





ALAN GRATZ

ALLIES



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A-HUNTING WE WILL GO

Dee Carpenter's foot slipped off the wet ladder and his stomach lurched into his throat. He scrambled for a handhold, but the weight of his pack and his rifle dragged him down. At the same instant, a gap opened up between the huge transport ship he was leaving and the little motorboat he was supposed to be climbing into. Dee dropped like a stone toward the cold black water of the English Channel.

A hand shot out and caught the pack on Dee's back. Dee jolted, then swung into the side of the ship with a *thump*.

"Grab on!" his friend Sid Jacobstein yelled.

With shaking, frozen hands, Dee fumbled until he was clinging to the side of the ladder.

"Legs up!" Sid told him. Dee pulled his feet up in

time to keep them from getting crushed as the motor-boat drifted back to *clang* against the side of the transport ship.

Dee took a deep breath and closed his eyes in relief.

“For crying out loud, Dee, you just about killed yourself before the Germans could do it for you,” Sid said.

Sid had been right below Dee on the ladder, and now they were face-to-face. With his free hand, Dee grabbed Sid’s shoulder.

“Thanks, Sid,” he said, still panting. “I owe you one.”

“Private Carpenter! Private Jacobstein! If you two knuckleheads are done fooling around, we’ve got a boat to load,” Sergeant Taylor called from above.

Dee and Sid helped each other climb into the small boat. They took their places halfway back, in a row of other soldiers wearing olive-green assault jackets and green metal helmets.

Though they wore the same uniform, Dee and Sid couldn’t have resembled each other less. Dee was sixteen and looked even younger. He had spindly arms and legs, and he worried that his baggy green army trousers made him look like a child playing soldier. Sid was just a year older, but he was six feet, four inches tall and built like Hank Greenberg, the big power-hitting left fielder for the Detroit Tigers. He could have bent Dee into a

pretzel if he'd wanted to. Sid had a long face, curly brown hair, tan skin, and stubble on his jaw. Dee was blond-haired and pale-skinned, and he couldn't grow a mustache if his life depended on it.

What had first united them was their shared hatred of the New York Yankees. Sid was a die-hard Brooklyn Dodgers fan, while Dee rooted for his hometown baseball team, the Philadelphia Athletics.

"The Dodgers'll be back in the World Series as soon as the war's over. You'll see," Sid said to Dee, continuing a conversation that had begun on the troop transport ship. "Of course they had an off season last year. Half the team enlisted to fight."

Another soldier overheard him. "Are you kiddin'?" he said. His New York accent was even stronger than Sid's. "The Yankees lost as many players—including Joe DiMaggio—and they won the pennant *and* the World Series!"

How Sid or any of the rest of them could think about baseball right now—could think about *anything* besides their impending doom—astounded Dee. He staggered on the metal deck as the boat rocked from side to side on the waves, and Sid steadied him to keep him from falling.

They were in one of the famous Higgins boats that Dee had heard about, but it wasn't much to look at. It was basically a big metal bathtub with a motor at the

back and a tall door at the front. But Dee knew that its flat bottom was what made the boat special; it allowed the boat to run right up onto a beach, drop the front door, deliver its forty passengers, then back out, reload, and make another run.

It was this Higgins boat that would deliver Dee and Sid and the rest of their platoon to Omaha Beach in Normandy, France.

The Allied invasion of Europe was about to begin.

Since the war started five years ago, Nazi Germany had rolled across Europe, blitzing through Poland and the Netherlands and Belgium and France. Now the map that had hung in Dee's high school history classroom back in Philadelphia was all wrong. Instead of a bunch of different-colored countries in Europe, there was just one big red blob—Germany—covering everything. And if Germany's demented leader Adolf Hitler and his armies had their way, that big red blob would grow and grow and grow until it covered the whole *world*.

Unless Dee and everyone else here put a stop to it.

Dee couldn't see over the top of the Higgins boat's high walls, but he knew how many other ships were out there on the water. He'd seen them gathered last night, at what the British sailors on his transport ship had dubbed "Piccadilly Circus," after a famous traffic

intersection in London. Hundreds of ships. *Thousands*. Transport ships. Destroyers. Battleships as long as skyscrapers turned on their sides. Minesweepers dragging the sea for German mines. And more that Dee couldn't even identify. Their lights had glittered like stars in the night.

There at Piccadilly Circus, where the ships had all come together, Dee and Sid had been up on the top deck when they heard a Scottish soldier on a British ship belt out "The Road to the Isles" on his bagpipes. The piper got laughs and applause from all the other soldiers waiting on their transports, and more GIs on Dee's ship came up from below to listen. Not to be outdone, a United States battleship broadcast "God Bless America" over its loudspeakers, and Dee and Sid and the boys around them whooped. A Free French ship played "La Marseillaise," the national anthem of the country they had lost and were going back to reclaim, and Dee got chills. Sailors on a Canadian ship joined in with "O Canada," and some Australian soldiers sang "Waltzing Matilda." There were more songs too—songs in Polish and Norwegian and Dutch—so many that Dee couldn't hear them all at once.

An English ship had capped it all off by playing a recording of "A-Hunting We Will Go" and gotten the biggest cheer of them all.

But nobody was cheering now, and no one was singing. Sid wasn't even talking baseball anymore. They had all grown quiet as the remainder of their platoon climbed down from the transport ship into the Higgins boat. It was still dark out, and they couldn't see France, couldn't tell how far away they were from shore. But suddenly they were hit with the cold, hard reality that *it* was finally about to happen. After months of training, months of planning, months of waiting, Dee and Sid and everyone else—more than *a hundred and fifty thousand* soldiers—were about to be delivered right into the jaws of death.

Today was D-Day. The most important day of the Second World War. Maybe the most important day in all of human history. Dee got goose bumps just thinking about it. Everything was riding on this day.

If they screwed it up, the world would never be the same.

The weight of the moment pushed down on Dee and the others. The dull, heavy sound of the small boat clanging against the side of the transport ship sounded like a church bell, tolling their deaths.

“Word is, anywhere from a quarter of us to a half of us are gonna die before we ever get off the beach,” Sid said.

Dee's stomach tightened. They'd all heard those

same odds. They all knew that when they landed on the beach, the German army would be waiting for them with machine guns and mortars and mines. Dee glanced around. Even the veterans among them—the guys in their twenties who had fought in Algeria and Italy and other places—even they were silent, sinking into whatever lonely thoughts a man thinks in the hours before he might die.

A soldier behind Sid gave him a shove. “Not such a big man now, are you, yid?” he sneered.

Dee felt Sid tense up beside him. *Yid* was a slur for a Jewish person, and Sid was the only Jewish guy in their platoon. The fact that his first name rhymed with *yid* had made it his nickname since boot camp.

“You’d think he’d be happy,” another soldier said. “Always talking about killing Krauts.” *Krauts*, along with *Jerries*, was a word a lot of them used for the Germans. “But Sid the Yid’s just as scared as the rest of us.”

Ever since he’d arrived at boot camp, if Sid wasn’t talking about the Dodgers, he was talking about killing Germans. Lots of soldiers were here because they’d been drafted. The guys who’d volunteered, they usually did it for things like patriotism, or glory, or to have a steady job. But Dee knew that, for Sid, the war in Germany was personal. For years now, the Nazis had

been rounding up the Jews of Europe and taking everything they owned and making them into slaves.

Sid was out for revenge.

Dee turned to face the soldiers who were ragging on Sid. "Leave him alone," Dee said.

One of the soldiers laughed. "The yid can't even fight his own fights!"

Dee saw Sid's fists clench. Sid was half a head taller than either of the other soldiers and had fifty pounds on each of them, but he didn't take a swing. Sid and Dee both knew what happened when a Jewish guy punched somebody for insulting him. They'd seen it happen again and again in basic training. It was the Jew who got in trouble, not the other guy.

"I'm saving it for the Krauts, fathead," Sid said. "I'm gonna kill the first German I see, and then every single Kraut I meet from Normandy to Berlin."

The two soldiers shook their heads and looked away. Sid nodded his thanks to Dee for sticking up for him, but it didn't make Dee feel better. In fact, it made him feel worse.

Sid was Dee's best friend in the army. His only friend. They knew almost everything there was to know about each other, except the one big, giant thing that Dee had hidden from Sid and the rest of the men in his platoon.

Everybody called him "Dee" because that was the

first letter of the name on his dog tags: *D. Carpenter*. Short for Douglas Carpenter. But what Sid and the others didn't know—could never know—was that Douglas Carpenter wasn't Dee's real name at all.

His real name was Dietrich Zimmermann, and he was German.