus to starboard! Starboard lookouts, find those ships! Portside lookouts, keep sharp – we don’t want to get in a crossfire like Callaghan did. And all lookouts, watch out for torpedoes!”

## **Part VIII**

Tormolen could feel his frustration mount. He could see the battleships firing their secondary batteries, their muzzle flashes like lightning. His lookouts were straining their eyes, trying to see any signs of hits. And his gunners were ready to open fire as soon as they were given a target.

But the Japanese were not cooperating with the Americans. There were no flashes of lights, no bursts of flame out in the darkness that Tormolen's fire control could lock in on. That meant the 18 5" guns that the Manchester could bring to bear to her starboard were utterly useless.

Then, as quickly as they started, the battleships' guns went silent. Apparently they had lost their targets. Indeed, Tormolen was not entirely convinced they'd ever had targets. It wouldn't have been the first time he'd heard of such a thing; as a boy, he'd heard a tale out of the Revolutionary War.

It seemed that the Americans in Burlington, Vermont had been exceptionally nervous about a British attack. One night, a lookout had sounded the alarm about a British ship just offshore. The cannons mounted on the shore had opened up, and fired all through the night at the Redcoats, but the ship stubbornly refused to sink. Then, as dawn broke, it was revealed that they had been attempting to sink an island.

Tormolen had never been able to verify the story, but he found it plausible. And in the near pitch black of this November night, he found it downright persuasive.

The night had returned. The darkness and silence descended as if they had never been disturbed. But the men aboard the seven US Navy warships knew differently. If the enemy indeed was out there, the Americans had just revealed their presence.

## **Part IX**

More flashes of light, this time coming from ahead. Then, later, the rumbling of explosions. Two of them, and somehow Tormolen knew this was different.

The radio operator was quick to fill in the details. "Flash from the Washington, sir! Two of our 'cans in the lead have just been torpedoed!"

It was on. The nameless dread Tormolen had been feeling, the fear and anticipation that had been omnipresent ever since Admiral Halsey had granted his request to join this group, all vanished in an instant. This was real. The enemy was there, and the fight was on.

"Radar, find us some targets!" Tormolen demanded.

"Sir, I'm picking up what appears to be several ships to starboard!"

"Good work, mister! Now get us a range and bearing!"

"Working on it sir... got it! Bearing 020 relative, range 18,000 yards!"

Tormolen slammed his fist on the rail. "That's too far! There's almost no chance they could have been the ones to torpedo the destroyers. There's another group out there, and we've got to find them before they find us!"

KER-WHAM!!!!

The entire ship shuddered slightly and was lit up for an instant. Tormolen's eyes were drawn dead ahead.

18,000 yards was out of range of the Manchester's main guns, but not the South Dakota's. And even though the Manchester was astern the big battleship when she fired her forward guns, the blast of the mighty 16" rifles was enough to notice.

"OK, that simplifies matters. We'll leave that distant group for the big boys. Radar, find us some closer targets."

The South Dakota fired off several salvos, then went silent. Apparently they had lost their targets – either sunk or faded from the radar.

The darkness and silence descended once more. Tormolen found himself hating the situation. Instead of honest, man-to-man, ship-to-ship combat, this was like swatting at ghosts. Friend and foe kept fading in and out, firing off a few shots before disappearing back into the night.

Even worse, the Japanese were winning.

More than anything, he wanted to go over to the young lieutenant on the radar scope – Tormolen couldn't even remember his name – and shove him aside, then find out the damned elusive foes. But he knew that the lieutenant – Dobson, that was the man's name – was not only doing the best he can, but was doing a better job than Tormolen could hope to do. After all, he'd been trained extensively on the complicated device; Tormolen had been given only the most cursory briefing.

"Sir, we've lost the South Dakota!"

"What the hell? How do you lose a 35,000-ton battleship!"

"She's gone completely dark, sir!"

Tormolen tried to conceive of what could cause the mighty ship to go completely dark without a sound or light, but nothing came to mind.

"Got her, sir! I caught a glimpse of moonlight off her. She's still dead ahead, but there's not a hint of light coming off her anywhere!"

That was damned troubling. Had the Japanese developed some kind of secret weapon that could silently kill a battleship? If they had, they were damned fools for using it here. They were already winning the fight. It must have been something else, he realized. Something that somehow robbed the South Dakota of virtually all power at this critical time, right in the middle of battle...

With the Manchester dead astern and plowing on at a blissful 18 knots.

"Helm, come right 30 degrees! Engines, set turns for 25 knots!"

Tormolen cursed himself. He had gotten so wrapped up with whatever had afflicted the South Dakota, he let his attention wander from the fact that he was dead astern of her. If the power loss had also affected her engines, he would end up ramming her – a bad move under any circumstance, but quite possibly the worst thing to do in the middle of battle.

Dobson suddenly shouted again. “Contacts, sir! Ships 40 degrees off the starboard bow, range six thousand yards!”

“Confirm that they’re not ours!”

“Confirmed, sir! Five vessels, cruisers or destroyers, in formation. We don’t have that many ships – they’ve gotta be Japs!”

“All guns, aim and fire!”

Tormolen remembered his first experience with the Manchester’s full broadside firing at once. That time, he’d been out on the bridge wing, and the combined blast effects – fortified by the odd characteristics of the superstructure focusing and amplifying the concussion – had knocked him ass over teakettle. Here, inside on the bridge, it was still an intimidating effect.

“Sir, lookouts report multiple hits!”

“All guns maintain fire! Keep pouring it on until... now.”

Tormolen watched in amazement as a massive fireball erupted off towards Savo Island. The ship they’d been firing on had apparently just exploded. For a brief moment, he dwelled on the fact that he had just most likely seen several hundred men die.

But there wasn’t time for that. Dobson had said there were five ships out there. That blast meant that there were still four ships full of Japanese out to kill him.

“All guns, shift aim to the next ship! Keep firing! Lookouts, keep an eye on the South Dakota – we don’t want to ram her in this dark!”

The guns continued firing, pouring shells out into the dark. Tormolen could barely make out tiny sparks off in the distance as some of them found their targets in the Japanese ships, tearing holes in the thin-skinned warships.

“Thin-skinned.” Tormolen was one to talk. The Manchester had barely more steel protecting her than did the Japanese destroyers. She had a mighty punch, though – she was tossing almost a ton of steel and explosives every three seconds. He found himself remembering the battle cruisers designed by Lord Jackie Fisher, and Winston Churchill’s memorable phrase: “eggshells armed with sledgehammers.”

Dammit, he had to keep his mind on the battle! The second ship erupted into flames, running nearly the length of the hull. Time to shift targets again. “Guns, change to third ship!”

KER-WHAM!

The Manchester shuddered again, considerably more strongly than when the South Dakota had opened fire. Tormolen knew instantly what that meant: the Japanese had started shooting back – and scored a solid hit.

### **Part X**

“Damage control, report!” Tormolen barked.

Hit to the stern, sir! Still getting details, but engines, main battery, and fire control unaffected!”

“Keep on firing, then. The Manchester’s tough. She can take it.”

The guns had barely paused when the Manchester had taken her first battle damage. A brief stutter, that’s all, then they resumed pouring steel out at the Japanese.

“Sir, damage control reports we took a round right on the fantail, just above the deck. It blew three of the 40-mm mounts clean off the ship, along with their crews.”

Dammit. Tormolen had meant to order those mounts abandoned once the ship got up to speed, but had forgotten. Now he had just killed two dozen of his own men.

He brutally shoved the thought to the back of his mind. There’d be plenty of time for guilt and recriminations later. “Keep firing! Lookouts to port – what’s going on with the South Dakota?”

”She’s still dark, but she’s starting to take some hits. Looks like the enemy’s found her.”

“Helm, keep us between her and the Japanese. Our job’s to protect her, and by god we’re going to do just that.”

**KER-WHAM!**

The Manchester shuddered again, and this time Tormolen heard the unmistakable sound of an explosion coming from the stern.

”Sir, we just took another hit! Mount ten is out of action! Looks like a big shell went right through the turret!”

Mount ten... Tormolen found himself quickly counting. That was the highest of the stern mounts. “Stand by to flood aft magazine!”

“Standing by, sir!”

“Damage Control, do we have any signs of fire yet?”

“No, sir! Looks like a clean hit. The mount’s destroyed, though.”

“Casualties?”

”It’d be a miracle if anyone survived, sir. It was a direct hit, by at least an 8” shell. The turret looks like Swiss cheese.”

More blood on his hands. More men whose lives had been entrusted to Tormolen had paid the price. He once again shoved the thought to the back of his mind.

“All remaining guns, keep firing.”

By this time, the third ship in line had begun to take some hits. And the guns of the Manchester had slowed their fire, as the ready-use ammunition was used up and the crews had to manhandle the 55-pound shells from the magazines.

KER-WHAM!

Another hit. This time, Tormolen didn’t have to ask for details. He’d seen the bow of the Manchester jerk as an enemy shell went right through, carrying away one of the anchors. Luckily, it appeared to be well above the waterline. Even more fortunately, Tormolen didn’t think that any crew were likely to be in that area when the ship was at general quarters.

KER-WHAM! KER-WHAM!

Two more shells hit the Manchester. One of them passed clean through her forward stack without detonating, showering the decks with shards of metal. The other – apparently a small-caliber round from a Japanese destroyer – hit the ship’s thin armored belt amidships. Somehow, the 2” of steel had held, and the shell burst without penetrating.

The Manchester was being incredibly lucky, Tormolen noted. Five hits so far, and three of them essentially trivial. In return, she’d blown up one Japanese ship, pretty much destroyed a second, and was tearing apart a third piece by piece. Admittedly, the Washington and the surviving destroyers might also be taking part, but until the after-action reports were all compiled and collated, Tormolen was quite pleased to take all the credit.

But he knew their luck wouldn’t hold. It couldn’t.

And it didn’t.

“Torpedoes!”

## Part XI

Tormolen raced to the window, shouting. “I need more info than that, dammit! How many, range, and bearing!”

“Three of them, coming in from starboard!”

Tormolen yanked the binoculars away from the young seaman and looked for himself. Yes, three wakes were boiling through the sea, towards the Manchester. He lowered the binoculars and did some rough calculations.

The rightmost one would pass astern, with no problem. A clean miss. The middle one would be close – it might miss, it might clip the stern. A slight increase in speed should guarantee the ship's safety. And the third one would be a tight squeeze, but if the Manchester turned into the torpedoes just a little, it would pass by the bow.

“Helm, increase speed to 30 knots and come right 20 degrees!”

He felt the ship's turbines spool up under the increased load. He was amazed he could feel such a subtle thing while the guns continued their firing, but he could. He'd heard that the best captains were so in tune with their ships that they could pick up on such subtle things, but he'd never believed it before. Now he felt a tiny thrill of pride.

And then a horrifying thought struck him. He looked again at the leftmost torpedo, carefully measuring its course. Then he turned and projected it in his mind, past the Manchester's bow. As he had figured, it would miss his ship.

And catch the South Dakota – still helpless and dark – smack dab amidships.

There was no hesitation in his next order. “Helm, belay that steering order! Come five degrees to port. And warn all hands to stand by for a torpedo from starboard.”

Off in the distance, Tormolen could see a third Japanese ship explode. Someone – he hoped it was the Manchester – had just gotten lucky again.

He heard the Manchester's guns continue to bark, pouring sixteen shells every few seconds off into the night to wreak havoc upon the Japanese. He drew his eyes back to that third torpedo as it bore down on his ship.

He thought about turning into the fish, trying to catch it as far forward as he could, to maximize the Manchester's chances of surviving. But he remembered Captain Stark trying a similar maneuver at Midway to save the Yorktown. Somehow the torpedo had gone beneath the ship's bow and gone on to fatally wound the carrier.

No, he wouldn't take that chance. There was no way the South Dakota could dodge or stop the torpedo, so it was up to the Manchester to save the big battleship she had been charged to protect.

His own words came back to echo through his mind. “You have to eat the fish.”

The torpedo streaked in, closer and closer. It looked like it was going to catch the Manchester right under the middle forward mount. He leaned out to see the torpedo as long as he could.

“Sir, get down!” Dobson, the radar operator, had left his scope. He grabbed Tormolen and dragged him down to the deck just before the torpedo hit.

\* \* \* \* \*

## EPILOGUE

### EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORT ON THE LOSS OF THE U.S.S. MANCHESTER SECOND NAVAL BATTLE OF GUADALCANAL NOVEMBER 15, 1942

Details of loss:

During the battle, it appears that the USS Manchester deliberately imposed herself between her assigned charge, the USS South Dakota, and at least one Japanese torpedo. At the time, the South Dakota was utterly crippled from an electrical system failure.

According to eyewitness accounts, the Manchester deliberately moved into the torpedo's path. Had she not done so, the torpedo would most likely inflicted severe damage to the battleship.

The torpedo apparently struck the Manchester in very close proximity to the forward 5" magazine, triggering an explosion that virtually destroyed the front half of the ship. All of the survivors had been located in the aft half of the ship when she was struck, mostly from the stern and abovedecks stations.

The Manchester was designed as a test-bed ship, a platform on which to evaluate several new weapons and concepts. She was the first warship designed exclusively as a defensive weapon against aircraft. She helped prove the efficacy of three different guns in their anti-aircraft role: the 5"/38 twin mount, the 40mm Bofors quad mount, and the 20mm Oerlikon single mount cannon.

All three can be considered unqualified successes. Both on the Manchester and on other ships, all three guns have shown to be highly effective against enemy aircraft, especially when coupled to modern fire-control systems.

As to the ship itself: it is the opinion of this board that the design had many strengths, but ultimately must be considered a failure as a surface combatant, both in general design and in detail.

The fantail 40mm mountings were, in retrospect, a poor idea. While the position is stable enough for accurate fire on a 35,000 ton battleship, a 10,000-ton cruiser's stern is simply too subject to roll, pitch, and engine vibration to serve as a stable enough platform for five mounts. They were also placed too close together for maximum field of fire. Finally, it has been noted that enemy aircraft rarely attack from the stern angles – they prefer to come in from the beams or off the bow. The stern angles offer the drawbacks of a narrow target, an extended approach period, and a very predictable attack vector, with minimal deflection shooting required by the defending gunners.

The absence of substantial side armor, a torpedo bulkhead, a torpedo bulge, or other accommodations for possible surface combat also proved ill-advised. She was never intended to fight in the type of situation she found herself in, but that is no excuse: any United States warship should be prepared to face the enemy at any time, in any seas, in any circumstances. The Manchester design fails this test.

In the evaluation of the general design, it must be noted that the resources invested in the U.S.S. Manchester would provide roughly four of the new "Gearing"-class destroyers now under construction.

While it is indisputable that the Manchester was superior to the destroyer, the overall value to the fleet of four Gearings would be considerably greater.

In summary: the Manchester did all she was designed to, and more. She helped prove the value of numerous weapons and doctrines, and the lessons learned will go a great deal towards winning this war. But when she was put into a position she was never intended to face, her crew gave their all.

The men of the Manchester did not fail. The Manchester herself did not fail. In the end, she did precisely as she was intended – she defended the South Dakota, saving her from likely great damage from that torpedo.

The failure in this case lies with those of us who put those men and that ship into a situation they were not equipped to deal with. But that is the nature of war. One fights with the weapons at hand.

### **Conclusions:**

It is the finding of this board that the loss of the USS Manchester was in the line of duty, and unavoidable given the circumstances. Further, Captain Tormolen and the crew acted in the finest traditions of the United States Navy. Captain Tormolen is recommended for the Navy Cross (posthumous) for sacrificing his ship to save the USS South Dakota.

It is the recommendation of this board that no further ships be built to the Manchester design.

It is also the recommendation that a new ship be commissioned with the name “U.S.S. Manchester” as soon as possible, to commemorate the gallant service and sacrifice of that ship and her crew.

====

October 29, 1946

Mrs. Susan Tormolen, widowed nearly four years now, forced herself to smile bravely and swing the bottle. It shattered perfectly, the champagne bathing the fierce, sharp prow of the new USS Manchester, and (thanks to the miracle of concealed machinery and superb timing) the impact of the bottle seemed to shove the 10,000 tons of steel down the ways into the waiting sea.

Beside her stood Captain John Stark. He'd never held another command, after the Manchester went down while he was recovering from his appendectomy. He'd spent some time on Admiral Halsey's staff, taking the place of Joe Tormolen, but he hadn't lasted. That hadn't worked, though, so he'd bounced from desk job to desk job, never quite working out at any of them. He looked around at the Fore River Shipyard. More than once, someone had suggested he look into working at one of these places, and he'd always demurred. Now, though, as more and more doors closed on him, he might just give it a second thought. He'd never thought highly of Massachusetts, but up on the Maine-New Hampshire border they were building subs at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. He'd always felt drawn to the Granite State, and his family had come from there originally.

This new Manchester had little in common with her immediate predecessor, lost off Guadalcanal with most of her crew, but Susan hoped that in some way her husband's spirit would find solace in knowing that he, his men, and his ship would not be forgotten. Their legacy would live on in this proud ship, bearer of an honored name.

As the new ship hit the water, Susan saw the bow dip deep, then rise proudly out of the foam stirred by her launching. The bright white "83" gleamed and shone in the bright morning sunlight, drops of seawater glistening on her hull.

It was no substitute for her lost husband, or the hundreds of men who died alongside him. But she knew it was the best the Navy could do in his memory.

It would suffice.

It would have to.

She smiled bravely for the cameras, and forced back her tears.