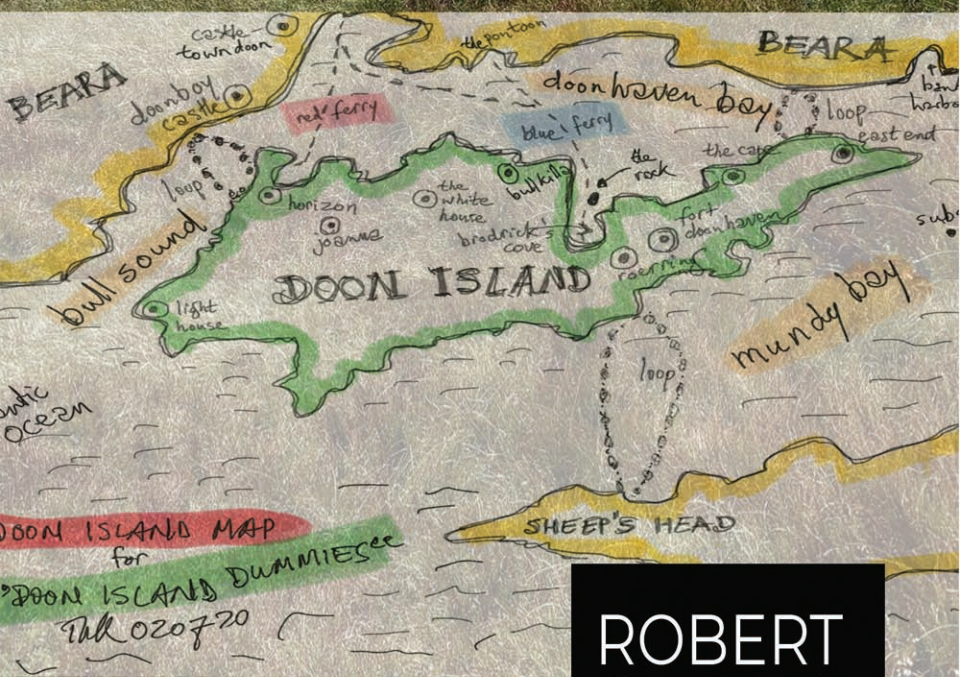


LOOPS

Loyal in The Emergency



ROBERT
CLUTIER



Before The Emergency (as the Irish call World War II), a determined British military technician became an Irish citizen to work on an advanced submarine detection system to protect the British naval base on 'Doon Island' (Bere Island, West Cork). However, when the island came under Irish control, he lost support. Isolated but undeterred, he acquired valuable knowledge about German submarine movements. Regrettably, during The Emergency, his crucial information went unnoticed. In a climate of indifference, his noble mission to safeguard the realm's naval interests faced significant challenges, not least due to his new country's perceived stance on neutrality.



LOOPS

Loyal in The Emergency

'From the moment this war began, there was, for this state, only one policy possible, neutrality.'

Éamon DE VALERA

Taoiseach Eire 1937 - 1948

December 1937 - the 'Eccles' Hotel' - Andriff

Diaries are for girls, they say, but for me it will help to keep things in perspective - keep me on the right track. Because all this is not for the short haul, I must document what I think and how I want to move forward. I feel this is important for later.

I sit at one of the grandiose fireplaces in the lobby of The Eccles' in Andriff and I have just made up my mind to change my nationality. I will be an Eireman soon - if they accept me. I am on my way to Dublin, their capital, to advocate my solicitation personally and to make sure that the right people understand why such an unusual request should be entertained with enthusiasm! It is a cold winter night. They say it may still snow tonight, and I am not sure if I can travel on tomorrow. Am I in a hurry?

My story starts in 1915 with two important events: my brother Jonathan drowns in the Lusitania disaster and three days later, I was born. My father, returning from America with Jonathan, where he had tried to salvage some money he had disastrously put in a fake mining exercise, got saved. He would never forgive himself that he had let the baby kid stay with one of the nannies in a nursery deep down below in the ship, whilst he on the upper deck lounge had started to

play whist, one of the first games of the day, and as it turned out, the last of the voyage.

Dad was landed on shore in Queenstown, having been fished out of the ice cold Atlantic waters after many long hours. He rented the biggest rescue vessel he could get his hands - and money - on. He stayed awake on the arctic temperature seas for three days and nights, outside, without sleep. The crew brought him back, half-mad from sleep deprivation and hypothermia, moreover suffering from the first stages of a serious pneumonia that would nearly kill him. He was brought back. But not his little torpedoed kid.

I was born while my mother, who had just heard about the sinking, had been assured that father and son were perfectly safe. The medical and domestic staff had lied deliberately, in order not to disrupt the birthing-process, which had started, well, actually around the time that the German torpedo had hit the large Albion steamer. She learned about the true events only days later. It was therefore a small surprise that I was called 'Bernhard' and not 'Lusitanus'...

When I grew up with her alone, my mother told me often that I wanted to be a writer and that my main childhood interests were reading, reading and even more reading; any subject would do, but history, preferably maritime history was my main interest. Was that also the doing of the German torpedoes driving into the hull of the Lusitania?

The barman left his bar and brought me the ordered triple brandy, almost a full glass. He put two more enormous wood logs and three peat

briquettes on the dying, but still hot fire and turned again to me to say that it had started to snow. Snow in West Slane; it sure was a special night indeed. I should perhaps stay here, not journey any further, just return to the island tomorrow and forget about all these ideas. Stay where I were and stay who I am. Would that combination be possible?

I think now it must have also been my mother who pushed me to read technical studies. Couldn't have come from my Dad. The only activity my father undertook seriously during his short and unsuccessful life was writing a novel, which remained unpublished. He combined that with so much drink for inspiration, that the sight alone of somebody writing as much as a shopping list on a piece of scrap paper was already enough to make my mother instinctively start clearing out any bottles and glasses present. I do not recall any formal strong push in the direction of engineering, but I still feel now that she would have never allowed me to read something like law, or history, which at that stage would have been more appealing to me. That also meant, no Cambridge or Oxford for me, which would have saddened my Dad, as he was very much himself of that league. He would have loved nothing more than to boast about in his dreary personal story than the relative burden-free years he spent at King's College in Cambridge - him still being then a promise and not an embarrassment.

So I did not end up on one of these toff fancy 'grand' colleges, to which I would have had a natural

birthright. The money had simply run out, it just wasn't there anymore - Mother's technical preference was not the genuine reason...

Instead, I enrolled at one of the first Polytechnics as they were being called, a novelty in fact, the 'City of London' one, as it was London to where we had moved, after Dad died. The old manor in the country had been rented out at first, then sold away at a bargain price to some new money made in the War - to provide for all the old debts that kept on popping up unexpectedly.

Hence, I specialised as an electrical engineer. Electricity, especially the industrial uses were still a relative modern development and true widespread applications were few. Although it never stole my heart, as history would likely have done, I thoroughly enjoyed the physical principles behind electricity, and especially its generation.

When I graduated, there were no jobs. The industrial world and most businesses were basically still in the 1929 crash-induced depression - or just recovering from it. Mother could no longer maintain me; what was left of the once vast supply of money was needed now for Timothy, my younger brother's studies. I needed to find a way out. Myself, that was.

Military recruiters came to our classes the last few weeks before the exams. I made it very clear I was not interested at all. My entire family - as far as I could trace back - had a history of staying as far away as possible from warfare, drafts and uniforms; the very reason why my ancestors had fled from Germany to Albion in the late seventeen hundreds. The fact that I was so openly disinterested backfired - it made one of

the recruiters wait specifically for me in the pouring rain, after a heavy math class in preparation for the next day's exam. Unsolicited, he walked up with me, invited me to a pub where he fixed me up with some heavy drink and dear food.

He was from the Albion Navy, the 'Technical Intelligence Department' as he called it. Like every young man, I of course liked spy stories, and I have to admit to this day, he did a fabulous job explaining what his work was about. He poured me another stout, a pint of Eirish porter this time, into my greedy and thirsty body and said that he had state-of-the-art technical spy work waiting for me, in a foreign country, mind you! Long story short, I saw him back the next day, and for three more days in a row, and then I signed up. Not realising then, that he was not interested in me at all, as a technical person, but rather in an old exotic name on his trophy list. Further on, (and me not realising either) that apparently Eire was considered already, pre-maturely, a true foreign territory, having decisively drifted away from the old Albion.

The next day

Never had I seen so much snow. Not even in my native Albion! Public life came to a complete standstill. There will be no coaches, motorcars or boats, us Eccles' guests were formally told just now. I am back in my chair by the fire from the last few days. There is another barman - Leo, the one from yesterday, had been called home to cater to the horses his relatives groom for their absentee landlord. His caretaker-father down with influenza... As for the rest, it is unsurprisingly all the same. The large fire makes me sleepy and I have great difficulty in forcing myself to keep my thoughts clear and to write them down on this stale parchment. I start to feel even stronger that I need to - no: want to! - to write this all up to provide, if ever necessary, a documented rationale for the change, my conversion.

Spring 1936 - to Doon Island

As we were not part of the regular Albion contingent on the island, and not enough in numbers (we were in total only a few going this route) to justify a direct naval shipment from Liverpool, we had to travel twice overland to and in Eire. Not fully by sea, as would oblige the Navy. After landing on Eire's shores, we transported by train to Mundy, and then the two of us transferred to the local steamer 'Princess Beara', which happened to leave that day from Mundy on her way to all towns south of Beara. We stopped in Andriff - the same town where I am now - and we stayed on land for two hours, after which the Princess Beara set steam to the next stop. Brodrick's Cove. Doon Island.

We were instructed to travel in civilian clothes, as we did not want to draw attention or even suspicion to our mission and had therefore forfeited to wear our easily recognisable special Navy uniforms. We looked like eccentric, Albion and obviously rich tourists - because who other than that category would travel to Beara and Doon Island (anyhow very unlikely, even if the Military would have given permission...).

As we were both officers, we slept in large individual luxurious rooms above the officers mess. I got a large room at the front with a view over Brodrick's Cove. Day and night, tenders from

the large Navy ships came back and forth, shuttling people, delivering bunker coal, hauling supplies. I didn't sleep that well, due to all the excitement of the travel – my first time out of Albion, apparently on foreign soil, but in transit to an island that still belonged to the Crown. I spent quite some time sitting in the low rattan chair by the open window, smoking many cigarettes.

The Cove and the Doonhaven Bay were, later in the night, lit by a half moon. Pretty sight, actually.

The next day

We had a good breakfast, as only the Eirish can make, and made our mess boy (well, 'boy'... actually a local male middle-aged potbellied islander called Paddy, obviously a naughty nick name we, Albions had given him) proud of his culinary achievements. Best compliment for a cook: we ate like wolves. I had only slept a few hours, no more than a total of three or four, but I felt good and strong and looked forward to today's proceedings and hopefully, discoveries. We both smoked a few cigarettes on the large open wooden deck outside while we waited for the announced transportation. We knew that we were going to have some 'confidential' assignments; they had hinted at that back in Albion, but we did not know the exact nature of it.

We were collected in a camouflaged tarpaulin-covered pick-up truck. We sat on wooden benches along the cargo space in the back, Paul opposite to me. We had no knowledge of the geographical magnitude of this island, and what our journey would encompass, so we sat back against the stiff tarpaulin fabric, relaxed and continued smoking, drawing cigarettes from Paul's endless supply packs. Never fancied smoking very much, but since I joined the Military, it gave me something to do in idle moments (which were many), moreover it gave

me a kind of mature manly pose. Besides, just about everybody else smoked, as observed in the training weeks. Quite a many soldier's wage got immediately converted into tobacco products. We had prepared for a bit of a ride, but not even at a third of the latest cigarette, we stopped. We were asked, rather instructed, through a muffled voice coming from the steering wheel in front, to get out. We were at the Navy camp, the voice informed us, the Head Quarters of the Albion Navy stationed here at Fort Doonhaven. The first thing I noticed (and which got imprinted on my retina), was a truly gigantic Albion Jack flag blown straight and flat in the strong south westerly sea wind - high on the Fort on a very tall mast. The Fort itself was hacked out of rock towering over the rest of the eastern part of the island. Must have great strategic and defensive views from up there. With our booted feet we extinguished the half-smoked cigarettes. We were at an Albion Navy camp in the middle of Eire. Home and abroad. We were ready for duty.

We followed the driver, who was surprisingly, higher in rank than us, but had not introduced himself. Why would a superior drive us...? He led us away from the Fort into the barracks area on the left side of the road, opposite the old Fort redoubt with the guns. Most of the barracks (bare bricks, corrugated iron, all painted military green) were windowless. We proceeded to the last building, across an exercise area and were then asked to enter a building that did have

windows. It had an open atmosphere, rather inviting, and also quite a nice view over a large part of the eastern island. We eventually stepped into what looked like a small classroom and sat down on the tables - a temporary position, awaiting proceedings. Paul now wanted to offer another round of puff, his cigarette holder shook in his outstretched hand, but was halted by the driving officer who said:

“Please don’t. The Commander doesn’t smoke, he doesn’t understand it and he doesn’t like it when others do. Smoking I mean, not the understanding.”

With that cryptic advice, he left us without any further word or good-bye.

The commander introduced himself to us as Captain, well also as Commander Trevor-Smith. He was small, but looked friendly and had those immediately recognisable aristocratic looks. A rather tiny man in an immaculate uniform - without any hint of decoration or rank. He smiled at us, genuinely. Paul and I exchanged a quick glance. We both felt good having got this VIP treatment.

“At ease gentlemen please! A warm welcome to Albion in Eire! Although we, as it looks, will have to part ways with this beautiful rocky spot soon forever from our Crown and Empire, we still have, as you know, the good fortune and privilege to possess it for now; with a few other strategic areas, still firmly under our control. Ports we kept in our treaty with the insecure Celts. Fort

Doonhaven is one of them. Welcome hence in Fort Doonhaven. You are in Albion, at home, gentlemen, therefore: at ease please."

He took two military-style steps in our direction and proceeded with shaking our hands formally, sidestepping from Paul to me. Individually greeting us with his rank and name again. We offered ours. It looked like we were being decorated - honoured in advance for a dangerous, suicidal mission yet to start. Then he took two pompous steps back and continued:

"Before you both start working on your important communication assignments today, I insist on briefing you concisely on the history and importance of the collection of rocks you stand on, to our Empire, King and Country.

"The exact date when this greater glorious Emerald Isle joined our empire is not known and actually not of great importance. The Romans - that's now a generally accepted fact - visited regularly, with their splendid explorative and structural minds. They were not interested - and only now we start to grasp why. Centuries later, the only human interaction was still merely simple coastal trading, intertwined with some lucrative piracy and slavery raids. Yes! What do you expect with Norsemen, Vikings and Gauls freely roaming the waters? Only after Oliver Cromwell - a hero to us Albions, a genocidal villain to the Eirish - the green islands became an official part of our great country.

“In ‘22 we had to yield Eire to the Eirish - who by then had since long stopped being pure Eirish. What do you think the influence has been of our first true wave of benevolent colonisation, Cromwell’s soldiers being rewarded with estates and land? We did not merely bring development, but also genes, hereditary will-power to persist, to further develop, to think positive... What to make of the fact that the Eirish were only interested in leaving? To their master’s country Albion, or to Albion’s America to join their cousins, or in convicts’ chains to Australia? No sense of reality? Escapism? *Politique de l’autruche?*”

Paul and I, in unison, had started to swing on our legs, not only due to the time we had been standing, but also because we anticipated now a much longer monologue than only a quick and formal welcome briefing.

“But do please sit down gentlemen,” Trevor-Smith suggested smilingly, when he understood our hint and he himself adopted now our earlier casual position sitting on a corner of one of the tables in front. We pulled two chairs from under a table on the front row and sat ourselves down like two well-behaved school children, eagerly ready for an hour class.

“Why are we Albions still Lord and Master over this piece of land? This rock formation called Doon? A series of historical events took place near and even on this island. And in many cases Doon Island played a crucial role. Not only a

geographical coincidence, if you ask me now. Who has ever heard of the Battle of Doonboy?"

We looked at each other for an answer - which we of course didn't have. (We also craved for a cigarette).

"The French, always the French... Our allies now, then our enemies for eternity, the French then, in their bad taste, had lined up with Eirish insurgents, officially to de-stabilise our increasing power over Europe, but their endeavour was of course not without their own proper colonialist intent.

"With the Eirish terrorist, Wolf Tone on their side, they tried to invade Eire through Mundy Bay - one of the various French invasion attempts, this one in 1796, but they suffered loss and shipwreck through bizarre meteorological conditions. Heavy storms and gales from the east. Eastern wind directions are very rare here. They were then and still are now. They got blown out of the Bay, tried to regroup for awhile on and near Doon Island. The Albion lords, in their vision, with their power, and with the winds of their god of course on their side, pushed them back into the Atlantic - so they could limp home to their sorry place on the Continent. A remake of the Spanish Armada...

"Doon Island had taken the dubious role as host, hide-out and centre of attack for Eire-predators! By the early 1800's, we had realised that our vulnerability was not only from internal treason, but threats also started to impose from the Atlantic. We needed a thorough defence

structure along our coasts and more particular in this area. The first works were swiftly executed with ample money coming in from the powerful Albions: Martello towers, cannon-proof round bastions with high precision weaponry, but also more specifically signal towers, a Napoleonic invention, which could signal with flags and signs, complicated messages fast and secure over long stretches of coast line. The French boasted at that time that they could convey a message from Dunkirk to Marseille in twenty minutes! They always exaggerate, our eternal friends, then and even now... anyhow, gentlemen, after these constructions along our Eirish coast, no more Gaul niceties. It worked!

“Then, not that much later, a more technological development created another need. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most of the Albion Naval fleet had converted from wind and sail to steam as the main and often only power supply. Steam became state-of-the art. Steam made these ships invincible. However, with all their firepower, speed and armour, the great battleships of the time were as exposed and vulnerable as newborn babies as soon as the coal fires went out under their pressure vessels. Once off the steam, they would not be able to manoeuvre, to get away; they would not be able to fire, not able to turn the turrets and guns. Totally dependant on steam. Every ship had to go off-steam on a regular basis, to do repairs, maintenance, clean, bunker up, renew equipment;

not having to go back to the naval yards in Albion, but stay close to the action, stay close to where the action might happen...

“Consequently, the Albion Navy needed a well-protected and guarded harbour to service their ships temporarily. The large natural harbour shaped by the bay between the smooth north side of Doon Island and the rocky shores of south Beara turned out to be the perfect location! It was deep enough to have any vessel come in and it was still shallow and sandy enough to create good anchorage. The bay between the island and the mainland became known as ‘Doonhaven’: the home base for Albion’s operational Atlantic Fleet. And a true haven it would be. On and near the earlier built anti-French invasion fortifications more guns and cannons were placed. Small gun nests were built closer to the water. The fleet - resting or recovering, as pampered dependent babies - was fully protected! Around the turn of the century all works and weapons, again, were modernised. No effort was spared to protect Albion with Eire as first buffer.

“Now, lads, I will be pretty much disappointed if you would have not learnt this already at grade school: this eastern part of Doon Island is one hundred percent Albion! As Albion as are Devon, Manchester or London. Our Albion Jack is flying here,” (without looking he pointed behind him stretching his arm in the direction of where the flag was flying on the Fort - just 45 degrees off - we chuckled) “although we don’t

know for how long... When Mickey Collins - with his personal negotiation mandate from his reckless peer Eire freedom fighters - went to see the Albion government in December 1921, for a Free Eire state treaty, we made him swallow the deal. The Albion-loyal North would remain with us, non-negotiable anyhow, and plus, here it comes - also the three most important strategic Albion Navy spots: Lough Swilly, the wild fjord in the north, great for hiding, Queenstown near Slane, a major supply port and, yes... you got it... Doonhaven! Our gateway to the Atlantic, protected by Doon Island. The Treaty Ports were born and ever since known by that name. We kept the east part of Doon firmly under Albion flag... from where we have undisturbed access to the overall island."

He produced, rather impromptu, a small rolled-up map of the island, taking it out of a drawer from the teachers' desk he was now standing at, unfolded it and hung it over the blackboard. The shape of the island was perfectly clear, but the small prints on the map were illegible to us.

"Look gents, we operate guns now on two major sites. Here" (he pointed with a pencil to the map, towards the east side), "are the newest installations, one at Loneport and one near Roerring - two six inch monsters that can cover the entire Mundy Bay entrance. Don't ever forget, the French lesson, we are really most vulnerable from the east. One wouldn't say with the entire

ocean threatening from the west of course, but not even the simplest stupidest maritime nitwit would ever think of coming in from the west. The island is high there and the channel leading to Doonhaven, is called 'Bull Sound', and within shooting range even with the simplest of rifles. Still... never take your eye off the Atlantic - that's a vast place..."

He looked at us intensely - kind of probing our brains. We did not fully comprehend why. When he continued I quickly looked at Paul, who - bloody hell you wouldn't believe - was clearly dozing away! I had always assumed he had more motivation than me to execute these orders. His slightly obese long body started to slump over... but Trevor-Smith did not register it, or he simply pretended to ignore.

"In any case, we also have weaponry on the west side - canons and a lot of smaller guns, which protect the entrance to Doonhaven. The smaller guns are actually quite close to the water and manned twenty-four hours a day. That saves us, even from the smallest attacks, from foreign or local sources. I dare say that not even a low-flying seagull with wrong intentions could pass that channel."

As I expected he chuckled: he liked his own joke. He became aware now that Paul had fallen asleep completely. I had not expected a brilliant sense of humour of this diminutive man, but I admit he approached the situation creatively and remained master of his narrative.

"We are faced with a totally different challenge today, gentlemen, but very much still like the sneaky French at Wolf Tone's time. Any ideas?"

He stepped towards Paul and pulled hard at his left uniform jacket sleeve.

"Do you know what I am talking about?" he shouted in his ear. Paul however didn't wake up, he even started to snore after this intervention.

He brought his mouth very close to Paul's left ear and tried a different approach:

"What do you call a boat that sails under water?"

He repeated the question, winking at me to solicit my cooperation in the embarrassment. Paul moved. He looked instinctively for a better position to continue his sleep and then rather awkwardly slumped-over into one.

"What's a boat under water called?" He pulled very hard again at Paul's sleeve.

Paul woke up with a childish shriek, looked around, at Trevor-Smith, then at me, and shouted, almost relieved: "A wreck, Sir. Sir, a wreck!"

Trevor-Smith and I laughed hard. We could not suppress it. Paul attempted a smile. A strange, but bonding moment among the three of us. Trevor-Smith, back at the map, playing with the pencil in his hands, repeated the original question, looking at Paul.

"Ah...," said Paul, "You probably mean a submarine, Sir."

“Absolutely, yes, that is what I mean indeed,” Trevor-Smith said gloriously, stiff upper lip, “yes that’s what they are called, submarines, submarines: gentlemen, the intestinal parasites of international warfare, of deceit, cowardly attacks, the fluke worms of all coming naval battles. They are weapons of terror and hence terrorism, remember the Lusitania! Uncontrollable, unreliable and therefore never to be trusted. Weapons of mass destruction... politically unstable, worse than the French from a hundred and fifty years ago... And that is also why we are here - and” (He pointed at us, two indexes, each for one of us) “why you are here! We must hurry though. Time is ticking.

“As a starter, the Eirish want us to simply get the hell out of here, and for two reasons; firstly, they don’t want any Albions anymore, anywhere. Full stop! They puke on us. We are incompatible genetic material. Obviously, aggravating the nationalistic emotions, all Eirishmen do now realise they made a silly, no,wait: a plain wrong deal with sending Mick on his kind of one-man-show in 1921... finally Free Eire, but without the cherished and affluent North, and even worse allowing us perfidious Albions to keep the beautiful Treaty Ports... leaving Doonhaven and the strategic east part of Doon Island firmly in alien hands - I personally still naively hope for eternity - although I think I know better.

“Secondly - and more importantly - like everybody, even our Eirish friends understand

that at some stage international conflict in Europe is inevitable now. The expansion of Germany and all that, chaps – I trust your daily paper reading is up to speed... Eire feels that when one of the greater powers in the larger conflict has lined up with them in some sort of alliance - as in fact our use of Doon Island could be very well conceived - it will be extremely difficult for Eire to keep a neutral stand. Difficult when one of the major parties in global conflict rents an island off your neutral coast... wouldn't you agree? It might upset and challenge another major party. Catch my drift, lads? Hence, our days on Doon Island are numbered; we have no time to lose. One of these days the Paddies just might kick our asses out! Or, to remain in island terms, they might kick us off! No time to waste."

Paul sat straight up again and listened. Something had changed in his attitude. But, still, it looked like Trevor-Smith's words - as the saying goes - went in one ear and out the other, undigested. Who was this Paul? Or what was Paul...? For sure, a good looking guy; I had seen women flocking to him like flies to stale pancake syrup on an empty plate. Was he indeed inert, disinterested, lazy, or just plain thick?

Trevor-Smith had intensified his monologue, untied his hobby-horse and started riding his apparent favourite tune: "What we develop now around Doonhaven will, for a very long time, have a strategic meaning for all our wet bastions. Do me a favour though and see this as a pilot run,

a well prepared and well executed experiment, gentlemen, and forget where you are. We will bring it back to Albion and our remaining colonies and use it forever after, wherever and whenever we feel that we need it. If we ever leave this rock, we will take it with us. The learning, the manual, this defence tool for the country, for the Empire.

“Now, Bernhard, I nominate you as the electrical engineer in charge of the overall aspects of this project, meaning the cables, the measurements, the calibrations. With all the scientific stuff, all this will of course depend on your calculations and applications as to whether the whole bloody thing actually works or not! Paul, you will be responsible for the management of all the physical support we require: design and construction of the few buildings we need, all the ships, goods, personnel, power generation and needless to say - security.”

I could not entirely comprehend the last information and task repartitions, but my first thought was that Paul’s announced important new role would lead to trouble. As friendly a fellow as he was in the mess during bar hours, I did not rate his managerial traits very highly. But first, cables...? What the heck is this all about?

“Before I call in Captain Dr Simon Flowers, the naval Chief Engineer for maritime works, and hand you lads over to him, who – no surprise gents: happens to be on the island as well... what a coincidence indeed, hahaha – I would like to ask one more thing of you...”

Not to smoke anymore, we must have both thought simultaneously. We were by now, dying for a cigarette. But it was not that.

“And that is to refer to the project solely with the name DUMMY. Code name DUMMY. There are not a lot of people that know about it. This is the DUMMY project. Can we all agree? We want to leave the impression that we are developing a trial, a trial for an experiment for something else later. Oh yes, and uniforms not necessary, salutations, ranks not that important - wouldn't mind if the locals thought you were just some specialist technicians helping out with something or other, some electrical stuff, phone lines or so, no big secret project stuff et cetera. Get me?”

We nodded and whispered subserviently 'yes'. We now really needed a smoke. Now!

“Great chaps, excellent! I will then indeed call in Flowers now. Would you by the way perhaps like to have a smoke outside boys? You, youngsters all smoke don't you? But please do me a favour comrades, and never let me see you smoking anywhere inside. Scared that the business might blow up, all these explosives you know. It takes one ill-attended cigarette butt, you know, but do take a break outside if in need, now, please.”

We walked outside, into a rather warm, damp air. We lit up and told each other that we were apparently lucky to be here, a piece of Albion in Eire, assigned to work on an interesting new project. Our first Navy assignments could

quite well have been as very junior engineers, deep in the belly of an old rusty tropical battleship, four months in the engine rooms with no daylight... passing time in a world of grease, steam, heat and seasickness. Paul did not talk a lot, laughed a bit sheepishly and launched his burning half-smoked cigarette with his middle finger from his thumb in the direction of the barracks without windows, where it landed just near the brick wall. I presumed barracks with no windows were for supplies, not people. Supplies such as ammunition...

"It is a pleasure gentlemen, welcome, but we will not embark straightaway on a sophisticated overview of war machinery. I'd like you both to revisit your academic years, let's talk a bit about physics, let me take you back to some basic electro-physics. Need a piece of chalk? Here we go." Flowers was in civilian clothes, dressed like us, strange for his rank. He was slim and tall, the opposite of Trevor-Smith. He spoke common, in fact accent-free Albion, not the century old craftfully created toff tune that Trevor-Smith wanted to display on us - to let us know that he was from a very different league. Flowers was a regular guy. Perhaps had married well and made a good career in the Navy. Or just plain clever. Happens also.

"Do we all remember how electricity is created? I see confusion in our eyes... doubt on our knowledge. Let's not take any chances and let's make sure we all get down to fundamental

knowledge again. Let us go through it again, ok? Hahaha. Now, if we take a loop of copper wire and move a rod-shaped magnet, or even a plain iron rod through it back and forth, what will happen?"

He had formed a circle with his left index finger and thumb and pushed his right index finger back and forth through the loop. I was sure it was not only me that got some awkward thoughts - even the slow-thinking Paul would have picked up the naughty association faster than I did. And indeed - a demonic smile materialised on his face. He had woken up at last.

"Yes, gentlemen, I can read from your elated looks, that you indeed remember: the particles in the copper wire change with every movement of the rod, their electro-magnetic orientation and this results in an electron movement through the wire - basically generating an electric current. In fact electricity! Now, if we scale this up and we create large spools of copper wire and have industrial-size magnet rods running at high speed through that spool, back and forth, we will be able to create electricity that can be used to light lamps and drive machines. Machines, engines, yes, in fact, just the other way round, remember: the same amount of power driven through the copper spool-magnet set-up will make the rod move... We have created an electro-engine! Or a power generator, a dynamo - depends on how you see it and how you move it! Any questions?"

Yes, obviously, we both had the same question: where was he driving us? Where will this lead to? We were not shipped, more or less under cover, to this remote spot to refresh our basic high school simple electro-physics, were we?"

"All right, now, let's take a step aside, no, rather a step forward. We talk about magnets and copper wire, as they are the materials that were found to be the most powerful and efficient in creating electrical current, or the other way round. But basically all metals with the power to react to magnetic forces - and most ferric metals can! - can be used in this equation. If I would use" (oh my... Same embarrassing finger and circle movement; Paul could not suppress a rather girlish giggle) "for example plain iron wire and a plain simple iron body, I would get the same effect, only the electricity current created would be too weak to drive any electrical appliances, but with a sensitive gauge it could still be measured. Keep that in mind, guys, electricity can always be measured, to see if it exists, however weak it may be. If your instruments are the right ones and well calibrated - but we will come to that. That's enough working knowledge. For now, we are in the business of measuring electric currents.

"Step ahead: then, it does not always need to be the finger-in-circle concept..." (Paul behaved - poker face. Strange, I thought, nothing really excites him, but the coincidental sign language Flowers used woke him to great interest).

“I could leave a flat round loop on a surface and move my metal object just over it. Imagine it as a two-dimensional world. This movement, not commonly known, will also create a weak, but measurable electron movement through the loop and can hence, be measured even over large distances. Now, this principle works in air as it does in water, water or seawater at that, that’s an important thing to remember for DUMMY.”

An open friendly smile appeared on his face.

“Still guessing where we are going?”

He didn’t take any questions, good for us, as we didn’t have any. We knew where this was going. Had Trevor-Smith still left a choice between battling the French and submarines, Flowers did not leave any guesses. We got it.

That was about all we would see from the classroom. The rest, as Flowers and Trevor-Smith had implied, was going to be just practice, on-the-job training - and running against the clock. If we can’t do it here, we can’t do it anywhere. It’s now or never. I suddenly felt very motivated and proud to be part of this. As for Paul... I was not so sure.

That very afternoon, I started with Flowers and Paul. We drove in the same old open-back camouflaged truck to the ship, which had transported the cables to Doon. They had been shipped all the way from Singapore to Plymouth by the Royal Navy, and then on the high seas transferred to this stealthy limping little cargo coaster, which, next to a noisy and very smoky

steam engine, still had a mast and sail. Wasn't the twentieth century supposed to be modern? Perhaps the sail-impression would shield it from torpedo attacks... This tiny coaster now was at the Roerring Navy quay, in Brodrick's Cove, waiting to have its enigmatic cargo off-loaded.

"The success of the cable technology," Flowers explained, while he puffed pedantically away at a pipe - safe and far away from the base camp and tobacco-phobic Trevor-Smith, "is heavily dictated not by the correct type of metal and the layers within the cable, well, that was critical too of course, but rather by how the metal layers were protected within the cable against each other and how they could be protected against long-time corrosive force of the seawater. Let's have a look at that. Crucial to grasp that, lads."

We stepped on board the small vessel and looked into the cargo holds the crew were just opening, where three immense rolls of cable were lying, like three giant turds - as Paul had expressed, trying to be funny. (Flowers coughed and looked the other way, but I suspected he smiled). Flowers called up to one of the officers from the vessel and explained to him that he wanted to have from either end from any of the cables, a couple of inches sawn off. As he wanted to demonstrate the configuration and the vulnerability of the technical cable design. We went into the cabin of the coaster and had ourselves some tea offered, damned good tea

actually; still available apparently. Flowers happily kept puffing away on his pipe; Paul and I had therefore no qualms joining him with our own tobacco-burning rituals.

It was a nice flat disc they came back with. The unshaven officer put it on the table of the cabin. Flowers, Paul and I bowed over it and we saw clearly the different layers of metal, very easy to discern. However, we hardly noticed the sudden heavy rain that had started clattering on the steel roof of the cabin.

"The outside cover, funny enough, that technology is quite old," Flowers said philosophically. He drew heavy smoke from his pipe. "This is special rubber from Malaya, they found out this particular stuff could last for ages in the sea. All earlier transatlantic morse and telegram cables were coated with it. That's how we know it and that's how we learnt." Suddenly, he pushed it off the table. He poked at it with his foot and tried to flatten it hard on the wooden floor. It looked sturdy and strong. All layers remained firmly and nicely in place. He picked it up and laid it on the charts table again.

"You see guys, doesn't move at all. Your cables will last until the year 2000," he said. "And most likely beyond..."

Looking back later: that was actually the first and the last day that there was a bit of time for reflection, philosophy and expertise exchange, humour even. We started the next day in a far more serious and hard-working mode. We were

assured that the clock was against us; we started also reminding others that time was running out. The work would not stop after Paul disappeared from the island - and it should have continued even after I had left. But I am going too fast now.

First, we rolled out all three cables over the road from Roerring to Bullkilla, the hamlet with the church, all over the High Road; a herculean task with two mainland-provided independent-acting unruly Eire cob horses that pulled the large wooden reels, driven by an unreliable, mostly inebriated horse driver, also a mainlander. Two cables, unrolled, were more or less the length of Roerring-Bullkilla, but a third was about double the length and had to be rolled out, back with the second half all the way back to Roerring.

Paul and I inspected all three cables personally. Flowers joined for only a few hours during the first days, and only with the short ones. He backed out pretty fast... We had to look at any visible or suspected cracks that could let water in through the robust rubber outer skin and into the interior and more importantly, for any signs of the cable having been twitched, which would mean that the inner copper and metal shields might have shoved into each other, thereby creating short circuit and rendering the cable potentially useless - not for power transmission, but definitely for weak, sensitive, current measurement. This all according to Prof Flowers, the 'Cable Professor', as Paul and I had started calling him. (He had looked a jovial, easy-

going chap at first, but with stress of the mounting work, he turned out to be a first-class very detailed manager who wanted to know everything and did not trust anything... Especially annoying seen the fact that he did not hands-on participate in the field work of inspection at all. A royal pain-in-the-ass). We found some minor damages at the ends of all three cables, probably to do with the hauling onto the big reels, needed for the sea transportation. We cut these ends off beyond their affected parts and decided to use the loose parts for further smaller experiments, study and of course, very secret display.

The rolled-out cable inspection took us nearly three days. Another two were needed to reel the cables up again - not at all easy with the free-spirited horses and the full-of-spirit horseman, who could hardly manage his unstable gait, let alone his four-legged live equipment. Then, we had to load the reels again on a ship, unto a well-maintained steam cutter this time, which the Navy had destined for this operation - a clean aft deck ship clearly tailored for the roll-out cable operations to come. The Navy engineers had fitted it out with a tailor-made reel holder, a strikingly simple but sturdy device that would let the cable slip off smoothly from their revolving wooden holders.

We now directed our focus to more general phases and components of DUMMY buildings. Paul was, as agreed earlier, the support and

buildings man. I appreciated to keep my attention very close to the crux of our existence: the cables, the eventual loops, the measurements. We thus divided our supervisory roles: Paul would remain with the 'main building', a bit ambitiously named for a rather diminutive construction building where all electrical measurement data would be collected and where necessary, findings would be signalled through to the mainland. In this main building we would also erect our offices, and install archives and administration. We identified further the need for three reception huts, one on the north and one on the south side of the island, and one in the west. I would keep an eye on the construction of these measuring cabins - as their functioning was crucial for the success of the cable experiments. We built all new dwellings in the style that the Military had practiced here since they started to use Doon Island seriously: like non-commissioned officers houses; they would give the impression that more staff would locate to the island and would not give our experimental secretive electrical intentions away. Anyhow, they needed to be like real places to live in, as we would have long and even twenty-four hours shifts - people needed to sleep, eat, relax and bath there. Not only potentiometers and tables for scribes. They were basically small one-room houses, with a small kitchen and a water closet. In the large room there would be a table to work on, an easy chair to sit in for long shifts - with a reading light fixed to the wall - and even a bed,

for duty sleep-overs when true closeness to the gauges was required. One wall, the wall parallel to the shore where the loop would come in, would be the fixing point for all instruments. Finally, the houses had their own small kitchens, and two small bedrooms. A living room with chairs, yes, to smoke in and to read the odd magazine or newspaper. No rooms or windows on the island side - no need for peeping locals, but of course on the Doonhaven and Mundy Bay sides there were larger than normal glass windows, to enable measurements to be linked with visual observations - or rather perhaps the lack of those.

That was the entire idea - nice clear indisputable readings on the gauges, but nothing on the water? We got you submarine! However, whether it was going to work all along that simple way, we had at that stage not a single clue. Events, as we would call them later, would take over... But for now, we were getting very well prepared indeed.

Even Paul was serious.

The last day of the year 1937 - Crookstown, Slane

The last day of the year normally leads to introspection and this one is no different from the others I had experienced. I am still convinced I should continue with the Eire naturalisation process. It is the reason for my journey. My journey through troubled youth, over land and sea, brought me to this weird hotel, the journey of my life perhaps. I am lying in a majestically large bed, overlooking the very wintry Crookstown harbour. The bed is white, so white it pains my tired eyes. The harbour - a collage of sky, water, quay buildings, ships - is grey and dirty. The rotten brackish smells come through the supposedly tightly closed windows and doors. This outside now begs for me, trying to convince me to continue. No rest. No rest even on the last day of the year. Earlier, over the abundant breakfast, I have decided that if I still feel the same about everything tomorrow morning, I will persevere and indeed continue the naturalisation process. I would like to party tonight, after all it's New Year's Eve, but I prefer to stay in this comfortable large bed. Perhaps I will look for a book from the hotel library downstairs, but it should not have too many pages, as I will travel early tomorrow morning through to Dublin by train. Not sure if I can finish an entire long novel before that. Bring it along secretly and send it back? Or just keep it? Along my journey...

It took us about a month to put the cables on the seafloor. We had no prior experience with it. Plus: it needed to be done secretly. We didn't want the Eire-men to know too much about it. You don't cancel six hundred years of mistrust overnight, do you? Well, we couldn't of course keep it a full secret, as the entire island - and quite a few of them had made some handsome bucks in helping out - had seen us cautiously handling and inspecting the materials. What we wanted to avoid was that they knew what we were going to do with these cables. We had indeed purposely rumoured that they were for a special telephone line, dummy experiment to the mainland. To both sides: two up north to Beara, one down south to Sheep's Head. State-of-the-art technology, we said. Swore everybody to secrecy, so we were sure this false information would make the rounds fast. Still, we thought it better to roll them out rather covertly, preferably in starless, stormy, moonless nights.

We started with the smallest stretch, from the fortifications at the small entrance to Doonhaven, Bull Sound, on the west side of the island, crossing over to the mainland near Doonboy Castle, at the edge of Castletowndoon. It turned out to be so deep there, that it took us four times of trying to place the cable correctly on the seafloor, hauling it completely up and putting it down again and again. We could simply not create a clear loop on the bottom; both sides slipped together in one - an undesired double

close parallel cable configuration. Only after we decided to sail out a much larger loop in true O-shape over the water in the small converted tugboat helping us, we were able to get it placed more or less the way we wanted. We could never probe how it was really lying on the sea bottom. That combined with the main question: 'would it be working?', could only be answered by a detectable electrical current. If ever...? Eventually, this loop worked the best so we never thought of it anymore. The true art was in the rolling out of the cables in a large real circle shape. How they would end up on the bottom was of less importance. Learning on the job!

The next stretch was, although longer than the cross-over to Castletowndoon, much easier, as it went flat over a relatively shallow, very stable and flat sandy bottom, from the measuring hut on the north side of Brodrick's Cove to the foot of Mount Appetite, near Bank Harbour, on the other side. That one took us just one night.

Looking back, and if it would have been up to me, I would have now paused to see whether the theory and practice would rhyme and if we could get the electrical signals we wanted out of the cables. But the Navy brass was in such a hurry... Time was running short they kept telling us. All loops must be rolled out - they felt the hot breath of Eirish neutrality on the back of their necks. The sinking of the cables first, effectiveness second.

It was after the second loop that the rumours started to gain ground. The persistent rumours

about the Treaty Ports handover. Churchill had played his cards too high... Obviously the Eirish now wanted their entire country back - they had most of it, except that big chunk in the North and of course these Ports, of which Doon Island was a very visible part. Although we had accepted that at some stage the island would revert to Eire, we needed these cables at any cost. We wanted to learn the technology and were even convinced that, once we mastered it, it would be a great argument to keep the Eirish on our side. As, in a way if you like, we developed it together with them. On their territory, we must stand together in the international conflict that was brewing.

We were pressured so much that we did the third and last cable pretty much out in the open - from Roerring's south seaside to the other side of Mundy Bay, to the tip of the Sheep's Head peninsula, about two miles away - no longer under cover of bad weather or in the full darkness of a new moon. We put out the tugboat, with a large tender behind it, on which the much larger cable roll stood, in that windless, moon-lit night in August. I will never forget the beautiful stillness of the water that night. The cable slipped off the tender like a prehistoric monster seeking its origins back in the history of the sea. We were all there for the occasion, with our teachers and buddies from the first days: Flowers, Trevor-Smith, Paul and I. We sat in Navy-issued camouflage folding chairs on the aft deck of the tugboat; smoking and drinking coffee from a big

dented thermos - coffee supplemented with ample local whiskey. We smoked and nobody objected. It was like a holiday cruise; only the girls were missing... that aside it was really perfect. I remember we sang on the way back, silly Navy and Army songs and Flowers was indeed much more cheeky and naughty than we had thought over the tense last few weeks. I think we all realised already at that stage that our vision was great, our technology unbeatable - and our days on Doon numbered.

The cables were connected fast and without trouble and we ran successfully shore-generated currents through them that could be easily measured. The electricity we put in on the island side through the loops, came squarely and unscathed back out in the gauge cabins. Apparently the cables were all intact.

We received the potentiometers from London, strange enough from some government seismological institute; it might have been a decoy to fool the eavesdropping locals. They were smaller than I had anticipated, also very sensitive and I was instructed that they needed to be handled with the utmost proper care. It took us nearly as much time to get the measuring equipment properly installed in the three island cabins as it took us to loop the cables over the sea bottom!

The work progressed now in real secret and we had code terms for everything. The cables were referred to as our 'parents' (Are your parents

in the west doing well? How are your parents overseas?), the potentiometers, not without irony, as 'the girls'. 'One of the girls is upset, she wants to be readjusted.' Silly simple humour of lonely, but dedicated men. Obviously Paul loved the metaphors.

The night before we had planned our first real ship's experiment, Flowers joined us in the officers mess overlooking The Cove, with a bottle of local Powers whiskey. He told us we could continue smoking and asked who would like to have a 'shot', as he called it, rather vulgarly waving the bottle over his head. We both raised our hands agreeing to join him. We were fast becoming alcoholics - was it boredom, excitement, or the stress of secrecy that made us drink?

"It might take at the most another year," Flowers stated, "but we better get prepared to get out of here soon. Coz' Paddy wants to have his island back." (I initially thought he referred to our mess boy and cook, but realised straight away that he of course meant Paddy, the generic Eirishman, named Patrick, after St Patrick, the Emerald Isle's patron saint). While we sipped the surprisingly good liquor, he briefed us unusually candidly on the situation on the Continent: Albion and France, watching from the sidelines, could of course not approve of the course Germany was sailing, currently violating most, if not all gentlemen's agreements of Versailles, taking back Allied-occupied pieces of land in the middle of Europe. Look what happened in the Rhineland...

“Think a bit ahead lads, let me repeat: if Eire insists on staying neutral, they could not tolerate to have a major war party on its very territory! Their North looked lost forever to them, but the Albion Ports could be easily demanded back - in case they were serious about neutrality. Neutrality as a pretext to send the Albions home.”

“When?” Paul asked.

“Depends what Herr Hitler is going to do really. Perhaps we can appease him; I heard somebody saying that we should reach out to him before it is too late. The Krauts are ferocious soldiers, but deep inside also very much cultured people, they will not be deaf to reason; Hitler or no Hitler. But, if it comes to war, we will be out of here soon.”

Flowers stayed with us until the bottle was empty. His personal consumption was a substantial contribution to that development, as he took care of that nearly single-handedly.

All in all, the cables were technically a huge success. We commenced our measurements with the short one on the west tip of the island, looping the gap with the harbour of Castletowndoon. We found already some signal with the normal small boat traffic, though nothing with a wooden sailing ship of course, but the odd steel trawler or local cargo peddler, even wooden hulls with a large enough engine made the ‘girls’ go nicely.

We recruited all the pure steel Navy ships that were currently stationed in Doonhaven, lined them up according to tonnage, volume and length

and paraded them - smaller ones first - over the loop, in a slow moving line. It worked really well, the readings were clear and appeared proportional. We were even able to set some simple calibrations on the potentiometers - signal versus ship size.

The second cable, on the east side between the island and Mount Appetite, yielded yet more obvious readings, as it was less deep there. This cable had sunk almost perfectly and we knew it was lying very straight over the flat sandy sea bottom. We then calibrated the equipment again and moved on to the long stretch, the double mile to Sheep's Head. As anticipated with the knowledge we were fast developing, signals were indeed weaker there, for this cable was the longest and especially the deepest - and we had no insight on how it was stretched out over the rocky bottom. Small vessels were hardly detected. We could see a slight change in reading - but only when we knew a boat was going over, as we could track it visually. Without this confirmation of a boat passing over, it would be very improbable to detect any clear ship movement on the meter alone.

We depended much on the cooperation of His Majesty's Royal Navy to test the system to its true extent. I had by now figured out - also thanks to Flowers' many whispered suggestions - that the 'loops system' (or as we casually referred to it: The Loops) was slightly controversial in governmental and high military channels and that it was driven

very much by some of Churchill's personal inner circle. Which made it a political project... Would they be interested to get a free, fully functional highly sophisticated system being offered, at the last stage, on a platter - in other words would they wait until we were finished with DUMMY or would they not give a damn? Would it then add clout and value to our presence on Doon or would it be an even simpler argument to kick us all out...? Flowers speculated openly, triggered by our questions, and now more often than not assisted by the bottle, that George, our King, had developed interest himself (perhaps also influenced by Winston), as suddenly and completely unannounced a very modern Albion submarine showed, visible to all on the surface of the water, just outside Brodrick's Cove. Flowers went on board, stayed away all day and returned only late that night, when we were just planning to retire from the mess. He called us three together, made us raise glasses and briefed us in a conspiring tone that 'formal submarine validation trials would start at seven in the morning'.

The next day, Flowers was most probably again the invitee of the enigmatic submarine crew; we did not even see him at breakfast at six. (Paddy was late and smelled of booze when he finally showed. The cranky bastard spoiled our eggs upon breaking them and eventually decided to manufacture only one big lousy omelet, which we had to cut through with a heavy knife, as it was burnt, thick like leather, and which we had to

share, not really a comfortable Albion thing to do, I would say).

We divided the work. Not that there was a lot to do, but the need presented itself to be very sharp and focused; we could not afford to make mistakes with this high-level presence. Moreover, that vessel would never stay longer than a few days, as the Albions were obviously not really welcome in these waters with their state-of-the-art submarine technology. I, staying behind in the main measuring cabin, would be monitoring all meters, reading, interpreting and making extrapolation proposals, while Paul would be the liaison officer between the submarine and us. The submarine would surface every hour on the hour, at a point between Sheep's Head and the island, at the Atlantic side, give a signal with lights and flags to tell us at which depth they would be crossing the long loop again. Paul would collect the visuals and walk to us to hand me the data, so we could note them down together and relate them to possible meter readings. Paul would note down all subsequent data, I would interpret on the spot.

It took us all day, eighteen long hours, from dark to dark, and Paul swore incessantly: he would never do errand jobs anymore (it rained all day and he got soaked to the skin). I asked myself for the umpteenth time whether Paul had enough motivation for the cause. Getting wet was for him more disastrous than a potential failure of DUMMY.

But clearly, no failure whatsoever: these trials were also truly a huge and complete success. Of course, very close to the sea bottom and just some feet over the cable system, the potentiometers nearly went over their scale; that was expected. But having nice and easily identifiable results of the sub passing over the detection loop at periscope depth, near the surface that is, even in deep waters, was an excellent result. Better than expected. Because that was the threat: submarines hiding and sneaking in at periscope level, just under the surface of the sea. We were all jubilant and had a celebratory boozy night - with the anonymous Albion submarine officers now openly joining us as well. (They drank like fish and were jolly folk, but extremely cautious in what they said. They must have had an extra and heavy security briefing before surfacing at Doon. We could have been Eirish or German spies... In their indoctrinated suspicious eyes no difference...).

We wanted to start with repeating some of the depths the next day. But we had a delay of two hours, as most of us suffered from a severe hangover. Paddy was not even late - just nowhere to be seen. Absent without leave, AWOL. Unreliable folks. We cooked our own breakfast. Decent scrambled eggs with some bacon this time, nothing burnt or overcooked, individual portions. We smoked our cigarettes outside until Flowers (who again had shown his human face also the night before by getting completely 'smashed' - as

he called it colloquially this morning) picked us up. We walked to our stations, I changed posts with Paul. Today, I was the runner. It was a cold, clear, but beautiful morning. I hoped it would not rain like the other day.

Instead of a depths repetition, it was decided that we were going to do different speeds today. It was obviously rather easy to get detected over an electrostatic cable loop through sheer clear movement, but we had no idea what would happen if a submarine, or any steel vessel for that matter, would glide extremely slowly over the circle. Like a hundred meters in half an hour. Theoretical models had it that if the speed of the steel mass was very slow, the meter would not give any discernible reading.

We learnt that a sub needs a kind of minimum speed, to keep level and to be navigable, in other words that they can still steer where they want and decide on their own course and depth. It is one thing to be blind in the deep, but quite another to be lame, as one of the sub officers had explained to me the other 'boozy' night. Nightmare of any sub crew - lose velocity, hence agility. So there would have to be some speed. Very low speed would only be possible on the surface, but not in the deep.

We had reached a kind of consensus with the crew of two nautical miles per hour as the absolute minimum speed for a fully loaded and crewed submarine under war conditions. We had her slide through and on the waters at that speed

and even once at lower than that. The normal tidal currents in Mundy Bay would anyhow always be faster. The readings were less spectacular, but they were still obvious, even at periscope depth. Our girls did not lie. It showed clearly that the potential for sneaking slowly into the Bay on the surface was limited - at night only, rainy weather, perhaps only under a dark new moon, flat surface: no waves, no tide...

Paul looked sunburnt (we suspected he had spent more time outside of the cabin than inside at the meters...) and appeared, as the only one of us, completely healed from his hangover. All of us were sitting, in the chairs, on the bed, smoking and chatting. Flowers joined. As we relaxed in the little meter cabin and congratulated ourselves, we had indeed been successful in pioneering the submarine detection loops system, soon a standard issue in the arsenal of the Royal Navy, DUMMY installed. We were the first. The Germans had no inkling of its existence, they had no clue.

After half an hour of loops-small-talk, Flowers got serious and after swearing us suddenly and unexpectedly to complete secrecy (I committed straight away, but Paul tried to be funny and said something silly - what is wrong with that guy - why is he never serious? Always other thoughts on his mind...), he told us that, after this successful Doon experiment phase, they would make the system fully operational here on the island. Moreover, the Royal Navy had

requested for an urgent installation in Singapore, under heavy pressure by hostile Japanese threat, and - not surprisingly - for some loops across the sea-mouth of the Thames and, a bit further from home, the harbours of Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland. Would any of us be interested in going there and help set it up? Paul and I, without consulting each other both nodded instinctively. We volunteered on the spot. It was clearly not the right moment to refuse or buy time. Honestly, I did not know exactly what I wanted. I kind of liked this island, and enjoyed the simple camaraderie in the military settlement here; was also seriously in love with the loops, but I could not make up my mind on this question. Flowers did not press further. He actually never came back to this idea. He had left Doon Island and Eire long before his other international loops would have been due.

The euphoria should have been complete - after those glorious days where Albion technology had claimed such an obvious victory - when my new identity arrived! One of the cleaning guys had left it on my bed, on the top pillow. An official-looking envelope, my name written in a trained hand in black ink. A letter from the government. Not the Albion government. The Eirish... I instantly knew what type of information would be inside the envelope, but was still surprised with its verdict: 'Request approved'. Upon rendering my Albion passport, at a time of my choice within six months, and with a personal

visit to a Slane County Office all would be formalised. All discreetly done. Although I normally slept well on Doon - with the abundance of activity and labour in the healthy outside, the ever present sea air, the relatively good grub and the ample supply of spirits - I did not catch my normal nocturnal rest for a few days in a row. Did I really want to change now? The basics of the loops working, system in place, lots to fine-tune though - an opportunity to go further abroad... Did I want to go abroad? It was time, I felt, to reconcile with my family - I did not miss them that much anymore, but something told me we needed to simply get together again. Now or never. Were the loops, our experiences rather, transferable? I liked it here. On the third night, I decided that the decision point would be with the island. A handover soon of Doonhaven, or not, and its protecting island of rocks, would decide for me.

Then, not long after all these climactic developments, to top it up, another 'event' took place that rocked my existence... the Paul-story. That undoubtedly contributed also in Flowers' vanishing interest in our tandem. Not that I had any part in it, but I was somehow guilty by association.

We lost Paul. Along with so many other things happening in those messy times, I did not care a lot. I had liked the guy as a companion, but had started to develop serious doubts about his general attitude. Was he with us, or was he with

something else? We had been colleagues, peers, but never true friends. I think that only on the train to Mundy, on our way to our enigmatic assignment on an island called Doon, we exchanged some thoughts that had a certain emotional value: about our families, background and the like. But I do recall also that Paul kept on talking about his girlfriend in Poole, in the south of Albion, even tried to capture my attention longer than modesty would have dictated: with her anatomical details, revealing physical actions and habits. Rather quite embarrassing for a first meeting, actually...

In short, Paul was a conqueror, a ladies-man, and womaniser. Whenever I saw him staring away out of the train window - and later to non-existing objects on the horizon of the seas surrounding the island, I was sure he was fantasising about girl play, servicing or being served.

It started quite classically with Paul skipping a watch duty. Another colleague who had joined the surface visuals station had briefed me. Paul had brought a girl, well a woman rather, from Castletowndoon with him to the island. She was dressed as a man in soldiers' uniform, under a shelter of very heavy rain - and he was to later 'ride' her publicly in the enlisted mens' dormitory, with an interested audience of ten soldiers, who were rudely awakened by the noise and sounds of the impromptu coupling! The woman was a very distant relative of the Donovans, an island

dynasty. She was a rumoured nymphomaniac, who went with men from all backgrounds, most of the time for free and for fun, and sometimes for money, if the household budget ran short at the end of the month... She loved to be with (very) young men, sometimes several at the same time it was further gossiped.

Paul subsequently skipped a few other service obligations, then disappeared altogether for an entire week. Nobody had a clue of his whereabouts. At a certain point in time he actually stopped functioning completely. Funny enough, I ran into him often in the enlisted men mess - unshaven and smelling of booze and cigarettes - but we had stopped talking by now. I kept on wondering why the higher officers kept him in the system, on the island. Was he part of an important secretive movement - he could not be afforded to be lost out of the service? Important family links? OxCam material? A spy for Albion?

Just before the war threat took off in earnest and just a few months before Treaty Port and Fort Doonhaven were handed 'back' to the Eirish, he ran into serious trouble. His horniness, in combination with his incredible nonchalance, his profound arrogance in fact, pushed him into a ginger haired fate. She was no more than seventeen, with milk white skin, a pretty scalp abundant with red hair, a virgin - but not for long, as Paul made her open her legs...: with his look, stare rather, his trusted baritone voice full of attractive Scottish accent, his long hands, his

tongue and all other relevant parts of his good-looking young man's body.

In all fairness, he did a correct short week of walking around hand-in-hand, with a pretension of being in love, sweet kisses on deserted island pebble beaches. Subsequently, he took her bloodily on the side of the High Road, coming from the west towards the village of Roerring.

The Methuselah-old Sean Donovan, who happened to walk by, thought initially that he was dreaming and even managed to get some kind of arousal for the first time in twenty years - was to spend the next three months in Morty's Bar loudly painting the pastoral road scene to whatever audience he could find. Nobody believed the old randy fool - but that changed very rapidly when little Fanny started to show an ever growing little belly.

What Paul had overlooked in his haze of hurried hormones, were the hidden royal roots of wee Fanny. Fanny Donovan descended through the Donovans who had run the east end of the island, even now, when the Albions had sequestered it from the rest of the island, with a historic entitlement. It would be rather standard than exception to hear a Donovan in Morty's Bar boast about the rich lineage that had given them the power to run the rock they lived on. They would go easily back to Viking settlers, rough and ruthless Danes, later mixed with powerful Normans and other knights pushed out of the boiling-over Albion and Europe continent. The

Donovans were not only proud, they were also in charge and beyond and above any law that did not originate from their island, their heritage.

They came for Paul, in the pouring rain, in the middle of a very cold night. The Eirish loved a good old fashioned lynch-party, preferably after getting collectively drunk and courageous. Paul slept an unburdened sleep, when they literally tore him - blanket and all - from his elevated bunk bed (he preferred sleeping in the enlisted mens dorms, as he could sneak in and out undetected) onto the cold floor, and from there on through the dormitories and hallways, over doorsills and steps out into the open. During this journey he alternated between receiving damage to his head and trying to dance on knees, hips, back and elbows. They kept on walking - his head jumping from stone to stone on the Fort's roads. When they finally dumped him on the exact spot where he had impregnated little Fanny, he had lost consciousness. The eight heroes who had abducted him, urinated all over him - fresh liquids from the earlier numerous courage pints - and left him there to rot. Ironically, he was found the next morning by the same old Sean Donovan, he, who had launched the scandal. The skin on Paul's hands was gone, tendons torn open and protruding, some small bones visible - infections had started.

Sean made him wash under the pump of his bachelor cottage nearby and told him simply to leave the island as soon as he could. Otherwise, he

was sure, new measures would be introduced. Paul left like a wounded bird, a bundle of misery smelling of unwashed civilian clothes that Sean had produced - on the last ferry of the day, under cover in the twilight of the evening.

The red-haired angel was freed of her embryo by three old mainland women, who had experience with the routine. In spite of predictions and warnings, she recovered in a couple of days. Bleeding and infection stayed absent, and fertility intact: later in life, she would produce eight very healthy children for her cousin she married. A Donovan, not surprisingly.

August 1940 - a rainy night at the officers mess

I am all alone in the mess, the only officer left at the camp. They have all left for 'more strategic locations' - as they call it. I don't want to move. Well, perhaps I wouldn't mind, but nobody asked. But then, they need somebody to keep an eye on the day to day business here, to guard the loops, don't they. Well, do they?

We had five signals over the last month alone. None of those could be confirmed at the surface. I have no idea what they mean. I duly reported all signals, but did not get any response (questions or confirmation...) back from headquarters in Dublin. Looks like they have other things on their mind. Or just not interested at all: a loop signal? Loops? Not invented by us, so why should we care...

*Next day, another evening alone at the
mess*

The man was back in O'Keeffe's today. He is Eirish, he had told me upfront, but had lived in Albion for a while, he told me the second time round. This was the third time I had met him. Major challenge to determine his accent. Never heard it before. Could even be Australian, New Zealand, Canadian... We took a few pints together, he gave me a cigar, good pre-war stuff, and then we followed the same protocol. I went for a leak, while he paid and left the pub. Then, I sat for another four-five minutes at our table in the front near the grocery counter, took my last sips, put my coat on, to leave. He told me he would always leave turning left out of the door, so I took a right. I then crossed the deserted town square, avoiding the dung the cattle had left this morning after the weekly livestock fair, and hurried to the quay. He would wait for me in the ferry bus shelter, near the water. That shelter would be empty; the old folks were gone by five o'clock. No more buses after that hour. The aged who would use the shelter for passing their day time would definitely be gone. It was now half past six and I had exactly half an hour before the Navy shuttle would fetch me at the crossing ramp for my personal transport back to Roerring.

He sat on the small, half-rotten wooden bench in the shelter. I still did not know his full name, only his first name: Rick. He was in his late forties he said and that he was an Eirish patriot, with contacts in London and Canada (Was that the accent?). Never understood what the Canada-thing had to do with it but at the time, I found it thrilling to hear. The first meeting we had, had I think had truly been a coincidence, we just happened to sit next to each other at O'Keeffe's Bar in Castletowndoon on a stormy night, when I came back from Mundy and could not cross over to the island anymore. I sat waiting for information whether a tender would still be able to pick me up. He (never did I have any inkling of where he stayed) had become very much interested in the island, he said, and the military works, he himself being a military man, as he stated more than once that evening. During the loops construction with the Albions, we had once had a special briefing by Trevor-Smith on 'the enemy and its spy tactics' and how they might be after intelligence on our DUMMY project - although later, I found that the Eirish didn't give a damn about spying or being spied upon. As for DUMMY, I had no clue anymore what was common knowledge, what was inside military secrets and what was not to be shared with anybody.

He paid for all the drinks - he seemed to have a lot of money. He was a horse trader, for the rich, Albion-based toffs, he said and was exploring

some 'new sources' away from the traditional breeding grounds. There was time to do some good research now, he said, as the Emergency had stalled all normal recreational horse business. The east of Eire was locked, he said, no transportation to or from Albion was possible. Sea transport for horses now more likely from the south or even the wilder west Atlantic side. I knew nothing about horses.

He quickly became quite intrusive in his questioning. I sensed that he was kind of aware that it was in fact me alone that ran the loops, and that he knew I could do what I liked with them.

The trust in the man came from my realisation that we had both such an enormous Albion background and were also, or still, Eirish - even me, convinced by now. First he had been keenly interested in the loops as a system and only later, and to be honest, much to my prompting, did he develop an interest in the results, the ships traffic if you like. Looking back later, I think he played it really well.

He lit two fresh cigarettes now in his mouth, and handed me one, again good prewar stuff and we sat back on the wooden bench while the cold and humid evening fell over the stretch of water in front of us - which the Albions, when they still owned it, called Doonhaven. A very safe haven indeed.

We talked again about horses. He was glowing, he loved the subject. He had bought a breeding stallion for a price that would have been

impossible in normal times, he said. Now with all the international travel restrictions, values had plummeted. I said that I would love to visit his farm. He did not react to that, instead inhaled deep from his cigarette. We were silent for a while. It was indeed excellent tobacco.

“Any movements?” Rick asked suddenly. I was surprised. He had never before inquired so bluntly about the results of my work. But I knew instinctively that he would go at some stage in this direction. I asked him why he was interested, so out-of-the-blue. Because it is a great technology, he said, we Eirish should be more proud of it. And develop it more. After the Emergency, he said if there was ever going to be an ‘after-the-war’, he would try to re-apply with the military and see if he could be assigned to the Eire Navy Technology Department. There was still so much to do for the country! I decided to tell him about the five signals we had got over the last few weeks. His face lit up again, now even more than when we talked about horses. He leaned back and looked happy, but he was not relaxed. He just kept on firing questions, one after the other. He gave the impression to be very well prepared for this talk.

During the ensuing talk, or interrogation rather (now that it was dark and we had no reason anymore to stay on that bench there, with a very humid storm coming up - he kept on talking and asking though), I started to realise that freely giving out all this information could be rather

inappropriate. Somewhere, somehow, to be fair however, I didn't give a damn: nobody, except Trevor-Smith maybe, had actually restricted me in sharing information. My fellow-Eirish they didn't give a hoot either, it seemed. They were too busy staying out of the whole mess... or too busy manipulating themselves into a new post-war role opposite the Albions, if indeed there ever was going to be a post-war, to copy Rick's thoughts. And let's not forget, it had not been very motivating for me that nobody showed interest in my loops: I felt pretty much on my own, hiding an explosive secret that I didn't own. I wanted to talk about it freely and proudly. The loops had kept me here; they had me have my passport changed. Thirdly, I needed to get clarity on my findings, there was so much that I did not understand. Well, to keep it short, I had in fact an enormous need and urge to talk about it. Rick came at the right time! I only realised to the fullest much later that he was most probably indeed a vulgar spy; a classical thief of information.

I took another cigarette out of the open packet he had left just between us and lit it with the stump of the earlier one. It felt it was soon going to rain heavily, but I didn't see anything coming down just yet. The first signal, I explained to Rick, came in the middle of the night, around two in the morning and had been registered by the new writing devices we had installed as part of the potentiometers, just before the Emergency started. The signal was on the long Mundy Bay loop.

There was no question about it that something had passed. There were no surface observations though, while it had been a relatively clear half-moon night. To be frank, I do not remember if there had been a watch on duty, as all motivated and qualified people had left. A very similar signal - this time, I was present in the Bay loop cabin myself - came up on the meters around sixteen hours later, six o'clock in the evening. No surface sightings here, I checked myself. There were no doubts.

"They came back," said Rick, staring blankly in the night. I think by then it had indeed started to rain.

"What?"

He coughed, inhaled again. What?

"Mundy Bay is not that long. They are going to check out Mundy town, from Sheep's Head to Mundy is about twenty miles, right? Average speed of a subsurface submarine is seven knots. Got it? It took around three hours to get to Mundy harbour, they staid overnight at periscope depth, checked out the movements, noted the number of vessels, Navy and civilians in town, perhaps landed a spy, whatever... stayed let's say twelve hours, then moved back submerged at the same periscope depth, over your highly sensitive looped cables. Out to the ocean again. Not to be seen again...? Who knows?"

I suddenly felt depressed, in that moment. The rain added insult to injury. Never had I gone that far yet, to attach real conclusions to my

electrical readings. I felt very technical, limited and useless. Of course, this is what it is all about, I now saw, that is why we made this; this is why I am here!

“What do you think?” Rick asked, enveloping himself in a huge wet cloud of exhaled smoke. No cough. He stared in the dark rain in front of him. What did I think? I felt quiet. My brain raced for answers. What does he mean? German? Albion? American? I said I didn’t know.

Rick relaxed a bit. He looked at me. Then spoke: “Albions would come in and out fast, but they would never stay. They had been kicked out of here after all. They are persona non grata. Politically highly sensitive to challenge Eirish coastal waters. Americans... well I don’t think they are interested in us Eirish, why would they be? We are neutral, kind of on the American side, but not on the Albion side, well, what can I say, they wouldn’t go so slow either, I would say, and not stay that long. Must be the Germans! Got it, good old Bernhard? Got it? We need to assume, to interpret, to conclude, to extrapolate... otherwise technology is just technology... So, it must have been the Germans, our Kraut friends was what they were. But, what the feck are the Krauts looking for in Mundy Bay...?”

I finished my cigarette and threw it in the rain that was now pouring down fast and massively. The heavy glowing end of the sump sizzled out in a second when it hit the soaked grass in front of

us. I was getting cold. Wanted to go back to the pub. Get drunk. Forget. Sleep. Get out of here.

We were quiet for a short while. Before I realised what I said, I offered another solution. What if it was another one? The first one didn't come back, stayed where it was. Possible, Rick laughed, but then they are stupid idiots. How long can you stay in Mundy Bay? On a clear, quiet, sunny day even a boy shepherd could see them from above, from a hill position, through the water. But you know what, it is not impossible. Especially when they rest on the bottom... Good thinking!

That night, I didn't tell Rick about the three other signals. Three, that would mean one in-and-out, plus one staying in. Or: three coming in, none coming out? I was confused; needed to measure more and better and I needed to think a bit more as well. No more readings without conclusion... From now on.

May 1941 - Doonhaven

I write this while I am on duty in the main cabin myself. As I am most of the time. Self-imposed duty. Nothing else to do.

There were so many movements lately - basically starting when spring took over from the long wet winter that I decided to take most readings, if possible, by myself. The other guys, they are OK, but sometimes I suspect they sleep and switch the recorders off. If they found out there had been a reading, they would be required the next day to make a report. With 'interpretation' as I now requested as routine. So simply disabling the reading was a great advantage. They would rather play golf on the nine holes that the Albions left on the other side on the mainland, next to the Navy coal bunker station.

Rick had also come to Doon. Unannounced of course. He stayed in The White House on the Low Road. He used another name on the island, he said because of a heritage question for which he was being looked for in his hometown on the mainland (he never told me which one that was). He even spent a night in the hut with me, but did not sleep at all, and made notes and copied the readings, including the unclear ones. Told me not to tell anybody. He was just interested in the

technique. He admired my system very much, that was all. It was all in the pure interest of the 'Eire-of-the-future'...

My god, what a winter it had been. Storm after storm crept in from the Atlantic. Tens of vessels at the time stayed for days, sometimes weeks in Doonhaven, and if they were not Eirish, then they were sequestered by Eirish from each other - and prohibited to disembark on the mainland. Crews were only allowed to land under Navy supervision. Formally the duty of the Eirish authorities, it was often still the omni-present Albion ships that supervised and managed the anchoring. The old colonisation and the perception of a shared enemy blurred the lines of duty.

How - with this continuous bad weather - could this land, this big green wet island have been the preferred habitat for so many people during long prehistoric years? Can one believe that civilisation was parked here, as some say, for centuries, on remote islands, not like here on Doon, this is not a remote island, it just lacks a bridge to the mainland, no I mean real remote islands...? Islands only visible on a clear sunny day.

Two days later

Tonight is warm and beautiful. A glorious night. That's why I am perhaps in this writing mood. Before the last few days, I hadn't put pen to paper for at least four to five months. Who is ever going to read these memoirs? They are dangerous and I should not even keep them.

Rick only showed at night. He never took a ride with any of the Navy vessels, or with any of the islanders it seemed. Would he have his own boat to get to the island? He always came strictly by foot to the huts. Never before twelve midnight and never after four in the morning. As toddlers are afraid of the dark, he was afraid of the light. I took on more and more nightshifts myself, as signals were more likely to be had in the middle of the night rather than during the day. Although we did get them at daytime as well, I have to say, the recorders actually increased the number of observations in the dark.

There was one disciplinary imperfection in Rick's stealthy life style, and that was his incessant cigarette smoking. I had developed an extra sense for knowing that Rick was on his way to the hut: I could smell his smoke from about a mile away, unless the wind blew it the other way. I instantly recognised his weird, unusual expensive brand of tobacco.

About a week ago he came to the hut, just when the high barometric pressure field laid itself out over our eastern part of the Atlantic and the heat spell began. In his tobacco halo, he entered the hut without knocking and closed the door carefully behind him, just stopping short of actually locking it behind him with the key, which I had kept stuck in on the inside. He did feel very much at home in my domain by then and frankly, I did not care. Although I had still no clear idea of what his true mission was in his current life - well, spying obviously, but for whom? - I trusted him. I often found him too inquisitive, and I realised it annoyed me, but I felt all my information was safe with him. Like it stopped with him, for a personal greater goal. At that night, Rick brought information himself - unprompted, not asked for. That very insight suddenly gave my work and beliefs a new lease on life and handed me the professional and personal attention that my Eirish compatriots were withholding from me. Well, anyhow, no active withholding... they most likely had simply just forgotten about me and my loops.

Rick wasted no time.

"Did they come out?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "they came out the day before yesterday."

"Confirmed Albion, correct?"

"Yes," I said, "their speed was clearly Albion." (We had calibrated our understanding and had become good at it).

“Nothing coming in, I guess?” asked Rick. He smiled at me, but he didn’t look at ease. He took a many-folded, discoloured piece of paper out of his long coat. He unfolded it. It was the same hand-drawn map he had laid out on the cabin table the last time he was here. I got curious again. I could learn.

The chart was now fully unfolded and stretched over the entire chart table depicting the North Atlantic. Albion and Eire and a part of France were on the right side, North America, Canada, some Greenland and Iceland were on the other side. The part of the chart that was ocean carried lots of lines. Rick had briefly explained it to me the last time. There were two grids on the chart: one the official internationally agreed naval grid, which followed the traditional meridians and parallels; the other was – and he had had a weird enigmatic look on his face when he told me – the secret German naval grid, much thicker manually drawn lines, a completely different artificially drawn-up system that enabled the German navy to apply an alternate code for their coordinates system. I had never heard about it and when he tried to explain, I did not understand the finesse of the difference. And I never understood if it was really that secret when Rick could work with it - and share its origins and principles openly with me.

Rick had been working on the map since the last time. There were now different colours, round spots in groups on both sides of the ocean. They

were black, red or blue. Then there were bright bars, green and larger than the dots. Also circles, squares, triangles - all in different colours. Hand-drawn and coloured.

He drew a chair close by and sat at the table. I sat next to the meters and looked at him. He expected me to sit at the table as well: I could see that from his demanding, near-military expression...

"The Battle for the Atlantic is going into its final phase, Bernhard," he proclaimed. "The Allies are not scared anymore and the Germans are definitely also no longer intimidated. The Albions understand all German strategy and tactics - and the Germans still consider themselves to be the strongest. We have two over-confident, strong parties, eager for a good fight. The 'knowing-all' against the 'best-in-the-game'. They are sucked towards each other. On a collision course literally, they are going head-on. Something's gotta give... Someone is going to need to win. And as a logical result, somebody's gonna lose."

He took a deep breath.

"Here," he said, and pointed to the large concentrations of stars on the American side.

"American shipping. They are now launching convoys, nearly every week, every four to five days. They are so sure, with their improved convoy system. Zig-zag tactics, ample destroyers around them all the time, even seaplanes and regular air cover, now much farther than what was possible only last year. You know, Bernhard,

you can see subs very well from above. At periscope depth there is nowhere to hide. Big whales, looking to breath, nowhere to hide."

"I know," I said and now decided indeed to join him at the table. But I did not sit down. Something made me slightly uncomfortable tonight in Rick's demeanour. I thought: that's why they go over my loop at night. In the midst-of-the-dark-night, exactly at the hours when you are walking to my hut, I thought, but did not say it. Nighttime seemed the solution for everybody in this conflict.

But the Germans (he had explained me once that he refused to call the subs Nazis as most of the German navy, and especially the submarine officer force was led by splendid young captains, free-spirits, non-conformist intelligent men often still in their twenties - who knew that they had to do their war duty, but found no intellectual or emotional support in the Nazi message... And the crews were just drafted, no volunteering or other hidden heroism; poor city boys and young farmhands, most likely very scared of water, drawn by cruel lottery into the cramped forward quarters of a U-Boot) had finally found their true fighting spirit in the 'wolf pack' tactics. They had spread out long lines - along the secret German grid - of hidden and waiting subs, all over the Atlantic. Each one of them hoped to spot one of the rewarding convoys. When one of them indeed did see the tens of full bounty ships in their defensive yet eager grouping, they would call-

signal urgently in to Berlin. All the rest of the pack nearby would be hurried subsequently - coordinated by Berlin! - to the lucky spotter's coordinates. In a true wolf pack they would then attack the convoy, drive them crazy, chase them to exhaustion, kill those left behind. Sometimes they were actively hunting, sometimes they were grouping together in an ambush configuration - waiting for the right moment for the kill, the jugular, the murder. The days of letting survivors get away in lifeboats with donated provisions, gallantly waved-off to a nearby coastline, were over. Deck mounted machine guns administered the last rites now.

He just continued without soliciting feedback and gave me his perspective on how the Battle of the Atlantic would develop. The wolf packs could still strike it lucky and tip the balance. If they could seriously damage at least five convoys per month, the Allies would be forced to rethink their novel Atlantic crossing principles. He gave figures in tonnage and said that more than ten percent increase in Allied ships' sinking would turn the war into the Germans' favour. I had no idea what he was talking about. He was going too fast for me; I couldn't keep track of these calculations. Never been good at mental calculation really. I just wanted to spot signals and help the Albions defeat the Germans. And of course keep our technology alive for the Eirish, if they should ever show interest. I think that were the only motivations, I had at that stage. This game was too

sophisticated for me. Rick knew a lot about it; that was clear. What was his role? Were the Eirish handing over this information? Through the likes of Rick...?

Next to his nicotine habit, there was something else I detested in Rick. He started to call me 'little brother' or 'little buddy'. It was nice of him to be a bit more friendly and personal, but I did not like to be reminded all the time that I was perhaps too young, for the decisions I had been making and for the work I was doing. Then, it made me think of my own little brother - who was safe in America. Well, 'little' - he was nearly grown up now. I missed my entire family actually. Hadn't heard anything, seen them for years. Would they be missing me? Would they still be there?

At that very moment - Rick sitting, his head bowed over the chart, me standing next to him, looking literally over his shoulder - a signal like an explosion came through. Rick saw it first. We both stood up and took the two steps to the wall with the meters. The signal went off the charts. It was as clear as could be. Very fast and large, dipping, then coming up again. Never seen such a large and fast one though. But it could be a normal surface ship! I phoned to the south Bay loop cabin and got very unexpectedly an awake watch duty staff on the line. Nothing on the surface. Visibility excellent, Sir. Nope, no ships, Sir. No. Nothing. We talked about the split signal. Up, down, and up again.

“There is two of them,” said Rick, interrupting, sounding firm and convinced. “The first tows the second. A wounded brother, a wounded wolf from the pack. I can smell the blood, the gore from here...” As if to underline the aromatic statement, he produced yet again another cigarette, sat on the chart table and looked at me with an intensity which was new to me. Rick had entered the game himself, it looked. Did they move in or out of the Bay? Did Rick know something that I did not?

February 1942 - Doonhaven

Over the entire last year honestly again no time to write in this stupid journal. Been more on the water than in any of the measuring cabins lately. Rick's gone! No idea where he is, where he went. Who he was. He might be dead - it's war after all. Feels like everybody's gone. All deserted the war, the effort, the Emergency. Deserted me. Gone. All have vanished.

Basically, the numbers didn't tally. Very simple, and that's how it further started. Eventually, there were always three not coming out! I recalculated all sightings and signals, took me a full day. Reconciled them from time to time. Three remained in Mundy Bay; no other explanation possible. Recalculated and rechecked - went through all observations, I had made since the loops were made, including all my notes taken during the long conversations with Rick. Only in the very beginning the loops were sometimes off, no longer than a couple of hours, and that was before we had started routine and disciplined administrating plus counting. Anyhow, three signals were missing. Sure as hell, one hundred percent sure! The fact that it was an odd figure and not an even one, gave better proof. I was very confident about it.

No real clear way though to guess when exactly the boats that hadn't come out, went in;

but I was sure it must have been the last two-three weeks. Before, we never had a sub, or a positive signal unaccounted for, for longer than a week. Three subs hence: the maximum three weeks. Schoolboy math. All obvious and clear - but what was actually going on? I had no idea! It was always the same, but still it didn't make any sense.

And finally, there was no more Rick to guide me. He would have encouraged me to do what I eventually did. To start with, I entrusted one of the good local guys with the new information, because I needed help: I could never do this alone. There was an island boy, Denny Donovan, a very smart kid. He had just finished high school at the pre-seminary in Bandon. After, he had drifted back to the island, not because he did not want to continue his studies, but because his fishing-farming-shop-keeping parents had no money, and worse: no vision of a what to do with an intelligent kid that did not really want to become a priest but saw no other way to develop himself. He was instructed to help his father, fishing for a couple of years; then possibly seek out a job with the Mail or with the shop. If times would change, there might be money for a short-track schoolteacher's curriculum in Mundy. After that, he could take a job as an assistant schoolteacher, ending up on another poor island or in the slums of Sligo, Slane or Dublin. (Brains were obviously not always seen as a blessing on Doon Island. It provided unwelcome challenges

for which there were no immediate, let alone affordable solutions...).

I picked Denny for three reasons. Firstly, he had already worked with me on the cables, and also during the initial loop trials. I had evidence that he had kept his mouth shut on what had transpired on the meters in the waters surrounding his island. Secondly, he was indeed un-island-like clever. Last, but not least his father owned two boats, a large trawler with which he made day trips for shrimp and lobster and a much smaller one, without a cabin, but with a strong new diesel engine, which he used for small trade between the island and the mainland. Denny drove that smaller boat regularly. He could take it out whenever he felt like it, no questions asked. He got fuel from the Navy; that was perhaps why I offered him the job alongside me. All islanders who in some way provided service to the Navy, got fuel - which was becoming more and more scarce at the time. Clearly Denny entered the picture here.

I assumed that the subs had to come up regularly to refresh the air inside and to enable the diesels to run and to keep the batteries charged. Also to give the men a break - to smoke and walk around on the deck. I had read about the subs in that earlier Great War: some had snorkels, and could breathe permanently when just under the surface - that was however for the diesel engines only, they did not do a lot for the overall air inside. They really had to come up once in a

while, whether they liked it or not. And this I needed to know. Coz' my observations needed to tally. Three is an odd number. Always observations in 'three', for more than a year now...

Coming up at night would be the best, from their hiding point of view, especially during a dark new moon or during bad weather. Bad weather being rain or fog, not storms, as the tiny submarine hulls and the movements they would incur would make any human aeration exercise quite uncomfortable, if not plain impossible. The rocking would render the men simply seasick - even outside in nice fresh air - no such a problem under water - there are no waves, no rocking when comfortably submerged...

I had to take the lead here. Show some initiative. So - plain gambling on a chance encounter - we went out with the first new moon. Leaving at around eight in the evening from the little pier in Roerring, it looked like we were just going to make a routine crossing to Castletowndoon. Denny (and I had not asked him for that; it simply showed the boy's intelligence) had put some empty fishing crates in front of the engine, similar crates as his father would use to get supplies onto the island from the mainland. We had clothed ourselves for a normal short crossing of Doonhaven Bay to town and did not bring any extra gear, suggestive of a longer trip. He had not been briefed on the true intent - but he understood, I guessed. We looked like we were

going for simple supplies or a fishing run - only the hour on the clock was suspect.

When we left the small dock and took the wide bent right around The Rock in front of the harbour, I felt like we were not going to be lucky tonight: there was no moon and it was a dark somber night, there was hardly any wind. Where did I base this sortie on? Could it all be based on misunderstanding? Wrong extrapolation?

No moon, no stars, it looked like it was going to be a pitch-dark night. No waves, no sound. No wind. Ghostly silent. At least it was dry. Deeper into Mundy Bay it would probably be so quiet that we could hear the stale swell from the Atlantic, originating from some old far-away storm, smashing into the furthest island rock, right under the light house.

We followed for about twenty minutes the normal expected crossing bearings, then tuned down the engine and crept onto the southern rocky mainland shores, following its illogical curves eastwards, into true Mundy Bay. That took us nearly an hour, as we did not go fast anymore. We had no lights; we both sat low on the wooden boards in the open cockpit of our boat. We did not even smoke: even a tiny little glowing cigarette-end might give us away, we thought. Or the smell of smoke would. Denny stopped the engine twice; once when he saw a man on a donkey on the seaside road, very close to where we were and a second time when a person on the rocks, working on an upside-down-turned rowing boat, again

close to the road, called out something loud out to us. Well, we thought it was to us. We stopped the engine. We floated on the ebb tide now; moved slowly out of Mundy Bay back to the ocean, rounding the eastern tip of Doon Island. The now invisible rowing boat guy yelled a few times more, but our impression was he had shouted towards the land and not to us - he actually sounded drunk now, and then his voice disappeared all together. I realised at that moment that it would be even more difficult for a submarine boat to surface here and remain undetected - definitely in these windless conditions. Far too close to humanity.

I had studied the charts carefully for this trip and tried to memorise all relevant data. Depth and distance to shore would be the key factors for a submarine's undetected survival in the bay. As a rule of thumb I had accepted that depth should be at the very minimum a hundred feet and distance from shore at least a half to a full mile. That would bring them possibly only at a straight angle from Ardgoal, indeed about a mile out; there were not a lot of other location opportunities... Further out east in the Bay would of course qualify too, but that would float them too close to the urban settlements near Mundy and the odd possibility of detection by smaller vessels, local traders, smugglers, fishing and lobster trapping boats and all kinds of dinghies - going out at any hour, their clocks driven by the tide. And the unpredictable illegal closing time of the pubs...

The light of the Beacon on Roancarrimore, the lonely rock island was off, for more than a year already; shipping was not welcome anymore along the Bay. It took us nearly a full hour along the shore before Denny set course to the central spot of the Bay, at the ninety degree angle with Ardgoal - where I assumed the subs could be hanging out. The night had now grown indeed at its darkest and I was amazed at how limited the view had become. I thought we had left under a clear sky, but there were no stars or perhaps they would come up later? Couldn't imagine that though.

I temporarily took the helm from Denny, who first peeped over the stern and then lit a cigarette with matches, squatting and hiding behind the engine chest. I was getting seriously cold now. We sailed purely on the compass, which we now lighted up every four to five minutes with the large torchlight that Denny had confiscated from his father's fishing boat. Denny kept looking around, at the same time that I peeped regularly at the compass.

Without any warning, he suddenly killed the engine and let the boat drift without further steering. He came to sit next to me in front of the boat and asked me for another cigarette. I had given up any submarine hope - he could smoke his heart out as far as I was concerned. We were quiet though, indeed smoked, looked around and listened. As expected, we heard, next to some very late (or were they early?) birds, only the water

splashing against the rather thin wooden hull of our vessel. Very faintly, from another faraway land, we discerned the anticipated sounds of the old ocean against the old rocks. It was eerily quiet.

Denny, like during the long night shifts in the measuring cabins during the trials, did not speak. This was pure duty for him, talking would not contribute to the task at hand. That was good, because I could normally barely keep quiet for extended periods - with a talkative partner I would have long conversations. His taciturn character also prevented me from wasting my time talking. He smiled back, smoked and looked up, without a clear visual focus. He was listening. Well, more active: he listened.

Denny woke me with a mean painful poke in the side of my body. I lifted my head, but was so sleepy, that my head sagged back. He lifted my head up and whispered: "Listen up Bennie! Do you hear that?" At that moment I became aware of a long hissing sound. It got stronger, and then with some splashing it disappeared. It had a movement this sound, it had a speed, and then there was another one, same, but with a shorter hiss. Then another, and another, four, five, more? I reckoned it passed about twenty to thirty feet from our little boat. I tried to stand up to see what was passing by, whether it was in actuality a sub. Denny pulled me down before I could even stretch my knees to a more natural position. I bumped back on the wooden floor and I hurt myself. Before I could speak Denny let out a

'ssshhhh' and put a stretched finger over his lips, staring seriously at me. Quiet now, there were subs! I leaned back with my head against the inner side core of the boat and thought how lucky we were. Only the first night out and all our theories, the loops, the small electrical currents, the measurements, the meters, the recorders, the long nights at the cabins, my new identity... it had all not been in vain... Subs!

When I smelt it, Denny jumped up and laughed. He laughed so loud and hard that it pained my ears. This smell was absolutely awful. Rotten fish, rotten proteins... Dead bodies, I could not describe it differently. Denny pointed at them. There were two of them pretty close to the boat and although we did not see any of the enormous frames, I saw part of a tail fluke moving like a very powerfully pulled plough through the perfectly flat water surrounding us.

Denny trotted back and forth in the boat; he was excited to see the large animals. He shouted at them like they were horses and for a while it looked like they hissed back at him, while they were at the surface passing us by. Then suddenly, they were gone. Deep down again. We heard nothing anymore. The quiet re-encapsulated us. It was a dream. The dark, the quiet, the water closed over our memory.

A long week later we went again. At night of course. There was some moon now - until about one in the morning. We left, under cover of a light persistent drizzling rain, around half ten. Denny

came straight from Morty's Bar and was slightly drunk. He smelt of the local heavy malt beer and he had to piss twice over the small boat railing, even before we had turned around The Rock and lost sight of the small Roerring harbour. The rain turned a bit heavier when we cruised along the mainland shore again, and at one moment we had to slow down, as Denny seemed to have lost his way. It was less dark than last time, but the rain curtain blurred the visibility and made our vision thick and unreliable. Whenever he saw rocks, or even heard rocks, Denny knew where he was and could continue. He truly navigated on sounds, the different sounds of the different waves crashing on different boulder material. We sailed faster than last time to our waypoint opposite Ardgoal, where we would tack at ninety degrees again to the centre of Mundy Bay. To the theoretical, presumed submarine hiding spot. We now chain-smoked - lighting cigarette after cigarette with the earlier cigarette - as it was difficult to ignite cigarettes in the rain with a flame, but when we reached our point, faster than last time, the last cigarette stumps flamed out in the now pure vertical rain. There was a bit of wind, but not a lot. A very long, low ocean swell moved through the Bay and our boat moved synchronically. We had put on our oilskins straight after departure, but we did not want to sit down, fearing that the wet would still get through the material and soak us. Strange enough it was not cold at all for a February night. Sometimes it even felt warm:

some small gusts of the southwestern breeze brought a humid hot streak of air. It made our faces glow.

About an hour after we had stopped the engine, the sky grew a bit darker, indicating that the fresh small moon had left us. We leaned with our backs opposite of each other against the bulwark insides. Denny had managed to get a cigarette running again, so we kept on smoking. Happy to be sitting, I had got pretty tired of the standing up, but I was not sleepy. We did not talk, which still pained me a bit, but it became the standard whenever I was on patrol with Denny. I just wondered what he had been contributing to the drinking conversation in the pub earlier? Non-communicative Eirish are a rare sight in their watering holes.

The rain subsided. I was dozing away - now while standing up. Only horses can sleep standing up, they say. Therefore, I first thought that I was dreaming, or rather, I did not pay focused, eager attention to the voices as they came up as somehow completely normal in the no-man's-land towards the twilight sleep that I had entered. But eventually they did wake me. Not Denny, who was still sound asleep. He had finally sat down on the wet floor against the engine board and had slumped towards the side of the steering wheel. A young animal fast asleep.

The voices were from young men and they sounded cheerful, happy, playing. It was not really close, I could not discern any differences,

languages or meaning in the vocal sounds. I turned my head and ears in a better-focused direction: heard laughing and loud splashing. Water fun noise.

I bent down and woke Denny, who stood up immediately and in a reflex wanted to start the engine and started to turn around the helm. I stopped him before he could make any noise and - copying now his very own instructions from the last time - I produced a vertical finger over my lips and ensured him to be quiet. He nodded submissively - he listened.

We both caught the wet sounds now very loud and clear. I perceived we were drifting in the direction of where the sounds originated. It did not go fast enough for Denny: he took a large oar and put it in the brass oar holder at the stern and started to scull us through the water. Soon enough he had created a nice boat speed.

Instinctively, I went to the front of the boat and posted myself as the watch. We produced no discernible sound. The voices became slightly louder and more distinct. More personal. Now I could clearly hear it was not Albion that was spoken and I could separate a few serious old voices from the louder and more cheerful younger ones.

And then very suddenly I saw it. A large black steel fin on a low stretched dark platform, which rocked rhythmically and slowly on the bay-swell. We were perhaps fifty-sixty feet away. I called Denny, who had only looked back to follow

the directions of the scull oar, and he looked up to the front and immediately started to turn the boat around. That was his instinct - surely he had not even had time to think about what he was going to actively do. Fear-flight-flee.

Now with the scene changing before our eyes, it looked like there were about ten men on the hull, three were in long raincoats, they carried formal caps, their ears covered. The rest, mainly young guys, some of them boys really, were in various states of nakedness, gliding off the hull, or climbing up again, using a collection of intertwined old ropes that were fixed as a kind of small stepping ladder at the back of the fin, the tower. Until they had noticed us, they were jolly, loud and all having a good time. What I did not understand: some were holding each other, in couples, giggling, high pitched voices - very happy. The old long coated men instructed the younger ones and these then jumped in under their commands, provoking laughter in all the others. How can they swim in this cold? - I thought, they must be freezing! I did not reflect on the otherwise exciting discovery of sub, did not wonder if they were Albions, Yanks or Jerries. Naked men in an ice-cold sea. I just thought of the cold.

Then they saw us! One boy who had incidentally swam out far, saw our boat frantically trying to get away from their scene and started to shout back to his base, his head twisted for effectiveness of the cry, but with his eyes still

firmly on us. He threaded water, he was not afraid at all. He did not swim back to his sub. He shouted more words, although we couldn't understand what he was trying to convey.

A lower, more mature, voice now shouted in our direction, and we saw all the men in the water moving back to the sub. Those who were on the hull started to quickly put on their clothes; the swimmers frantically tried to climb back on the hull, flocking around the impromptu rope ladder. Most hull men then disappeared fast in the fin-tower, climbing up, then fast dropping in. The low voice shouted again, clearly at us, and I saw him - could not believe my eyes! - pulling a handgun from his waist. He aimed at us and shot. Without any qualm, without any reflections. He shot. We were being shot at!

I could not figure out what direction he had now taken, but I shouted at Denny to stop sculling. Denny stopped and looked frozen at the strange tableau developing. The officer shouted again at us and Denny raised his hands. His revolver was not aimed at us anymore. He had lowered it, while he dialogued frantically with the other long coats behind him on the deck. It had remained pretty busy now on the shiny black hull of the submarine.

I still thought of making a smooth escape. Denny however, looked immobilised by fear - a tiny forest deer in the headlights of a car - and without him it would not be possible. The gathering on the sub turned more relaxed and I

perceived voices laughing about the frozen idiot fear-fixed stature that Denny had adapted. I wanted to say something to him, but then I realised that his fear looked so damn real that it would explain to the submariners that we had really run into them by chance. Night-fishermen bumping into unexpected bay guests. Surreal.

There was new activity at the base of the black fin. They produced a small black rubber dinghy, which they lowered fast off the hull in the flat water. One swimmer and one long coat had themselves descended into it and they pushed off from the sub. The long coat sat in the back on the wobbly floorboard with his legs crossed, while the swimmer, now in long pants and a woolen pull-over, sat on his knees with his back to us and rowed the tiny inflatable in our direction. When they were near I observed the officer holding a gun in his right hand, not a revolver anymore, but something bigger.

Denny had in spite of his fear and my warning, started to scull again, very smoothly and quietly. Of course the dinghy caught up with us fast. The officer started shouting something at us, which sounded like Albion. Denny stopped and looked at them. He froze in his earlier position and raised his arms ridiculously high up. The first thing the officer asked when he put his left hand on the side of our boat, fixing our position next to the dinghy, was: "Eirish?"

We nodded submissively. What else could we do? He was still young, much younger than I

thought he would be. He had a stubble beard of at least a few weeks, and, well, he had quite a friendly face, actually. He gave the gun to the rower who aimed it straight away at Denny (who closed his eyes for a moment when he saw that - preparing his final prayers most likely) and climbed aboard our vessel. He stood right up, smiled at Denny - who had simply stopped watching - and then at me. I tried to smile back. Then he produced his right hand and wanted to shake mine. I shook his hand.

"We have engine trouble," he said in heavily accented foreign Albion, "we are stuck in your bay."

"I see," I said, and nodded my head again. Would he pick up my Albion accent?

"You are Eirish?" He asked it again. Suspicious indeed.

"Yes," I said, "we are Eirish."

"Then I can trust you," the officer said.

"My name is Helmut. We are running out of food. We need milk, meat, eggs, bread and water. If there were beer, the men would be incredibly happy. We can pay. With cigarettes of course, although we are running low. Rather pay with Albion pounds, American dollars. Silver, bars and coins. We are honest, we are German submariners. Sailors, like yourself. We are not Nazis."

I kept quiet - thoughts raced. There were two that stuck: first, how can I get the information on this 'find' as fast as possible to my contacts in Dublin, hoping it would find its way to Albion

intelligence and second: am I 'yes' or 'no' going to link up with them here, getting them their food, their beer... They are after all enemies, potential invaders, an occupying force with world-domination ambition, right?

I tried to return a smile as natural as possible. I answered, trying to bring a local accent in my voice: "Yes, we are friends, we can do that. I need some money up front," (I thought that would sound professional and serious) "and beer for your entire crew I cannot promise, but the rest I think should not be a problem. Cigarettes I am not sure also, at least not good ones. Where you coming from Helmut? How's the battle going?"

Couldn't believe I said that. It just came out. This was a wrong, stupid turn. Of course Helmut did not take the bait of a casual conversation. He turned to his waiting crew in the dinghy and shouted something to him in German. The sailor pushed the dinghy off and then rowed it the stern to the side of our boat.

Helmut kicked Denny with the side of his foot. Denny froze again, but lowered his arms.

"In the dinghy, now, please," Helmut said sternly. The initial warm ambience had changed into chilled.

Oh my god, I thought, of course, they are not stupid, oh my god, I should have anticipated this. These guys talk business... They are businessmen, pirates, outlaws, renegades, kidnappers, slavers...

Denny started talking to me, rather nonsensical, sounded like begging, but Helmut

told him to shut up. He pushed him in the dinghy, and then he instructed the sailor - as far as I understood their German - to row Denny to the sub.

Helmut sat down on the engine chest, dug a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. Lit the cigarette with a very large lighter that he zipped over his pants and then opened and threw a large flame - and inhaled deeply. I noted that the cigarettes were Albion-made. They looked like a good brand; they had them also once in a while in Castletowndoon.

I honestly struggled now in deciding what to say or do. Denny was clearly being kidnapped! Where was I going? My initial fear and excitement was taken over fast now by the cold of the night. I knew it was going to be even colder in a couple of hours. I leaned back to the bulwark - and I decided, again on a whim - sometimes I really do not think about my actions - to ask Helmut for a cigarette. Apparently his good mood was back - he handed me a cigarette - I lighted it up using the glowing stump of his. That tasted good, these were good old-fashioned genuine tobacco cigarettes. We looked at each other, every other inhale, and I remember I reflected that Helmut was a well-composed cool person. I had read about the heroism of the U-Boot captains and I envisaged here a genuine stereotype, a true captain. I wanted to strike up a conversation again, less intrusive this time, by asking if he was indeed the commanding officer, but the dinghy

with the sailor was suddenly back to fetch him. Helmut took the courtesy of shaking my hand again, and said: "Tomorrow night you must come back. If the weather is bad, then the night after that, if bad again, the night after that, with all the supplies, for forty men for two weeks, you calculate yourself. There is enough money. If you want to see your little brother back..." He smiled and showed perfect white teeth. He gave me a sticky fat bundle of banknotes, which I - without looking at it - stuffed in my coat pocket. Then he lowered himself in the dinghy and they were off. Or was I off? The odd thing was, they rowed in a straight line back to their mother vessel, although I couldn't even see it anymore. They might get lost, like me. What was their homing signal?

Initially, I wanted to wait until daylight, but realised that that was going to be quite some time. I started the engine the way Denny did, and I was lucky that it started straight away on the first crank. Put the engine in gear, tossed the stump of my cigarette overboard and increased the speed on the throttle. I took the helm and sat down on the small wooden steering bench. I had become my own Denny now.

I remembered the wind had come from the southwest when we left and I chose therefore my course straight in the wind. Straight back to Doon looked better to me now than following the shore course. Coming back is less suspicious than going out. A new factor had entered the story; I decided however that explaining Denny's disappearance

would be of later order - there were other riddles to solve first.

Most of the way back - trying to keep my eyes sharply focused on the limited visibility, looking for last-moment fatal rocks, listening to last minute sounds of breaking water - I got lost in the cigarette riddle: Helmut smoked an Albion brand, which tasted good and fresh. Suppose he had not had it purchased one way or another in Castletowndoon nearby, he would have brought it from their homeport, presuming Germans had access to Albion cigarette stock. Possible! Would they go on shore in Albion? Also - disruptive thought - what about this weirdly large lighter... functioning even in the thick drizzle. Wasn't that American? Seen it in some movie... For cigarettes, he was undoubtedly now asking in fact for a new supply, meaning he was running low.

Now, let's put the supply per person at the moment of departure on two sleeves, each with twenty packs, which would give them - with twenty cigarettes per pack - eight hundred cigarettes. The officers had access to the outside when the sub was surfaced - they surfaced very regularly apparently; let's say they - the officers, each - smoked two to five cigarettes of their personal ration a day. Would this mean they were out of port anywhere between roughly a hundred and fifty and four hundred days... More than a year? The cigarette I smoked tasted quite fresh, not dry, acrid or tarry, the real stuff. Were they on a hand-to-mouth regimen, supplied from the

Eirish coast? Was I the only one falling in their sea trap? How would they get supplies otherwise? Dirty tricks to get stuff on board through naive and stupid seamen they encountered by chance, perhaps?

The sky cleared dramatically in the commencing morning. It got lighter around me and could easily see half a mile. The rain had now completely subsided. I was very close to the small guns post near the water on the east point of Doon - it resembled in my tired, sleep-deprived hallucinatory mind a submarine tower! Made me chuckle... - and could even discern the large guns, higher on the hill at Loneport. I decreased the engine pace and dropped the fishing lines with the large but empty hooks overboard and started trawling, stopping once in awhile, getting the lines in and out, navigating large vain circles. Hope I wouldn't catch any fish there, but it would be nice if somebody would see me fishing. I just wanted to sleep.

Entering the small Roerring harbour, just when I came around The Rock that closed The Cove off from the bay, I thought of something else Helmut had said. 'Your little brother.' He thought of Denny as my true little brother. Did he really think that Denny was my brother, or was it an Albion translation of a casual friendly German remark; little brother, like 'little buddy'? Then, Rick had also called me this. And still, I didn't like it. I was nobody's little brother and the only 'little' brother I had was in America, far away from these

threatening waters. Before the start of the Emergency he had left with my mother for America, Dad's country of lost opportunities - but also of safety, rest and future. What a vision and what courage...

Once in bed, thoughts of my family filled my head - before I passed out. Would they be surprised to hear from me, what I was doing and for whom? Pleasantly surprised by my ideas, gust, new loyalties; vision yes... Or would they not see it, not grasp it?

Helmut's stalled submarine had crept into my life now as part of a normal and expected evolution. After the first shocks were over, it did not excite me anymore, I had always known that the loops were working. What did surprise me, honestly, was that nobody knocked on my work cabins since I was back, to enquire about the whereabouts of Denny. Denny had disappeared. Nobody cared! Where was his father? Out to sea himself? Nobody had seen me disembark in the still rather obscure morning and I would stick to the story that he had come back with me, perhaps had gone to the backdoor of the pub and found some buddies to get drunk with into the early hours, nothing unusual. None of my problems. Denny was gone.

Left again early in the evening, with Denny's boat. I had brought more fuel from the Navy camp and had filled up the tank to the rim. Took my time in the boat to make sure that the sight of me alone preparing for another nightly fishing

trip became part of the normal harbour-scape. I crossed straight over to the mainland shore, copying Denny's navigational route and headed for the hamlet of Ardgoal. Mary's shop there would be open until nine or something; even if it would be closed I could wake Mary, I had been there on several other occasions, during nightly military exercises. We had always been entertained with bread, beer and snacks. The military was one of her most stable customers. She would open any time for us!

I tied the boat with double moorings - the high tide was now reached - at the old concrete landing pier. Nobody in sight, pretty fine with me. I walked up the winding unpaved road to the main road and descended onto the bend where Mary's shop was. The pub next door had some lights on behind the windows, but otherwise it all looked very quiet.

Although the place was dark, the door was not locked and Mary, surprisingly, was there herself. She stood on a small wooden stool. She was working on one of the shelves, putting things in order, aided by a tiny flame oil lamp next to her. Saving on power, most likely.

She was not surprised to see a client coming in and started talking to me straight away, about the weather of course, the safe opening act in any Eirish conversation. I came though fast to my wish list, which I knew by heart, and she was not even surprised with the sheer amount of goods ordered. She knew that the Navy had a poor

planning record and that, if it were not plain running out of money, they lacked the leadership and the vision to get crucial supply prepared well in time. Large military shopping lists and procurement parties could materialise at any time.

Beer and cigarettes were all possible, she told me, but it would 'bloody hell' deplete her of her entire stock, so she needed to ask more money for that. I missed out on that economical rationale, but agreed. Milk, eggs, no problem - meat she didn't have, at least not fresh, there was canned meat, corned beef from Argentina. We started to fill old used jute potato bags and she handed me two large galvanised dented iron pails - which she needed back, she said. The cigarettes, I thought, would be quite crucial, so I examined them a bit more in detail. Lit one, they were Spanish, a brand that I didn't know, but they smoked at least as if they were made of genuine tobacco. You could hardly tell nowadays. Not really fresh, a bit dry rather, but better than coming back empty-handed to my officers on deck duty - five per day smokers.

Before I left, I thought of asking for Mary's discretion about this large, unforeseen and nightly purchase. So as not to disturb the locals in these uncertain and uneasy times with the knowledge that the Navy camp on the island had purchased such ample means for egotistical survival, which they never shared with the locals, the bastards. But I decided against that. Asking for discretion here was an open solicitation to public sharing. If I

were lucky, Mary would have forgotten about it by morning. Double lucky, with all the fresh money, she would see the pub early, get easily stone drunk and would wipe it clean of her memory slate anyhow. She did not even look at the amount of money I gave her, after she mentioned the price. Second time nobody counted the stack... She would find out in the pub that it was Albion money... Would they care? Money is money. What's going on in this country?

I eventually walked three supply trips to the boat. Even if I could have gotten Mary's or anybody else's assistance, I did not want any help. I stowed all goods in the bow and covered it with a tarpaulin I had found abandoned on the Roerring dock earlier. When I left again, I had the impression that the wind had somehow picked up, quite substantially actually. This was confirmed by impressive waves when I came out of the small Ardgoal bay. I turned left for a short while, and then started to cross into the larger body of Mundy Bay. The now routine trip into the waters that housed Denny and his newly discovered friends.

The waves started to roll pretty badly and as the course of my boat was exactly on a ninety degrees angle with their stretch, it made the last part of the trip incredibly uncomfortable and awkward. I was a Navy man, true, but not a sailor. I think due to sheer excitement I pushed away any upcoming seasickness symptoms. I started to feel a bit weak. Sign of dehydration, we

had learnt. Drank some more water, felt immediately better. I timed the crossing on my wristwatch, the same way as Denny had done and after twenty minutes I thought I had reached the spot of rendezvous, so I put the engine lower and stuck it in neutral gear. I did not switch it off, as I was not completely confident of being able to get it running again - especially if the seas would get rougher. I could not see clearly on my watch (the torchlight I had stupidly stowed somewhere under the shopping stuff, deep buried under the tarpaulin) but I guessed it was around eleven, perhaps already around midnight. We had not agreed on a specific hour, so I just tried to copy the conditions of the night before, hoping that they would do the same. It was all a shot in the dark, really. I paced through the now heavily rocking small boat for about half an hour, ate something from the sandwiches I had stuffed - wrapped in packing paper - in my oilskin pockets, then thought it wiser to sit down. I sat myself against the shopped victuals in the front of the boat, covered myself with a free-hanging part of the tarpaulin against the bags of potatoes and, incredibly, fell almost immediately asleep. Only later, I realised that I must have been at that stage of sheer exhaustion, not so much physically, being a young man, but rather emotionally: where was this all going? Who was I to trust? Where were my loyalties to be allocated? Who made me play these games? All this excitement and insecurity was pretty much draining, really. Only the drone of

the engine gave me some frame of ease, peace and comfort.

I woke up half an hour later, with a slight headache starting. I drank more water from the large bumped military metal canteen. I didn't hear or see anything else than the black and wavy seas surrounding me, but I sensed something was near. It was like that feeling when you assume you are alone, but you know instinctively that somebody is watching you... It got later and later. I killed time with making rounds around the engine hub in the middle of the boat, counting them, like a prison exercise.

Pffff... the sub emerged so close to my boat, that I could nearly touch it. It came up quietly, like an enormous whale, with some animal-like hissing and splashing sounds. Of course it scared me, but as I had somehow expected it to happen, I felt as well some kind of relief. I stood back in the boat and waited. Two people climbed out of the black fin, the tower, they stood motionless on the deck, then two more came out, with the familiar sight of the black rubber dinghy lowered onto the sea. No Denny! I had drifted away a bit, and wondered if I should have steered my boat towards the sub. I saw however one man in the dinghy rowing fast toward me. He pulled a rope from the deck of the submarine behind him. He tied Denny's, well, my boat now, to the sub. We were connected again. Tethered.

He smiled artificially at me. He remained sitting in the dinghy. I did not recognise his face. I

uncovered the foodstuffs and stuffed the tarpaulin elsewhere. I lifted the first metal bin to the dinghy and the sailor carefully laid it down on the shaky floor of his small vessel. He looked in my boat and gestured that he could handle a few more bags. With his dinghy full, he pulled himself along the long rope and brought the first instalment over. I saw my metal bin disappearing inside, then it came up again through the tower and one of the officers (at least that was what I guessed, as he was wearing a familiar long coat) had it placed in front of him and kicked it professionally in the sea. Some explaining to do to Mary, I thought. Not very helpful this unnecessary rude action. Assholes. The dinghy came back. I told the sailor that I needed to have Denny safe and well on board before he would get any more. He smiled again, produced a revolver from under his dark life vest and waved with it to the rest of the goods. The second metal basket left and most of the other bags. I shouted again at him: "Where is Denny?" He shrugged his shoulders and pulled away. My second bin went swimming, like the first, after a well-aimed football shot. In spite of the situation it was so absurd, it nearly made me laugh.

The crew of the dinghy then changed. A long coat now had taken to the oars. It was a different man. Well-shaven, younger than the captain I had met the other day. This one looked a real poster-German. Perhaps he was a fanatical Nazi. Hard as steel. We finally found one... exciting!

He untied the knot of the rope that connected me with the sub. He didn't care about me. When the knot was loose, he tied the rope onto the dinghy on an oar support.

I said again "Where is Denny?" trying my Eirish accent.

He laughed, took the oars and turned to me: "You'll be back here in five days. Same time, same spot. Give me the rest."

I handed over the last two bags - they were the cigarettes and the rest of the beer. Should have used that better in the Denny-bargain. He disappeared pulling on his line, landed at the side of the sub, goods got sucked through many hands into the tower. The submarine and its people folded up just as fast as they had showed. In three minutes there was nothing left of the spectacle anymore. As if I had nothing to do with it. Whales in a fresh dream. A clear spot that remained on the surface amidst the waves.

I put then the still running engine in forward gear, checked the fuel through the thick indicator glass at the back of the engine hub and posted myself again at the rear with the helm in both hands. I turned towards the wind. Routine. Back to the island; the rock in the centre of my clandestine activities. Only my activities?

I was plain depressed when I arrived back in Roerring. Denny's gone, my intended hard bargain completely lost. Funny enough, Mary's lost old crappy metal bins bothered me the most. These overconfident Germans ran the show, that

was clear, not me! I should have had Rick around to help me to strategise. Something was not going well.

What got me even more down, although it should have revived and assured me of doing the right thing to keep all secret, was that nobody knew or seemed to care what I was doing. There was a complete indifference on the side of the Doon Islanders. If only they knew what was going on, my lord, they would not sleep anymore.

I was instructed by the submarine to be heading back to the same spot after five days - with new supplies. The night I was planning to go heading out (first to Mary's in Ardgoal, then to the rendezvous location), I saw Denny suddenly in the village! He came out of the Roerring post office-cum-shop - and I am still convinced he saw me as well. He was going to talk to somebody who was entering the shop, but he changed his mind and went for it. He had a bicycle with him, a vehicle type rare to the island, it looked like a brand new one. He jumped on it and rushed away onto the low hill that separated the village from the Fort and the further east side. That was not where he lived, I thought. His parents' place was squarely the other way. I was too far away to shout for his attention.

I can no longer find it, but I recall, I did write a very short entry in my hardly touched diaries in those very strange months. 'What happened to Denny?' - was the only question that I couldn't shake off after the

Emergency. It bothered me for many years after. I did inquire, with the very few local people I trusted, and even tried to get the answer out of the secret officers that were so interested in me, after the Emergency had ended. Their consistent answer to my desperate search was a chuckle, or a smile, or a deep cigarette smoke inhalation, always with all eyes towards the ceiling. I knew they knew! Was Denny involved in some kind of conspiracy? Then the entire island must have been - which I couldn't believe. Was Denny sent? He was as capricious as Rick... Had he volunteered to have me do the dirty work? Me, an Eirish foreigner?

I remember I found it all so strange and confusing, but there was not a single thought however that suggested that I abandon the path that had been taken now. Duty, it still felt. Also, the night exercises had become quite a rewarding routine - I had started to like them and was attracted to the excitement, finding the attention I craved. As the islanders did not care (their lack of emotion must have been my motivation), I did not even consider avoiding taking Denny's father's boat, unasked, again. I had it now openly fueled by the military guys and I had stuffed quite openly most of the items of the new shopping list in the boat during the last two days in broad daylight. I had even started to purchase openly submarine supplies from the island shop. No questions asked. Nobody gave a damn it seemed. Or would they all know? This was hardly clandestine anymore. Were they all involved? It

would at least explain Denny's re-surfacing and behaviour...

Now I don't even remember in detail what the weather and especially the wind was like that night; it had become such a standard operation by now. No more being secretive - it was quite exciting in the plain open. I know there was of course some swell and there were always waves, but I don't think it ever rained. I did not even take the exact time anymore from my wristwatch once I started my rectangular course off the mainland shoreline into the submarine centre of the Bay. I knew where to go and where to stop. I now had no problem with killing the engine and drifting idly along the bay. I understood the tide, which would always run me back to Doon Island and I was confident the engine would run again once I wanted it to run. Navigating on feeling, not on a compass.

The sub came on the surface, but not so close as last times. Hatches opened, people came out and they blew up and laid out the dinghy and waited. The submarine used its electric engine to navigate in my direction. It stopped about sixty feet away, and then the dinghy was lowered. A trivial event by now. Two men rowed in my direction, filling the dinghy to a dangerous low floating level in the water. One wrong move and they would topple over. When they were nearly alongside my boat, I saw that there was something wrong, no, I felt that there was something not like the last time.

Hey, this was not the same sub that I had seen the other two times! This one was bigger and had a gun not only on the front deck, but also on the aft. The colour of the entire vessel looked more grey than the other one, which was blacker. Or perhaps the paint had faded? The two sailors in the dinghy, one with a gun, held both their left hands on the side of my (well, Denny's) boat. The one with the oars, produced a small handgun from under his bulky life-vest and told me to come with him. Before I could object or discuss the fate of Denny's boat, the sailor in the back of the dinghy had jumped on board and had bent himself over the engine panel and studied the systems the old wooden vessel had. I lowered myself into the wobbly dinghy and before I had settled on the cracked wet wooden floorboard, the sailor at the oars had pushed off. I was on my way to yet another Nazi submarine. Denny's boat, now with a new skipper, followed us.

"It is not at all important how many we are," Captain said, "it is important how many we are left to fight. It is now or never. You get that, I guess?"

I looked at the man, young as they all were. Maybe just a few more years than I had. But they looked old, my lord, they were pale, unshaven, underfed, smelled of diesel, wet socks, shit, piss and - of course - smoke. I sat between the Captain, and an older guy - at least over forty I guessed - who had shaken my hand and said that his name was Gerard and that he was only on a holiday trip

with the sub. He was too old to be a regular crew, he said and laughed until his laugh disappeared in an endless, rough smokers cough.

Captain kept on re-filling my glass with French red wine, and a very good one at that. I had not drunk that for years, last time at least a few Christmases ago, when I was still in Albion. I could still tell a good one from a not so good one.

"You Eirish at least seem to understand," said the Captain who had introduced himself as Hans-Juergen, "that there will be a new Europe. Having kicked out these fucking" (he pronounced that as 'focking', which made me nearly laugh out loud) "Albions, for you guys it is time as well to think of the future, of truly free people and no borders. Go where you like. We always knew that we could count on you people, in times of dire need," he continued (drinking too) and showed his dirty teeth, smiling benevolently around the tiny table.

While we spoke, I saw all my new shopping going through the narrow corridor, brought to the forward quarters by a small chain of sailors, young boys - much younger than their officers.

"You heard about us," Hans-Juergen continued, "we are the only ones in the Fuehrer's force that are allowed to say what we like, if we don't do it at least in public. I know we have a Nazi spy on board" (he slapped Gerard jovially on the back) "but I don't give a flying fock. He is a good man; he is from my hometown, but I can tell you - listen Gerard and take out your notebook! - that as far as I am concerned they can kill Onkel

Adolf tomorrow. The guy is nuts. His original ideas were good, don't get me wrong. Open up that stinking congested hellhole of what is old Europe. Get the people moving; let them settle freely where they like, where the air is clean... A nice farm with a bit of space, a bit of a future, you know. Clean air, clean spirits. We will help everybody, Poles, Russians. The Nazis are crazy, but they will be helpful in cleaning up the old act. You will see, thanks to us, in twenty-thirty years we will have a united Europe; how otherwise will we be able to balance out the Yanks? So what's the problem if we Germans take the lead? Do the dirty work? Not only the Eirish are grateful... hahaha."

Now he slapped me hard on the back. I hardly felt being in the lion's den. I nearly started to believe in the cause myself. Maybe he was right; all these national sensitivities should become something of the past.

We suddenly went through a new shopping list - the guys around me got pretty serious again - and the top of the list had now become booze: whiskey and beer. I didn't dare to enquire but that pointed to the fact that the subs were probably not moving. Stayed stationary in Mundy Bay. They needed spirits to keep the spirits alive.

Captain was called away for something, which I did not understand and I remained sitting at the table with Gerard. I did not feel the slight rocking of the sub anymore and was getting very

cozy in the moist heat of the sub. I was even getting accustomed to the terrible smell.

"How many subs are here in the bay," I asked, happy that I could still express myself. Question was on my lips for months. Now was the time.

Gerard smiled.

"Three at the moment, well Germans at least," he said with a wicked smile. (Ha! I thought. Ha! Three!). "One will be ready to go again in a couple of days, the other and this one is one of those two, they will stay perhaps a week more. Then a fresh convoy will get close to Eire and we will flock out. We need better data," he said, while he leaned back in a tired way to the cushions behind him which were fixed to the wall, "our own wolf packs are so busy destroying Allies, that they sometimes forget to tell the others where they are and what's coming up. They don't share!" I kind of liked this Gerard-guy and it was good to talk to him. He had been all over the seven seas he told me, even as far as the American Gulf, trying to get up the Mississippi river. He was supposed to keep the true Nazi doctrines alive on the subs, but he saw himself, he said rather as a counsellor to the men. He intervened in quarrels and fights: "I am the only Nazi who cares for the mental well-being of the submariners."

He smiled and laid an arm around my shoulder. (Which I did not like, but I just let it go. What could I do anyway?).

"Even Doenitz listened to me."

He had been on so many U-Boote, he had not kept up with the count. Who is Doenitz?

While Captain was still away Gerard produced another bottle of wine from under the table. I found it strange that the label had been removed - like a knife had scraped it off, tediously. Were the crew not even allowed to see where the supplies were coming from? Or was it safer to discard them in the sea once emptied?

He had been to Eire in the twenties with his wife, on a kind of belated honeymoon, they had already had their first child. He always dreamed of buying an old farm there and retire some day. Retire in-the-land he said, please no seas around, but a little lake would do. Pike instead of cod. The Midlands, vanish in the green. He slumped further down on the uneasy bench and into my side. I tried to wrestle myself free from his shoulder embrace, but he did not let his arm go. What could I do?

Hans-Juergen came back and opened yet another bottle. There was no real hardship on U-Boote, I thought, they just hang around in nameless bays, kidnap local boys and extort goods from the indigenous peoples, written down on extensive and detailed shopping lists. Get drunk and smoke their lungs out. Waiting for the things that would or would not come. Not their problem.

I had so many questions on my mind that I wanted them to clarify on, what happened to Denny? How many subs had totally passed, come in and gone out, what was the reason for hanging

around in Mundy Bay? but the more wine I drank – they filled my glass continuously – the less interested I became in the Emergency around us and the more I wanted to hear from Gerard’s stories. He had now started on how he had landed the U-Boote job. A sixteen-year old farm labourer, at the end of the other War, called to Kiel for the compulsory submarine service. He was all over me, traveling to Kiel.

I was still stone drunk when they pushed me off in Denny’s boat. I had fallen asleep more or less in Gerard’s arms (one around my neck, the other in my lap), who had also passed out prematurely. Captain woke us up five minutes before he had scheduled to go down again to lie on the rocky bottom of the Bay, during the day. I waved unstably goodbye to them from Denny’s boat as if they were friends. My big whale, the only animal still listening to me. Still loved me. My new friends, my new loyalty. I sat down for a moment on the bench near the helm and wondered what else was there to do. My hangover was going to be terrible. Fock!

Arriving in Roerring’s tiny harbour in plain daylight, I got some attention from the locals. They stepped to the ridge of the small quay and watched me mooring the boat with long lines - now that the tide was low. They asked questions, for the first time: “Where have you been Bernhard, anything on the naked hooks? Any German patrol boats around, hahaha.”

“Beat the shit out of the bastards, Bernie-boy hahaha? Where is Denny? Drunk again hahaha?”

How did they have the guts - would Denny have...?

The next days I was utterly confused. I called in sick – meaning, I left a message with the cook at the officers mess, since nobody else from the officers’ force was there and surely nobody was interested. I stayed in my room for three days. I think I developed a small fever too, as I had the strangest dreams: about drifting on the ocean for months, hungry sea monsters around me, clean eaten human skeletons floating around my raft. Skeletons that float? They were absolutely weird nightmares. Even after my short illness, after I felt physically better, a feeling of endless doom kept hanging over me - like a hangover elicits guilt. And guilty I felt, I circled in endless thoughts about my loyalties. I had changed my nationality to continue to be helpful in the war against the Germans, to fight the Nazi beast with a supreme technology. Now I was supplying nearly every other day a boatful of consumables to German submarines. The enemy, remember? They treated me as theirs, for better or for worse if you like, I felt like one of them, I liked it on board their cramped vessels, they treated me fair, they trusted me. I knew I was looking forward to going back. Wanted to drink more good wine, hear more stories from Gerard, sit in the warm human climate of human smells, human closeness. These Germans had more feeling for camaraderie than

the distant and tightly-closed islander Eirish. I felt attracted to the German ambiance, their motivation, their sense of duty and focus. It all worried the hell out of me.

I left my bed and went back to the main measuring cabin after four days. Upon entering, I saw that - although I had left a clear service scheme - there had been no duties whatsoever done since I had left the last time; nobody had done any watch, there had been no readings; the writing meters had actually been switched off - some even plainly disconnected from their batteries...! My reflexes wanted to activate the entire system straight away - but I had other matters to attend to first.

I heated up the cabin with a fresh peat fire, made good lights around the table and spread a blank paper sheet out on the charts table. I started to write.

Dear Rick,

I do not know if this letter will reach you in good shape, as I do not know your exact whereabouts. I do not know either if it is very clever to send this letter to you, in the first place. I don't remember any instructions you may have left to that effect.

This is what is going on. I have been out on Mundy Bay a couple of times to see if the numbers were correct and if I could see any subs. Since then, I have

been aboard two out of three submarines now, two of them might have been the same, but the last one was much bigger and with a different hull colour, perhaps a bit older. They have coaxed me in getting supplies to them. They do pay, very well actually, that's not the problem, they have all kinds of currencies on board in ample quantities American, German, Eirish, even Albion, but they had taken Denny (were you still here when I hired him?) as a kind of hostage I guess, to make sure I would return with the supplies. They never exchanged him with the goods. But I saw Denny before my third trip back in the village as if nothing had happened! He avoids talking to me. I am still using his father's boat and nobody seems to give a damn about that. Navy fills up the diesel tank. What's Denny's role? Do you know him? The situation hence is not clear.

They are up to something. I can't get that information, but it is important that you realise that they are indeed up to something. There is nothing wrong with their boats, it seems they are just waiting for something big.

I need your urgent advice Rick. I will keep the contact going as required although it looks like we stopped.

Please get back to me as soon as possible. Rick, I might try to contact the Navy as well. I feel we need to strategise our next steps.

Bernhard

The letter I addressed to:

Mr Rick
Horse Stables of Lord LUMLEY
Near Westport
County MAYO

I glued the back of the envelope closed and signed it several times over the closure, so that Rick could immediately see if somebody had opened it and whether the information would have been possibly compromised. I only realised now that I never obtained Rick's family name. Rick. No name. Was Rick even his real name?

September 1973 - Beara Peninsula

It went all too fast, life. And in spite of all misery it also went very much by itself, all very as a matter-of-fact. Natural evolutions.

I sit at the large kitchen table - everyone has gone to bed. It was a pretty busy day - last guests left this afternoon for Slane and to be fair, I do not expect anyone anymore before the Christmas week... A little break please. Tomorrow is my birthday - I will be fifty-eight!

I strongly believe you have to ask yourself a few questions when reaching that age, like "Am I happy?" Or: "Did I have a good life?" "Did I do the right things?"

I pull the bottle of Paddy's towards me. Paddy, the only loyal friend I had my entire Eirish life. Paddy has always been there for me - through the good times and bad. Best in a normal glass, no fooling around with ice or water. Turned into a real Eirishman finally...

Life is good. Simple and plain. Pauline and I run this Bed and Breakfast for almost twenty years now. Ever more guests from the Continent and from America, Australia even, knock on our brightly painted door. Old Eirish, removed generations from their roots - they all come back at some stage.

It is a simple life. We never have had or will have any substantial money. We eat well though.

We just bought a colour-TV from this season's left-overs; Revenue does not need to know everything.

These last years of the Emergency, on Doon Island, they were bizarre times. The letter I wrote to Rick - then the news I got about my relatives in USA.

Frankly, the arrest was in fact the most surreal and still haunts me - though sheer pointless. Two months in solitary confinement in a police cell in Castletowndoon. The Emergency had ended, the Germans came openly into port and partied for the last time. But I was locked up, suspected of espionage and treason. They walked drunk over the grills separating my deep basement cell from the road and pissed - unconsciously - over my air inlets. German urine streamed over my paint-less walls into my confinement...

Of course there was no case and eventually they admitted that it was all about Rick - they wanted Rick. Whom they never found. Whenever I think of Rick, I now wonder whether he really existed. My thoughts about Rick - in the oh so lonely years after the Emergency - were so intense that I forgot everything about the man: how he looked, his way of speaking, the cigarettes he smoked, what he wanted to know, what he wanted from my company. Therefore I could not be of any help to the police and the secret service - and I became the bogeyman. Me, an ex-Albion... Which half-idiot would change his more than

decent nationality into Eirish... Talking about doing something really suspicious - can you go further? Deeper?

No punishment, no court, no process. They just released me. I wanted to go back to Albion and asked for my Albion passport to be returned. Zero result. Letters, weekly trips to the consulate in Slane. No! No! No! We are not a revolving door, the prickly Albion consul said, further, you were suspected of collaboration with the Germans. Better you stay put, Sir. You are plain Eirish for us. Next please!

Pauline, an Albion citizen, worked at the consulate, at the front desk. She empathised with me, tried to help me get through the mill. We went out together, I learned about her parentless youth, her artistic aspirations - water colour, landscape, seascapes, nature... I never got my passport, but I did get Pauline! I honestly thought she understood me - she fell head over heels in love with me, I was too confused still to answer those feelings then.

Only after Joanna's birth - we called her Jojo - Cupid hit me and I started to feel genuine love and affection for Pauline. I worked in construction in Castletowndoon's surroundings, had a stable salary, but there was not a lot of money after the Emergency. We lived in rented shambles in town and decided to look for a farm to lease. We kept cows and sheep, and we started to make good money - the Continent started to spend money again - on our wool and goat cheese. These things

became fashionable again after years of total austerity. The calf beef was an even better money maker! It sounds so stale and corny but I truly think those were our golden years, we had no electricity, we read to each other by oil lamp and candlelight. Winters were staged in front of the large fireplace, fueled by wood from the farm and peat from the field. A tableau vivant with a crawling, later walking, mumbling, talking, chatting, cuddling Jojo before the wild and energetic flames. We counted on more children, but they simply did not materialise. We could live with that then. No endless tests, fertility clinic visits, lab results. We were very happy with the hand we got dealt.

All the disturbances put on me by my personal challenges and the Emergency changes - of which the effects lasted much longer than the immediate aftermath years - were compensated in the most natural way by Pauline. She did not think in black-or-white systems, villains or heroes, right or wrong. She was out of the circular loop of western life philosophy, which had to declare developments in cycles of events, adjustment, learning and - eventually - repeating the same mistakes. She lived along a horizontal line - matters happen, we move on. A completely different way of living than I had been brought up with. Everything coming on Pauline's path was always new, induced by positivism and, even more striking for her cultural background and nationality: immaterial. She enjoyed a dramatic

sunset, like I enjoyed a few glasses of my local whiskey. From Pauline, I therefore also learned not to look back, not to judge people by their passport, or their imperfections. The horizontal line was old, long, and for us rolling along without asking opinions. On that line, never ending, we would be free.

Another consequential trait I learned from her and which I could soon not live without, was her understanding of and patience with all living species. I honestly think she saw no difference between a baby calf and a neighbour kid - from both she understood, she felt, the needs and motives. In both she would encourage the primitive lust for life, but also the matter-of-factness of simply being alive. Pauline taught me to drift with the flow. Of the recurrent tides of daily life, but also the rivers swollen with sudden unforeseen rainfall. My life with Pauline became an ocean ride on the most agreeable swell, a rhythm that cut out my negative thoughts, my insecurity of my background, my shaky choices, my life before we met. It explained the unconditional love I had developed for her. It was most exciting to see all beautiful character features back in Joanna...

When Jojo had to report to school, Pauline and I decided to look for a bit more sustainable and conventional business. We bought the centuries-old inn in Castletowndoon with help from the bank and converted it into a small hotel.

Foreign, good money tourism was starting to pick up. We did pretty well then, if I look back at it.

Now I fill my days with a simple daily routine, I greet the incoming breakfast staff and supervise the guests' right start of the day. Around ten, I will go out and look for the newspaper at the shop-and-post office. Then I will have my fresh dark strong coffee at the 'Purple Heather', sometimes with an early glass of red port. Strolling back home to sort mail and bills, just delivered by the mailman. Following lunch, a small nap on my coach in my private room in the attic. The early afternoon is for a walk on the Doonhaven shore with Flash - the old boy is waiting for that treat the entire morning already. Back around four - if there are any, I will drink a glass or two with the guests and tell them about the history of the land. We never talk about Doon Island, never do I get any questions about that troubled past, my nationality change, my experiences in the Emergency. I feel more and more often that it wasn't me in those years, but a total different somebody else. We can change, can't we?

Jojo made acquaintance with Ron (I think he is formally a 'Ronald'), when she was sixteen and he was twenty-three. Ron was with a group of German Sea-scouts in Mundy Bay, in some kind of European exchange program. The Germans are back in Mundy Bay, I thought when Jojo told me later and could hardly suppress a humorous thought, and this time it is for good - they will

stay. Because they are sleeping with my daughter...

They now live in Albion. Ron initially aspired to be an actor - but traded interests with aviation. He fell in love suddenly with helicopters and wanted to make flying his career. The last time they were here together, - Jojo very much in love with her German international beau - he, after my inquiry, told me that his now old father had been an officer in the submarine force (I felt like I slipped out of my chair when he told me this). Had been all over the world, even far up the Mississippi in America in combat boats, later he was posted with supply services, diesel fuel, food, on a different type of U-Boot, the 'milking cows' - slower, bigger and much more vulnerable. His father wanted to be proud of what they did at the time, but he lost his pride when he found out that nobody was interested in the successes they had pulled off. He thought that wrong, but he also accepted it as a new fact of life - the world had moved on. We always invited Paddy of course to this conversation and in the end Ron admitted that he liked me as a father-in-law, as he could - without shame or second thoughts - inquire about our Emergency. The War that had made Ron also.

I can hardly imagine that only now Albion has joined our European club. After years of doubt and debate. There was no such paralysing doubt in the old days. And still a few years ago - no single spark of doubt when they refused my passport change for so many times. And no

respectful debate either - they simply did not listen to me. Rejected again!

In Germany it is a mess again, with all the terrorist attacks. It looks like our own North. Ron claims - only after Paddy has joined the conversation - that all those bombs have a decent side also. According to him the Germans have gone from one extreme to another: from simple Nazism to a fascist form of capitalism - which will even actually curtail individual freedom even more than the Nazis did. I did not take the bait and suggested Paddy intermediate in this difficult exchange. And Paddy solved it.

I love Jojo, my only child, so much, that I actually don't care what Ron is trying to say. As I love her, I love him. I am still the same weak, non-engaged type of a non-descript asshole. No opinion on anything. I don't make the future or the past. They make me. I am now moving on the long line. Drift with the flow.

After weeks of loneliness, this Albion officer visited me in my penal space: he interrogated me for hours, only to tell me just before he left for the darkening evening, that my brother Timmy had died, along with my mother. Torpedoed, like so many, on their way home, leaving America for Europe in a considered-safe large convoy. In the middle of the German-Allied War - it might have been sometime 1942 or so. The convoy got massacred... Torpedoes, just like our baby brother earlier. A true family tradition. Only I am left now. What made them go back at that stage?

Leaving safe America for messy Europe? No time and intention to do research, but I heard that their ship sank not that far from here - on this Eirish coast; close to me and close to home. Sunk by German submarine torpedoes.

I am going to bed now. Will very quietly position myself besides my love Pauline - fast asleep in undisturbed slumber. Sleep well. *Bonne nuit. Gute Nacht.* Thanks Paddy, good old buddy. You never let me down, the only true friend who is forever. Nothing will change much after this.

Tomorrow is my birthday. Fifty eight, a complete hollow, empty number...

A whole life still to go.

Inspired by:

❖ **indicatorloops.com** - *Dr Richard Walding*

Thanks to:

❖ *Jerry Aberne* for support

❖ *Emma Booker* for text editing

❖ *Roy Espiritu* for artwork

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career in 'Movologue' in 2015 (English). Earlier fiction works were 'Aan Dek!' (Dutch, 2010) and 'Locked' (English, 2004). Recently, 'Doon Island Dummies' (English, 2020), 'De Loser' (Dutch, 2021) and 'Dr Brendan's Bar' (English, 2022) were added to his portfolio. Islands, Ireland, Bere Island, and sailing figure in his writing.

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Bere Island Publishing 2024