

Reprisal without Repose

10a.m. September 2nd, 1944, on the border of France and Belgium. A ruined hamlet of homes is ashes now. Burned to the ground by the fleeing Germans four days before, there is nothing left. No French refugees cling to life here, no allied soldiers are posted here, and no Germans still hide here. Streets, foundations, and a crumpled, seared piece of paper caught in the remains of a burned out barrel are all that is left. The parchment barely survived the roaring inferno that had singed it and engulfed the town; only spared by the rains of France that had quieted the fire above it just minutes before it too would have been unmade into ash. The note, left by a retreating officer and supposed to burn, was a discarded jumble of cruel thoughts left on paper. Defying the officer, it was spared by fate, if only to reflect its writer's shattered world.

Hauptmann's Discarded Note

Taylon Ritter, Hauptmann
Fifth Panzer Army
Panzerkampfwagen Tiger 432 (DIA)
Leaving France
4:45a.m. August 30th, 1944

He's dead, Sven is dead, they killed him. Like an animal, they burned him alive. He didn't die with dignity, he died screaming in agony, begging for escape. They nearly killed us all, but they still took Sven from me. I still can't get his cries out of my ears. My mind won't stop racing, I can't sleep, and all I hear is him screaming for me to help him, yelling my name. All I can see is his face, smiling back at me even though I know it's gone for good. I can't cry, I won't cry. I won't show or present any weakness to those murderous subcanines. From now on, I'll show them no mercy, no quarter. If I have a say in the matter they'll burn alive, every last one. A bullet in the back for all of them that would avoid the fire and put their lives in my hands. They'll know and regret what they did to my Sven. We're pulling out of France now. This whole country should burn like this town, put to the torch in its entirety. ... If only.

The Reich's Reapers: 9:09a.m. September 2nd, 1944

Riding high in the cupola of King Tiger 526, Hauptmann Ritter surveyed the training grounds. His field of view was immense, a result of his current standing height. With so tall a tank it was like looking across the field from the roof of a house. He could see the gentle hills and what lay behind them, he could even see some of the shorter trees' tops. The sheer scale of his newest command was impressive, but it didn't mean anything if it couldn't fight properly.

"Serge, give me right turret rotation, ninety degrees. I want to see how quick this beast can track a target."

From the hatch at Ritter's waist and in his headset a heavy voice answered back in the affirmative. "Yes sir!"

A single, loud creak and then the hum of hydraulic pumps played alongside King Tiger 526's massive turret as it rotated atop its "striding" form. The panzer's massive 10cm gun traversed in tandem, swinging its immense length out over the grass below. Standing in his station Ritter was holding his coat-sleeve back and watching his wrist. When 526's barrel was at a ninety degree angle to its forward hull he shouted and locked his eyes on the minute marker.

"Stop rotation!"

The turret jerked to a halt and the Hauptmann's inertia only twisted him slightly from his sturdy stance. He looked at his watch just to be doubly sure of his calculations before announcing into his mic.

"Eight seconds, she's slow." The wolf scowled. "Erwin, get our RPM's higher, I want this next one done in five seconds."

From the driver's position much lower inside the immensity of the King Tiger, Erwin Rein also answered in the affirmative.

"Sir! Throttle from three quarters to full."

"Thank you Erwin. Serge, give me another quarter-rotation"

"Yes sir!"

Repeating the same noises and procedure as before, 526's turret rotated and swung her barrel to rest pointed over the rear of her hull. Again the Hauptmann studied his watch, this time smiling after double checking he had the hand's position right.

"Just under five seconds, good to know she can turn in a pinch. Erwin, you are to keep throttle at maximum in combat situations, petrol consumption be damned."

“Understood sir.”

Confident of this simple, but essential test, Hauptmann Ritter ordered his men to carry on with their proving ground exercises. “Serge, turret 180 degrees to front. Eckart, load HE shells. Erwin, move us forward thirty meters.”

The three addressed crewman all answered back, acknowledging their orders before undertaking them. Serge hugged his face into the aiming mount of 526’s main gun, looking down the carefully adjusted and calibrated lens at the tree-line and fence passing by in it as he rotated 526’s turret around to front once more. Behind him Eckart’s arms stuffed their heavy load into the King Tiger’s breach and slammed it down shut soon after. The new 10cm shells were quite a step up from the standard 8.8cm rounds and the weight difference alone was enough to make the fox flex his arms and breathe a little heavier afterwards. Behind the rumbling, moving wall of metal a group of German officers stood watching eagerly at the concrete edge of the hanger the tank had rolled out of. All of the assembled, nearby soldiers on guard were also watching in awe as Germany’s mightiest land weapon crushed the ground beneath its bulk as it advanced. The last party watching the scene almost compromised themselves as they looked on from the woods that King Tiger 526’s barrel was swinging its sights past. Of the group of Englishmen, one soldier almost wet himself in fright as the massive bore pointed their way.

Royal Navy Commandos: 9:11a.m. September 2nd, 1944

“Oh, fuck us.” Lee whisper-yelled among his squad.

Sergeant Frasier raised his hand up to signal Lee to keep his voice down while he handed the radio in his other hand back to Jason. Eric too was showing signs of worry as the tank started to look their direction, the leopard’s hairs starting to stiffen and rise.

“They spotted us, we’re dead.” Lee’s voice rose in tandem with his worry.

“Godamnit Lee, keep your voice down!” Eric hissed at the corgi to his side. “They haven’t spotted shit.”

Sergeant Frasier nodded in agreement with his Corporal while pointing accusingly at the corgi. “Unless you give us away you short, fat imbecile. Now shut your gob.”

From behind the quarreling commandos Jett spoke up, the only one still paying attention to the rumbling panzer.

“Lee, they don’t know we’re here, look.”

Jason pointed at the King Tiger’s still-rotating turret, its barrel’s aim passing over them

and continuing on. A collie at the fenced proving ground's edge turned to face the four hiding men, his ears perking up just a bit at what he thought were voices. The dog tensed his posture, held his gun at his hip, and started to investigate.

Lee flustered as he was proved a bit too worrisome. "Fine, fine. I get it, I won't--"

Eric roughly clasped his hands around the Corgi's flapping jaws, quieting him in an instant. Lee furrowed his brow and tried to free his mouth with his hands. The only response to the corgi was absolute silence around him and Eric's right pinky pointing from the side of Lee's snout to the slowly approaching collie armed with an automatic rifle. Lee's eyes followed the pinky's direction and watched silently as the dog peered into the thicket. Jett gently prepared his Sten gun and aimed it up at the inquisitive dog. His finger hovered on his trigger, barrel pointed up and at the collie's face.

"CRACK! BOOM!"

A thunderstorm suddenly materialized in sound alone as back on the proving grounds the King Tiger fired. The massive 10cm gun erupted in a gout of flame and smoke as it hurled pounds of explosive might downrange at the targets arranged on the dirt-hill next to the T-34 carcass. Everyone unprepared for the hellish release jumped and startled, including the inquisitive collie just feet from the group of commandos. The dog shot upright and turned to face the dissipating smoke and flying debris. He grinned and strolled towards the fence and panzer in forgetful awe.

As the dog walked away Eric loosened one hand and brought it around to jab Lee's ribs with it as he whispered to him. "Keep that tiny mouth of yours shut, Lee. Good god kid, you almost got us found, or killed, or both!"

Sergeant Frasier shook his head dismissively in Lee's direction as the corgi wrestled Eric's grip off, grunted, and returned to a watchful position with a humiliated scowl. The four British soldiers all looked back towards the field and the weapon rolling across it.

Sergeant Frasier looked from raining debris, to impact hole, then to the King Tiger's cupola and its commander. "Alright, back on task chaps. Those four need to die, the Bulldog and Montgomery want them dead;" he sighed faintly, "and its fallen on us to put them in the ground, like it or not."

Jett finally folded up his notebook and was stuffing it into his pack as he spoke. "With respect, sir, I hope you don't intend to try and kill them now with all those guards, and that tank they're in."

Eric scoffed. "Don't be daft, Murray. Of course the Sergeant isn't going to attack a base full of Germans head on."

Sergeant Frasier nodded in agreement. “Right, we’re going to go wait for them outside their motor pool back in Arnhem.”

“Sounds ballsy, sir.” Jett commented.

The ginger wolf rolled over onto his back and sat upright; Eric, Jason, and Lee followed suit. “It may just be, but it’s the best way we’ve got. Now, first order of business is to get us some local clothes. I say we double back and raid the farmhouse we passed on the way into these woods, stow everything but our guns in the stable, then head back to Arnhem and wait.”

Lee scowled. “Damnit, more running?”

Sergeant Frasier nodded. “Yes Private Hurn, more running. If we leg it, and your stubby lumps keep up, we can definitely beat them back to town before they’re done screwing around with that new tank.”

Eric brushed some dead leaves from his well-kempt fur. “Then what, sarge?”

“We follow the Huns to where they’re bedding down, ice ‘em, then get out of Arnhem right quick. In and out like lightning.”

All four of the assembled men carefully rose to their feet and steadied their gear. Slowly they crouch-walked in formation away from the forest’s edge, putting as much distance between them and their targets as quickly as possible, for now. Sergeant Frasier threw his hand up and gestured “forward, run” to his squad behind him; they all broke out into a sprint through the emptied woodlands.

The Reich’s Reapers: 9:12a.m. September 2nd, 1944

Inside King Tiger 526 Serge grabbed at his headset while smiling eagerly. “Scheiße that’s loud!”

Behind him and to his right, Eckart was rolling his arms in impressed mirth. “This new cannon is ridiculous. Did we actually hit anything, or did our barrel explode?”

“Still looks like it’s raining dirt outside, I’d say we hit, and annihilated something.” The Reapers’ radioman chimed into the radio from his seat down in the forward hull of 526.

Ritter glowed as he surveyed the damage his new panzer could do. “That’s correct, Nicholas. Serge was on target, and if that Russian tin can was real it would be filled with lots of fire and dead men right now.”

“The round went a little low, Hauptmann.” Serge commented as he turned back to face the legs of his superior.

“That’s fine, get used to and compensate for the new caliber Serge. We’ve got ten more rounds, practice with them. Eckart, continue the exercise”

“On it, sir!”

The Hauptmann looked behind his new weapon of terror and studied the huge, deep track marks left by its treads. This King Tiger certainly did require a wider berth compared to the first Jägerwolf, but she still left the same lasting impression of the fields of battle she crossed. Ritter’s jowl’s rose up in a slight smile and he held his mic closer to the side of his snout.

“Erwin, how does she handle?”

“Sir, permission to be frank?”

The wolf stood up straight as worry took over his posture. “It’s always permitted, go on.”

“The King Tiger’s slow, maybe a bit too slow. This engine barely moved the first Tiger, it’s really struggling with all this extra weight. We’re definitely going to need a higher octane gasoline to keep up combat speed, preparedness, and turret power. That, or a new engine.”

“Dutifully noticed Unteroffizier, good observations. I’ll make sure our requisition forms always have the highest octane that can be spared. And I’ll keep an ear up for any compatible, larger engines.”

The wolf pulled out a little notepad and pen from inside his coat and scribbled on the paper, making note of his driver’s observances.

“Anything else Mr. Nein, stiff steering, seizing tracks?”

“None, sir. She’s just a lumbering beast.”

Ritter nodded and stuffed the notebook and pen back into his coat. “That she is. But we’ll fix that and show the enemy just what this wonder can accomplish. Now, back to testing. Everyone, I want ‘parallel maneuvers on target’ practice, and ‘move and fire’ exercises perfected before we have to head back. We are going to be combat ready in time to take back France.”

Inside the tank all of the other crew members smiled ever so slightly as the morale-bolstering statement of recovering the ground they’d lost. Serge hugged his sights and adjusted them ever so slightly to account for the higher caliber’s slight drop increase. He’d be 100% calibrated by the days end, he swore it. The rest of 526’s crew slipped right back into combat mode and went about perfecting their stations inside their new charge while Hauptmann Ritter saluted to the officers behind him and then slipped down inside the turret, sealing it shut.

Royal Navy Commandos: 5:37p.m. September 2nd, 1944

Inside Arnhem night was falling. Street lights were glowing with radiance and Arnhem's residents were scrambling amongst the light. The city's residents were scurrying to their homes in a mad dash, trying to beat the increasingly lengthening hours of the German military's imposed curfew in the area. Anyone out after dark was suspect and susceptible to arrest under suspicion of partisan activity and subversion. The newly arrived crew of King Tiger 526 may not have seen it yet, but the people of the Netherlands were suffering greatly under the heel of their German occupiers. Arnhem may have seemed like a pristine city and shining example of the benediction of the invading Germans, but it was a completely different color of occupation compared to the rest of the country. Arnhem suffered under a curfew while the rest of the country was subject to slave labor, beatings, rape, and all manner of SS, and wanton, cruelty. The crew of Jägerwolf may not have known it, but the residents of Arnhem knew, and they did their utmost not to attract any attention to themselves or their city.

Sergeant Frasier and his men, clad in the shabby clothes of the raided farmhouse, milled their way through the streets amongst the throngs of Arnhem's hurried populace. Their destination, a bar opposite the German's smaller motor pool inside Arnhem, was just two blocks away. The four Englishman were careful not to speak, they had meticulously concealed their weapons, unloaded, inside their baggy clothes and made it into Arnhem without incident.

Jett was the first to speak since sneaking into Arnhem, reaching up to scratch himself in agitation. "These clothes suck, and itch."

A young boy walking by the commandos' left, hand held in his mother's, looked up to the man speaking English, confused to the sounds and words coming out of the canine's snout. Eric noticed the boy's attention being directed at his comrade and the cat tensed ever so slightly in worry as he scanned for any German soldiers.

"Keep your damn mouth shut, Murray." Eric scolded through whispers. "We're the only guys speaking English in this entire country, don't draw attention to us."

"Calm down *Corporal*" The shepherd-wolf cross accented Eric's rank with a demeaning tone. "I'm sure a five year old isn't going to rat us out to the Krauts, even if he was a rat."

Eric grimaced and scanned around again, the nearest Germans were a block away on an opposite corner. "That's not the point you clod, you should keep your mouth shut, period."

"Yeah yeah." Jett dismissed his squad mate with an obscene gesture mimicking a gesture of masturbation.

Eric growled and bared his teeth just a little. "Sergeant, permission to fulfill the earlier promise of pistol-whipping Private Murray?"

At the front of the pack, Sergeant Frasier and Private Hurn were walking quietly through the crowds of coming and going people, listening to the bickering behind them and keeping their eyes forward for any enemy soldiers. They carried on, despite the faces that kept turning to face the foreign language coming from the rear two members of their squad.

“Denied, Corporal. Now both of you, shut the hell up. The bar’s just up the road and I bet it’s a Hun-party inside. Don’t get us in a fight we’re going to lose.”

“Can I get a pint?” Lee beamed and looked up to his taller commander.

Sergeant Frasier looked down to his eager, young private with a bemused look parting his snout. “Do you have any Dutch currency?”

Lee’s smile faded. “No.”

“Do you speak Dutch?”

The corgi looked down, defeated. “No...”

“Then I guess you’re not getting a pint then, Lee.”

The four commandos laughed and continued on their way, finally quieting down and keeping their mouths shut as they closed in on the bar. Sergeant Frasier was right, the bar was crawling with Germans. Almost all of the tables inside and out were filled with various Wehrmacht uniforms cheering, singing, and swinging drinks around. It was more fact than assumption, what with the bar being located right across from the largest concentration of Germans in central Arnhem. The four Englishmen blended in with the passing city-folk, walking past the bar to finally stop and wait leaning on the side of a café that was closing up for the night. This was the spot they had planned out on their map; it let them watch all intersections that came to the motor pool, giving them enough time to react to the arrival of their targets and any direction they may go.

Sergeant Frasier looked up and down the street where he and his men blended in appearing to be reading a paper together, no Germans coming. “Alright boys, settle in. We may be here a while.”

“Still the same plan?” Jett perked up and looked past Eric to his commander.

“Same plan. We follow them until we see wherever we’re staying. Wait a few hours, then break in, kill the bastards, and run like hell.”

“In and out like lightning?” Lee chimed in and questioned.

Eric nodded and affirmed his stouter squad mate. “In and out like lighting.”

Royal Navy Commandos: 6:25p.m. September 2nd, 1944

“Look lively lads, staff car coming down the road.”

The commando squad’s Sergeant was the first to notice the cars heading down the road towards Arnhem’s center. In the first car was the German higher-ups who had supervised the proving ground’s test, a General and his cronies. What really mattered was what was in the second car, the black-clad crewman that had tested the newly outfitted King Tiger, they were the Englishmen’s targets.

“Or rather, *cars*. Keeps your eyes open, one of ‘em may be the guys we’re after.”

“First car’s looking pretty sparse.” Eric whispered as the cars pulled closer and the first started to turn towards the motor pool.

“Yeah, I’m betting the second car has our guys.”

Answering their musings, the first car pulled under the street light beside the entrance to the converted garage, illuminating all the rank and pomp of the high-ranking officers filling its seats. Right behind the first, the second car also passed under the light just long enough to light up the five men inside, all clad in black panzer-uniforms.

“Those are our guys, let’s go lads.” Sergeant Frasier pulled the paper away from his three squad mates and folded it back up, tucking it under his arm.

In file, the four men all leaned forward off the wall they were leaning on and slowly started walking back the way they came, purposely slowing their pace to a crawl to blend in and wait for their targets to catch up on the other side of the street. It didn’t take long, the commandos had just barely passed the bar when their five targets, and two escorts with automatic rifles, strode out of the motor pool gates. Over time, walking on the other side of the street, the seven Germans caught up with the incognito commandos, falling in step with the commandos as they subtly quickened their pace to match the Germans. Carefully the commandos stole glances at their targets and their escort, sizing up what sort of weapons they carried on them. It wasn’t much, a duty pistol on each of the crewmen and the rifles carried by the two normal Wehrmacht soldiers. Jett thought to himself how easy it would be to take them all out, all four of them armed with their Sten guns taking them by surprise. They kept tailing their targets in tandem until at the intersection they had passed an hour ago, they were stopped by two German soldiers coming around the corner in a hurry.

“Ack!” Lee spat as he stumbled into the chest and stomach of the German soldier jogging around the corner.

The rest of the commandos froze and looked at the equally surprised Germans, none of the six men moved or spoke. The silence was unsettling and Eric swallowed hard, they were blown for sure. Jett reached his hand inside his coat and put his hand on the thin, metal stock of his hidden Sten gun. The silence suddenly ended when the two Germans started laughing and pointing at Lee. This relaxed the mood a bit, but the Germans were conversing quite a lot, and their faces were getting a lot sterner. Out of nowhere, one of the Germans pushed Lee backwards and raised his voice, yelling at the 5' Corgi commando in German. Everyone tensed up once more as the German who shoved Lee walked up towards him, Jett started to pull his gun up on the inside of his overalls.

The German repeated his words again, yelling at Lee and stiffening his face. The corgi stammered and shrunk a bit, trying not to blow the mission as much as he'd like to punch the yelling soldier. All hell was about to break loose, and it would have if it hadn't been defused so suddenly as the German soldier unexpectedly plucked Lee's farmer's cap from his head, then stuffed it into his own trench-coat, and finally stuffed a paltry amount of Dutch currency down into Lee's collar before patting him on the head. The two Germans walked through the assembled commandos laughing and looking back at the four men they left standing stupefied on the corner.

As soon as the Germans rounded the walkway of the bar and were out of earshot Lee spoke up. "What the hell was that, why'd they take my hat?"

The other three men sighed, immensely relieved, as Eric blurted out an answer. "Dunno, mate. But I think you put on one hell of a show. Look, they even stuffed some bills in your panties."

The corgi looked down to the bills sticking out of his collar and then puffed up, agitated. "Har har, very funny asshole."

"I thought so." Eric quipped back.

Sergeant Frasier discretely pointed down the street at the back of the seven men round the next intersection's corner. "Enough! Let's go, we can't lose them. Lee, forget about your fucking hat, we stole it in the first place!"

"Right!" Lee stiffened up and fell back into a quickened walk with his commander, Eric and Jett following the motion.

Quickly the four men approached the corner their targets had disappeared behind just a minute ago, they rounded it as nonchalantly as they could. Jett was the first to notice six of the seven men stepping up inside the quaint, wooden inn two blocks away.

He pointed down the road. "There, that old inn, they went in there. Left a guard outside."

“Good eyes Private.” Sergeant Frasier praised. “Let’s wait here for a bit, give ‘em time to eat and crawl into bed.”

“Sir, what about the curfew?” Lee looked up, genuinely concerned. “We’ve only got thirty more minutes before we’re going to definitely be approached by every German.”

“Shit, that complicates things. Alright, we wait no more than twenty minutes then.”

Eric reached into his shirt and made sure his Sten gun was in an attainable place still amidst the baggy clothing. “Specifics sir?”

Sergeant Frasier looked down the road to the Labradoodle lighting up a cigarette and standing guard outside the inn’s door. He then looked down to his watch, making note of the “6:33” it displayed.

“Alright, pay attention. We get one shot at this, if we fuck up, we’re as good as dead. First, we walk up to the inn, Eric, you take care of that guard, quietly.”

The snow leopard nodded. “Roger.”

“Then we all head inside. If they’re right there, we shoot them, shoot them again once they’re down to make sure they’re dead, then run.”

All three men nodded.

“If they’re not there, and there’s any civvies, you point your gun at them, you make sure they stay quiet, you move on. We find their bedrooms, stack up on their doors, and take four of them out at once. You wait for me to fire the first shot, when you hear it you all fire on your targets. Once they’re dead, we converge on the fifth, take him out, and run.”

Again the other commandos all nodded.

“That’s the short and sweet of it. You use your training, keep your wits about you, and react to anything you find. Do that, and we make it out of here alive, then get back to England in time to ride back in here on the gliders. Got it?”

Lee, Eric, and Jason all nodded and replied in unison. “Got it.”

“Alright, good. Load your magazines on the way over and pray to the Lord Almighty you don’t jam. For King and Country.”

Again Eric, Lee, and Jason answered in unison. “King and Country.”

Royal Navy Commandos: 6:54p.m. September 2nd, 1944

Sergeant Frasier and his men quickly paced down the street, they all held on to their guns inside their clothes, ammunition magazines held in the opposite hand. Rapidly they trotted up to the quaint, wooden inn nestled amongst this modern block of Arnhem. 100 meters, 50 meters, 25 meters, 5 meters; as they approached the smoking labradoodle pulled a drag on his cigarette and frowned, the poor guys looked rushed. He thought to himself that he should help them home so they don't get locked up and interrogated. The four men continued jogging right at him, looking very serious and stern, like they were pursuing some unseen target. They closed the gap and were just feet from him now. He decided he'd help them, he could get Hanz to watch the door.

"Guten Abend!" The labradoodle spoke in the commandos' direction as he raised a hand to greet them.

"Eve'nin" Eric responded, tipping his hat as Sergeant Frasier, Lee, and Jason passed the guard dog.

As the labradoodle turned to try and watch the other three men he felt a slight breeze as a hand darted past his face, clasped his snout shut, and tugged his body backwards. Before he could react he felt a sharp pain in the side of his neck, it immediately grew to an immense level. He screamed into the hand over his snout and tried to remove it as again and again an immense pain filled his neck with each punch from the man behind him. His consciousness soon started to haze and his words were gurgles as his blood spilled from the multiple stab wounds in his neck and welled in his throat. As quickly as he had greeted the men, they mortally wounded him and left him to die bleeding out on the sidewalk and grasping at his throat.

The next step of the plan was already in motion as the door of the Inn swung open and Frasier, Lee, and Jason entered, guns just now loaded. Inside, the inn-keeper was behind the bar, cleaning dishes, and the other German guard was sitting at the bar nursing a stein of drink. In response to the door opening the chocolate lab at the bar spun around to see why his comrade had ignored his door-posting duties. Instead of the labradoodle, there were three men approaching him, guns drawn. He pushed his stein away, reached over for his rifle sitting in the seat next to him, and rocketed up. As he turned around to face the men he found himself already face to face with and then immobilized by the brashest looking one. Before he could even fire his rifle the chocolate lab was shoved backwards against the bar with two men pressing atop him.

The taller shepherd-wolf cross gripped the lab's snout shut and held his gun out and at bay as the shorter one stabbed him repeatedly in the stomach. The lab howled in pain, but the muffled noise was only heard by the avian barkeep behind the bar, whose hands were already in the air from a Sten gun pointed at his face. One other pair of ears was privy to the killing, but the man this pair belonged to hid and kept his mouth shut. As the lab howled and slid downwards in

pain the Corgi worked his stabs higher, eventually reaching and gouging the dog's throat repeatedly. Punctured and profusely bleeding, the two Englishman left the chocolate lab in the same sanguine, half-alive, and speechless state as the labradoodle outside. Sergeant Frasier put a finger to his lips and gestured for the barkeep to keep his beak shut and get down behind the bar, an order he complied with quickly and eagerly.

Eric quickly followed his team, coming in through the door dragging the bleeding and twitching labradoodle up the steps with him. Carefully he left the barely-struggling dog in a heap at the foot of the door and then closed it as quietly as possible. The four men all nodded, raised their guns to shoulder level and quietly filed up the stairs. The heavy wooden construction didn't creak, thankfully, under the weight of the four advancing soldiers, but it was time consuming. Precious seconds of surprise were slipping away and the chances of a patrol discovering the blood outside were rising with each second wasted ascending the spiral staircase. The top floor came into view, and with it all the assembled bedrooms and bathroom. Surgically the men fanned out and took position on four bedroom doors. They all looked to Sergeant Frasier, the wolf raised his hand and pointed forward, five doors opened. Jett immediately walked through his doorway at the end of the hall, striding quickly up alongside the black wolf sleeping in the bed as the rest of his squad mates turned to face the fifth door that had opened. Standing dumbstruck in the doorway was a jet-black German Shepherd, toothbrush still dangling from his mouth. Sergeant Frasier was the only one who got any word out before the shit hit the fan.

The ginger wolf's mouth recoiled as he and Eric swung their bodies around to fire on the young, half-naked canine. "Oh fu--"

The Shepherd cut him off in a far louder fashion as he yelled, filling the house with his voice and spitting his toothbrush out into the hall. "EINDRINGLINGE!"

Sergeant Frasier and Eric finished pivoting and instantly unloaded with their Sten guns. With milliseconds to spare, the German threw himself sideways towards the toilet, a hail of bullets shredding the wooden door, floor, wall, towel, and rug all around where he had just been. Like a tank's gunner tracking a target, the hail of bullets followed the direction of his jump, but the thicker wood of the wall the toilet was behind blocked the projectiles. The radioman pulled his legs up and puts his arms over his head as splinters flew all around the bathroom.

At the same time as the gunfire from his comrades tore up the bathroom Lee threw open his chosen bedroom's door and stormed in, swinging his gun across the expanse of the bed and peppering it with shots, tearing up pillow, sheet, and mattress alike in a flurry of feathers and cotton. No screams or yells, but there wasn't much time to notice as a massive mottle-patterned fist collided with the side of Lee's face, fracturing his cheek bone and sending him tumbling sideways to smack his head against the wall. Immediately following up the sickening punch the Corgi looked up to see a naked, heavyweight St. Bernard winding his leg up into the air. No

grace or courtesy was given as the massive Bernard stomped down on the tiny corgi's head, blacking and knocking him out instantly.

A German shout of "EINDRINGLINGE!" filled the hallway and Jett looked back to see what was happening. As soon as his head had pivoted he heard the staccato "pahrap" noise of Sten guns firing and the dog instinctually spun back around to shoot his target, taking the signal from his commander. His head was halfway back towards facing the sleeping wolf when a pressure shoved his gun towards the window and wouldn't let up. Muscle-memory kicked in and the shepherd-wolf squeezed his trigger, the Sten gun cracked to life and took chunks out of the thick wooden wall opposite the door, then trailing sideways and eventually shattering the great window that adorned the connecting wall. Looking down, Jett saw the black wolf's hand tightly gripping the magazine of his gun and forcing it sideways, but that wasn't all the wolf was doing. Already reacting the wolf was forcing himself up off the bed and Jett backwards with its surge of adrenaline as the tall, German warrior sprung from his bed, roaring as his sensitive ears were deafened by the gunfire so close to them.

The lurid wolf grasped, shoved, and fought with Jett over his gun, clearly having an advantage given his larger stature, he shoved the shepherd-wolf back against the wall containing the doorway. This wasn't going to be a fight he'd win, Jett reasoned as the wolf was already just seconds from disarming him. He freed his hand from the underside of his gun and jabbed upwards, catching the wolf in the side of his snout. The German howled and cursed as his head recoiled with the punch's force. Jett's tactic didn't work completely. In response, the wolf bared his fangs and slugged Jett right back in the side of his face with a much heavier blow. Stars filled Jett's vision as he fought to keep his sight on the assailant that pummeled his head with blow after blow, he still instinctively held onto his gun's grip with all his strength.

Reich's Reapers: 6:56p.m. September 2nd, 1944

In his bedroom next to the bathroom Erwin stirred uncomfortably, mulling over the day. As he mused over his new position he heard a few curious footsteps outside the door. He wrote them off and rolled over in bed, intending to get some sleep. That was before he flew out of bed as Nicholas screamed "INTRUDERS!" and then gunfire drowned out the Shepherd's voice. The husky rolled out of bed, landing on his feet then dashed sideways and grasped at his pants hung up on the oaken chair in the corner. He pulled his holster to the front of the chair and grabbed his pistol out of its leather holder. Not missing a beat, the dog quickly bounded across the room towards the wall his door was on, pistol always focused on the portal that could open at any moment. Once Erwin was glued to the wall he slowly slid his body along the length, approaching the doorway and the gunfire that had stopped outside. He looked to the opposite corner of his bedroom, to Nicholas' belongings and spotted the young dog's holster resting on his pants, on top of his dresser, pistol still in it.

"Shit." Erwin inhaled sharply and pulled his door inwards, pistol already pointed to face the hallway in his other hand.

Out in the hallway Erwin saw the two men with guns watching the bathroom entrance, one was advancing on the small bathroom, and the other looked straight towards Erwin as he swung his door open.

"Bastards!" Erwin yelled as fired into the hallway twice, one round scraping the ginger-looking wolf's leg.

In response the two men turned to face the open door and fired bursts into it. Wisely, just like Nicholas, Erwin put the thick wooden walls completely between the bullets and his body. The pistol-caliber rounds tore chunks from the carefully crafted and polished wood, even destroying furniture, a mirror, and various antiques arranged on the dresser on the far side of Erwin's room.

In Hauptmann Ritter's room the fight was going in the wolf's favor. He was bloodying the smaller half-blood that had tried to kill him quite effectively. Ritter laid into the wolf-dog's face with punch, after tooth-jarring punch. While he did so he still pulled at the assassin's gun, trying to wrench it from his grip. Seeing an opening in his foe's grip the wolf tugged his opponent's arm upwards, bared his fangs, and lunged down to bite into the gun-wielding arm, tasting the would-be assassin's flesh. In response the wolfdog howled and surged with adrenaline, he shoved Ritter off of him, but the Hauptmann's weight and grip pulled the Sten gun free with him as he stumbled backwards. Suddenly the victor and gun-wielder, Ritter looked down to the sub-machinegun in his hand, then to the wolfdog who quickly realized what had just happened.

Royal Navy Commandos: 6:57p.m. September 2nd, 1944

In the hallway Sergeant Frasier and Eric peppered the doorway where they'd been shot at from. They were expending a lot more ammo than they'd intended, and they knew they had to make a move soon or they'd be on equal terms with the Germans.

"Eric, get that Kraut in the bathroom. I'll get-"

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Jett yelled as he ran out of the bedroom at the end of the hallway.

"Jett, what are you doing!?" Eric queried as his vision followed the dashing wolfdog.

The answer came to Eric quickly enough as Sten gun gunfire shot out of the door at the end of the hallway in short bursts, tearing up the walls around him and one round catching the snow leopard in the right arm. In tandem, pistol fire once more shot out of the doorway next to the bathroom, rounds chasing Jett and catching him in the right calf before Sergeant Murray quieted it by spraying into the room again, a German cry of pain rang out. Adding to the chaos a flapping, fang-bearing jowl flew out from the door Lee had ran into, just below the murderous grimace a Sten gun was gripped and loosing shots at the three commandos. Eric once more was almost killed as a bullet from this third firearm tore into the shoulder of his stolen clothes.

"Gah, FUCK!!" Eric screamed and threw himself sideways. "We have to get out of here!"

Sergeant Frasier silenced each firing doorway with two shots from his gun, suppressing the Germans behind them. "God-damnit! No, we can't."

"If they don't kill us, the Germans outside will!"

Jett was already limping down the stairs, trailing blood from the wound in his leg and crying out in pain with every step of that leg. Eric quickly dashed down to catch up with him and help the wolfdog down the stairs, blood seeping from his arm wounds. Behind them Sergeant Frasier, quickly running out of ammo was backpedaling, gun pointed down the hallway, systematically putting a shot towards any doorway he saw movement in or near.

"Shit, shit, shit!" Jett yelled as he painfully jogged down the spiraling staircase.

"Move, move!" Sergeant Frasier yelled above the retreating feline and canine as he continued to cover their escape.

With heavy thuds Eric and Jett leapt from the staircase running, their Sergeant quickly catching up with them, gun still facing the staircase. Outside there were loud shouts of German a few blocks away. "Where's Lee?!" Eric shouted as he looked around them

"He's dead, we have to get out of here, now! Go, move!" Sergeant Frasier yelled as he bolted out the inn's door, his squad mates in tow.

Reich's Reapers: 7:00p.m. September 2nd, 1944

The upstairs of the inn was a warzone, quite literally. Bullet holes pockmarked every wall in the hallway, and a lot of walls inside the various rooms; in fact, each room had at least one round lodged somewhere in its wooden makeup. To all ears upstairs there was English yelling, the slamming of a door, and then even fainter yelling as the voices trailed off in the direction of the countryside. Canine heads and ears stuck out from the doorways to investigate. Serge, Erwin, Hauptmann Ritter, and Nicholas all looked around the hallway and towards each other.

"Everyone alright?" Ritter bellowed as he stepped out of his doorway, only in his underwear, face bruised, and gun tucked in his shoulder, aimed towards the staircase.

"H-holy...Jeeze... Yeah, I-I'm fine." Nicholas stammered as he stepped from the bullet-ridden bathroom, wiping a concentrated pile of splinters off to the side of the door with his foot.

"Egh, I caught a round in the shoulder but I'm fine." Erwin emerged from his bedroom cradling the bleeding, but superficial, wound in the side of his left shoulder

"I'm fine." Serge sounded off, the pudgy dog jiggling a bit as he stepped into the hallway, Sten gun in hand. "Knocked their little midget friend out." The big dog gestured behind him with his thumb to the Corgi slumped up against the wall bleeding from his head.

Ritter quickly paced to the top of the stairs and looked down, gun pointing around the staircase to watch the floor below. "Tie the bastard up, I want a word with him. We stay up here until reinforcements arrive."

"Got it!" Serge eagerly answered, tossing the Sten gun in his hands to Nicholas as he turned around. "Help the Hauptmann keep watch."

Erwin looked around the assembled crew members, counting one missing. "Oh god, where's Eckart?!" He yelled

From downstairs a familiar fox's voice called up in relieved glee. "Down here, I'm pretty sure they're gone. They took off running once their plans soured.

"Keep your head down Eckart. Stay hidden until reinforcements arrive." Ritter yelled down to the fox.

"But sir, they-"

"That's an order Gefreiter, I am not losing another one of my men."

"Yes sir!" Eckart yelled back up, followed by the thud of the fox once more falling down and hiding in the shelves of the bar.

7:10p.m. September 2nd, 1944

The area around the inn was surrounded by a sea of German soldiers. There wasn't a street, alleyway, or doorway nearby without an armed German soldier standing watch over it, the attempt on the Hauptmann and his men's lives had woken up every relaxed, drunk, and lazy soldier in the entire city. Arnhem was on a veritable lockdown, anyone still outside was instantly being arrested, no questions asked, and soldiers were fanning out to cover each row of houses and keep the residents under house arrest until they could be questioned. Inside the inn the crew of King Tiger 526 were arranged around the fire, drinking and eating food prepared by the avian innkeeper right before an SS Sergeant took him away in a staff car. Hauptmann Ritter was standing at the bar in half-dress conversing with the Hauptmann in charge of the soldiers posted in Arnhem.

"We're sorry Hauptmann Ritter, we don't know how they got into the city."

Across from the guard-captain Ritter was fuming and showing off every bit of anger he could muster for the assembled soldiers to see. "I do not care about you or your men's failings, Hauptmann. I care about finding the assassins who tried to kill my men and me. To me, it still looks like you're standing here in front of me, flapping your equally useless gums." The jet-black wolf stamped his foot, raised his hackles, bared his fangs, stood up at full height, and rolled his shoulders forward. "NOW GET OUT OF MY SIGHT, AND FIND, THOSE, ASSHOLES!"

Defeated, and publicly shamed, the guard captain cleared his throat, nodded, and about faced to head out the door, his men following him out and taking up position outside, guarding the door. In a cycle of blame, Ritter heard the shamed Hauptmann berating and yelling at his men, accusing them of failure and demanding they make amends. He shook his head dismissively at the idea of a commander who put all blame on his men.

"Sir?" Nicholas asked from the table him, Eckart, Serge, and Erwin were eating at. "Why aren't we telling them about the one we captur-"

"Nicholas, shut your mouth." The Hauptmann plainly and venomously cut off and silenced his driver without looking to him.

Serge backed up Nicholas, mouth slightly full of food. "But sir, we should tell them. They may get something out of him."

Eckart and Erwin kept their mouths shut; the former out of prior knowledge to such situations, the latter out of a reserved, unquestioning nature to his just recently appointed commander. In reaction to Serge's contest to his demands Ritter looked to his crew members and silently looked over them.

“Do as I say, don’t mention the Tommy assassin to anyone. We’ll hand him over after I’m done talking with him. Are we clear?”

“Sir” Nodded Eckart

Nicholas nodded in agreement too. “Yes sir”

Serge also nodded and spoke, spitting food a bit. “Yes, Hauptmann, sir.”

Last to answer, Erwin saluted and straightened his shoulders crisply. “Jawohl”

The Hauptmann chuckled at Erwin’s response, smiling at his new crew-member’s strict nature. He didn’t think it possible, but someone was an even bigger stickler for the chain of command than Serge. Everyone else picked up on this, and the three other crew members all jabbed and teased Erwin as the Hauptmann walked away and up the stairs, disappearing up the spiral staircase. Slowly the wolf padded up the stairs, carefully conquering each step as he paid attention to each of their subtly different levels of height and craftsmanship. As he crested the final step he could start to hear the clattering and stamping of their tied up prisoner. Thinking to himself, the wolf casually walked down the hallway and opened the door to Serge’s room.

Tied to the oaken beam that ran up the side of Serge’s farthest wall, the 5’ corgi that had tried to kill the much larger and taller Bernard writhed in his bonds. The little dog’s muffled defiance hadn’t been troubling since he’d been gagged the whole time, but the wolf wanted to hear what he had to say. Ritter straightened himself up and pulled the rag from the dog’s mouth roughly and freeing his speech.

Lee Hurn 7:14p.m. September 2nd, 1944

“You fucking mongrel whores!” Lee yelled at the wolf towering over him. “You couldn’t even kill me, how are you going to win this godamn war, hah!”

Lee wiggled in his bonds and wrestled at the ropes from the urge to attack the much larger canine, a rather stereotypical trait of smaller dog breeds.

“Why don’t you untie me and we’ll settle this man to man!”

The wolf didn’t answer, he only cocked his head and listened to the foreign language spewing out of Lee’s offensive lips. The corgi watched as the wolf fished in his shirt and produced a tiny, floral-outline-etched locket. The 19 year old from Leeds laughed at the object this “feared commander” pulled from his shirt.

“Hah, did your mum give you that? Real sweet, princess. Now fuck off and untie me.”

The Hauptmann he'd been sent to kill opened the little clasp on the memento and looked into it. Looking back and forth from the small piece of jewelry to Lee's face. He watched as the wolf's ire seemed to rise, the German's fists tightened into balls and his jowls rose up to bear his pearly-white fangs. The wolf shot an accusing, anger filled snarl at Lee and growled.

"Ooooh, I'm really scared. The big bad wolf's angry that I made fun of his locket. Hahahahaha!"

The dog chuckled and laughed at the assumed displeasure the wolf took in him insulting his locket. He laughed, and chuckled all while the wolf's ire rose and he started to shake with anger. Lee continued to taunt the "feared commander" that had come before him, balking at his "immense danger" he posed to the lives of allied soldiers. He kept up his laughter until the wolf reached to his waist and drew a pistol, keeping the sidearm gripped in his right hand, beside his waist. Lee eyed the pistol, ceased his laughter, and his grin faded to a neutral state.

The Hauptmann opposite him exploded at him, arms tensing up and snout cracking into a huge, gaping snarl. "WISST IHR MONSTER, WAS IHR GETAN HABT!?"

"What?" Lee questioned back, unable to understand the wolf.

Again the German officer repeated his question, this time raising the pistol to Lee's chest and screaming louder. "WISST IHR MONSTER, WAS IHR GETAN HABT!?"

Unable to understand, but sensing the true anger in the officer's words, even amongst the normally angry-sounding language that was German, Lee's street-urchin nature kicked in with a responsive, hopefully disarming, bluff.

"Yeah? You're going to shoot a prisoner of war? You're going to shoot me? Yeah? Yeah?"

The dog paused. "Well?"

He paused longer and then yelled as the wolf's snarl intensified. "WELL!?"

Thunderclaps and then ringing was all Lee could hear, five barking shots deafened him rather effectively. His hearing wasn't too effective anyway as searing pain overtook him and filled his senses as the German's five shots registered in their entirety with his brain now. Lee looked down at the wounds in his chest and abdomen, arranged all over the area of his creamy fur were holes, holes that now welled up and ran red with blood, his blood. The dog looked up as trails of red came up in a cough from his punctured lungs, looking into the cold, angry eyes opposite him. He looked down once more to the blood that was pooling under the ropes that bound him and flowing freely over them in other spots. The corners of his vision blacked as he felt his vitae leak and watched his life-force ebb away right before his eyes. He looked down to his hands and faltered to speak, throwing blood-laden spittle with his lungs unorganized force.

"M-mom... Mom... Mommy... Mommy...? M-momma?" His head fell, Lee Hurn was no more.

End part 3

Hope you enjoyed! :D