

The Dogs of War

By Jack English

“There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

When missed, all the voyage of life is bound in shallows and in miseries.

On such a full sea are we now afloat; and we must take the current when it serves, or lose
our ventures.”

— William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

Chapter One: Pearl Harbor

Peral Harbor, Hawaii

November 16, 1942 5:45 a.m.

Lieutenant Junior Grade Douglas Clayton walked down a long wooden dock to report for duty aboard the *USS Izac*. The *Izac* was a Porpoise Class submarine launched June 30, 1936. It was pretty advanced on the day it was launched, but it was already being replaced by the larger, more powerful Gato class submarines.

The morning was cool, but not cold. The air was fresh and clean except for a slight hit of diesel fuel. Still, this is not what he signed up for.

Last year’s Christmas present, a letter received on December 24th, began, “Greetings from the President of the United States. You are hereby ordered to report to 401 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for a draft physical.” Visions of World War I, trench warfare consumed Doug Clayton’s Christmas and on December 26th he went to the Philadelphia Navy Recruiting Office, also on Broad Street.

There, he was greeted by an elderly man in uniform recalled to active duty.

“Hi, I am Chief Nelson,” he stuck out his hand.

Clayton shook it.

“How can I help you?” the recruiter smiled.

“I got this draft notice, and I was wondering what would happen if I enlisted in the Navy?”

The recruiter picked up a pencil and smiled, “Tell me something about yourself.”

“I am twenty-two years old, and graduated from college this past May.”

The recruiter put one form aside and slid another one onto his desk. “You must be officer material. What did you study?”

“English literature.”

The recruiter placed his elbow on his desk and rested his chin on his fist. “Let me think about how the Navy could use an English professor.” After a brief pause, the recruiter continued, “Have you ever thought about becoming a military attaché?”

“A what?”

“A military attaché. They work in embassies around the world and advise ambassadors on military matters. There is a lot of diplomacy involved, cocktail parties, that sort of thing. Do you think that is something you would be interested in?”

“Sure, but I don’t know anything about the military. I wouldn’t know what advice to give.”

“The Navy has hundreds of schools, everything from telephone repair to logistics.” The recruiter tapped a thick catalog with the eraser of his pencil. “I can sign you up for one or two schools, then when you graduate from them, I can send you to an embassy. What kind of embassy would you like?”

“Some place warm.”

“We have embassies in the Caribbean, South America, and dozens of other countries. When we get done here, go home, look at a map, and pick out three countries you would like to work in. Sound good?”

“Sounds great,” Clayton said.

“First, we must get you into a school. You could study telephone repair or food management, but there is not much glamor in them. How about something cutting edge, something not many people know much about?”

“Like what?”

“How about submarine school? Now, before you say anything, let me give you two pieces of information. First, if you go to submarine school, you will get hazardous duty pay even if you are miles from the water. Second, if you graduate in the top quarter of your class, we can promote you from Ensign to Lieutenant Junior Grade immediately. After you graduate from submarine school and get your promotion, I will be able to place you in an embassy. It might not be one of your first three choices, but if you are successful in one embassy, after a year you can move to a better one. How does that sound?”

“OK, I guess,” Clayton said.

“Fill out this form,” the chief slid a one-page form across the desk and laid a pencil on it. “When you get done with the form, grab a cup of coffee,” he pointed to a large coffee pot sitting on a table across the room, “while I type this up. Sign it and you are on your way.”

“What about my draft notice?”

“After you sign, I will take care of everything,” the recruiter smiled.

A half hour later, Clayton signed his enlistment papers.

The recruiter shook his hand. “SOCS, Submarine Officers Candidate School starts January 12th, Newport, Rhode Island. Report to the front gate by 6:00 a.m. and they will direct you. The next time I see you, I will have to salute you, future Lieutenant Junior Grade Clayton.”

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To get to Newport, Rhode Island, Douglas Clayton had to take a bus from his parents’ home in Maple Shade, New Jersey to the Greyhound Bus Terminal in Philadelphia. From there, he took the night bus to Newport, Rhode Island. It took ten hours. There were a dozen sailors on the bus. He wanted to ask them what Navy life was like, but he did not.

By the time the bus got to New York, it was practically full. A sailor with three chevrons on his sleeve stowed a duffle bag in an overhead rack and squeezed into the seat next to Clayton.

“Where are you going?” the sailor asked.

“Newport.”

“So, you must be in the Navy, unless you are a contractor. Which is it?”

Douglas Clayton looked at his watch. “I will be in the Navy in seven hours.”

“You look a little old to be a new enlisted man. Are you a college boy?”

“Yes, sir.”

“If you are going to be in the Navy, you need to know I am not a sir. Officers are sir. I am a First-Class Petty Officer,” he pointed to his chevrons. “So, college boy, what did you study?”

“English literature,” Clayton said.

“Of all the useless...” The sailor started. “Why didn’t you study something you could make money at, like bookkeeping or engineering or medicine?”

“English lit seemed more interesting,” Clayton said.

“What a waste,” the sailor snugged himself back in his seat. Then he asked, “Did they tell you what you were going to do?”

“I am going to submarine school.”

“Shit!” The sailor slapped his leg. “You would never get me onto one of those things.”

“Why do you say that?” Clayton asked.

“Common sense. Why would anyone go on a ship they know is going to sink?”

“Yes, but they come right back up.”

“They come back up, sometimes. Did you hear about the O-9? It was a submarine lost last year on a training mission because it exceeded its test depth. Then there is the French submarine, the Phenix, which sunk off Indochina, in ’39, cause unknown. And our own Squalus, which went down on a training mission, also in ’39. And what about the Thetis, a British sub that sank in 1939 because of an open torpedo tube? Submarines are accidents waiting to happen.”

“Where did you hear about all that?”

“It was in a newsreel. I think a Clark Gable movie was playing.” The sailor did a half turn toward Clayton, “I could never work on a sub. It is too claustrophobic. If I was trapped in a steel tube with fifty men, I would go nuts.”

“You make it seem grim. Anyway,” Clayton said, “after sub school I am going to be posted to some embassy as their military attaché.”

“Who told you that?” The sailor spoke loud enough that the man across the aisle turned to see what was going on.

“Chief Nelson.”

“Who the hell is Chief Nelson?”

“He is my recruiter.”

“Your recruiter!” the sailor slapped his leg and rocked back in his seat in laughter. “Look,” the sailor turned serious, “the only people who control billets -- jobs and positions to you civilians -- is the BUPERS, the Bureau of Naval Personnel. If anyone else says they can get you a billet anywhere, they are bullshitting you.”

Clayton was tempted to tell the sailor how sincere and convincing Chief Nelson was, but he thought better of it. Instead, he asked the sailor, “What are you going to do?”

“I am going into PT Boats.”

“What are they?”

“They are small, fast, plywood boats that carry a couple of torpedoes and depth charges. They zoom out to a trouble spot; launch their torpedoes or drop their depth charges; then run back to base. I should be able to sleep in a nice comfy, shoreside bed nine out of every ten nights. And, I will have nothing but blue sky above me when I am out on patrol.”

~

The ride was long, and Clayton drifted off to sleep. The next thing he knew, the sailor was nudging him awake. “End of the line, college boy. This is the Newport Greyhound Terminal.”

It was pitch black out and cold. Clayton looked at his watch. It was 4:30 a.m.

“Come on,” the sailor said. “There is a shuttle bus that will take us to the base.”

Clayton grabbed his suitcase and followed the sailor.

The shuttle dropped them off at the front gate. The sky was dark and foreboding. A bitter, January wind cut through him.

They walked up to the gatehouse. Four marines were checking identification cards.

The sailor showed his card and was waved through. He turned to Clayton, “Good luck.”

Clayton showed a guard his orders. “Fall in with those guys. Twenty men were already there.” A few more followed him in from the gate. A chief petty officer lined them up; then yelled and screamed in their faces.

Clayton thought that half the guys in line with him were going to piss their pants, but it only took him about ten seconds to realize this was like pledging his college fraternity. *I know how to pledge*, he thought so he settled into the SOCS, Submarine Officer’s Candidate School, routine and got on with it.

Mostly it was engineering class after engineering class. Of the guys that he started with the first day, a third of them could not hack it academically and were transferred to regular officer's candidate school. Engineering was all new to him, but it seemed to have a certain logic, and where there was logic, he could follow the breadcrumbs.

He soon found that the Navy way was to break everything down into a recipe. It consisted of a list of parts, ingredients, whatever, and step-by-step instructions for putting together whatever the Navy needed. The drills also helped. Unlike college where they told you something once and you either got it or you did not, the Navy was different. They made him practice everything over and over and over again, until he could do it in his sleep.

Douglas Clayton graduated second in his class of thirty-two. As soon as he graduated, he called his recruiter, Chief Nelson, and asked about available embassy assignments. Chief Nelson said the Naval Bureau of Personnel, BUPERS, cut orders detailing him to General Dynamics Electric Boat Division in Groton, Connecticut doing quality control checks. Chief Nelson said it was a temporary assignment, just until an embassy post opened. So, Clayton reported to Groton.

He was not there two weeks before his promotion from Ensign to Lieutenant Junior Grade came through. A week after that, orders came detailing him to the *USS Izac*, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Suddenly, embassy duty seemed a long way away.

Chapter Two: Captain Stefanowicz

Douglas Clayton walked down the short ramp leading from the dock to the *Izac*, paused before stepping onto the aboard, turned to salute the flag, and then turned to the seaman who was on watch, saluted him and asked, "Permission to come on board?"

"Permission granted."

Clayton held a copy of his orders out to the seaman.

He glanced at them briefly and asked, "Do you know your way around a submarine?"

"A little."

"Leave your duffle bag here. It is a little cramped below and there is no point dragging it around until quarters are assigned. Find the galley, the captain will meet you there." The seaman fired off a crisp salute.

Clayton returned the salute and climbed down into the sub.

He was greeted by Chief Petty Officer Fred Hayes. "And who might you be?"

"Doug Clayton, chief, newly assigned to the *Izac*." He held out his papers toward the chief.

The chief barely glanced at them. "The galley is that way. The captain will be along in a while."

Clayton picked his way through the narrow corridor. This Porpoise Class sub was considerably smaller and tighter than the Gato Class sub he had trained on. He was beginning to feel claustrophobic. He found the galley.

An ensign greeted him as he entered.

"Hi, I am Mike Hurt. We heard you were coming. Coffee is over there," he pointed to a coffee pot lashed to the wall, sitting on a stainless-steel counter. Hurt saw him look and said, "We don't want to spill anything during crash dives."

Captain Jacob Stefanowicz entered.

"Attention on deck," Hurt said.

Clayton rose, but before he could straighten up, the captain said, "At ease, Mr. Clayton. Mr. Hurt, don't you have somewhere to be?"

"Yes, captain, sir," Hurt scurried out with his coffee.

"Welcome aboard, Mr. Clayton. May I see your paperwork?"

Clayton handed him a folder with his orders and military CV. It was a thin file.

"Shit!" the captain said, "I specifically asked for someone with an engineering background, and they sent me you! It says here you studied in English literature, is that right?"

"Yes, captain."

"Literature is as useless as tits on a..." the captain mumbled something to himself. "Maybe I can swap you for an engineer somewhere along the line." The captain cursed to himself and got a cup of coffee.

"Do you know anything at all about subs?" the captain asked.

“I completed Submarine Officer Candidate School, Newport, Rhode Island, sir.”

The captain cursed to himself again. “They probably trained you on a Gato Class sub, didn’t they?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You will find this a whole other beast. For better or worse, you are our Chief Engineering Officer. That means when I say start the diesels, they better start, and when I say rig for silent running, the electric motors better work, and when I say blow ballast, that better work or God rest our souls we will be stuck on the bottom for the rest of our brief lives. Got it?”

“Yes, sir. But I do not know anything about...” Clayton started.

“I requisitioned a Chief Engineering Officer, and the Navy sent me you. There is no point whining about it. Nobody cares. I expect you to spend every minute you are not on watch getting familiar with the sub and putting your nose in the engineering manuals to learn what you do not know. Find Petty Officer First Class Bodin Kowalski. He is the petty officer in charge of engineering.

“You are also our supply officer,” Stefanowicz continued. “On a sub, everyone does double or triple duty. Find Petty Officer Second Class Edward McElwaney. He is also a torpedoman. We do not want to run out of diesel or powdered eggs a thousand miles from port. We ship out for a 75-day cruise in two weeks. Figure out what we need and get it.

“OK, here is your orientation,” Stefanowicz spoke as he poured himself a cup of coffee. “The *USS Izac* was named after Lt. Izac, a World War I, Navy, Congressional Medal of Honor winner. The ship was launched June 30, 1936, which means its systems are already outdated. To say the ship’s systems are quirky is an understatement. They are in constant need of babying. And on a sub, if you throw a switch or turn a valve the wrong way, it could kill us all. Still,” captain Stefanowicz said, “you are more qualified than the last officer they sent me.”

“Who is that, sir?”

“Mr. Hurt. He got his commission through college officer candidate school and his sub training was only twenty days. It was little more than ‘never open a screen door on a submarine.’ We have been trying to train him to be careful ever since.”

“May I ask the captain Mr. Hurt’s role?”

“Navigation; in college, they taught him surface navigation, he was good at it. Then the geniuses in the BUPERS thought well, hell, underwater, over water, in the air, it’s all just navigation, right? And they assigned him here.”

“What else do you need to know?” Stefanowicz asked. “The Executive Officer is Lieutenant Commander Lewis Reynolds. He enlisted as a seaman, made chief in record time, was promoted to Warrant Officer, then promoted up the line to Lieutenant Commander. He is what we call a mustang. He knows everything there is to know about subs, at least everything there is to know about this sub.

“The only other officer aboard is Lieutenant Arbogast. He has been with the *Izac* for two years now. He was here when we had our accident.”

“Accident, sir?” Clayton asked.

“You will hear about that later. The accident happened before I came on board as the skipper. Lieutenant Arbogast’s father is a diplomat, and he has some pull in Washington. Other than that, I do not know much about him. He keeps to himself, which can be a blessing on a sub. Any questions?”

“Where do I bunk?”

“You bunk with Ensign Hurt, down the corridor,” the captain pointed, “past the infirmary. I am afraid Lieutenant JGs do not warrant a cabin on a Porpoise Class sub. Your bunk and that of Hurt’s open smack ass into a corridor. But at least you do not have to share a bunk with someone. Dismissed.” Stefanowicz grabbed his coffee and left.

Clayton tried to stand and salute; Stefanowicz caught him out of the corner of his eye; returned a half-hearted salute back; and disappeared down the corridor.

Clayton was about to get up when Lieutenant Layton Arbogast slid into the seat opposite him. “So, you are the new engineer. I am Layton Arbogast, but everybody calls me Arby.”

“Doug Clayton,” he stuck out his hand. “Nice to meet you, Arby.”

Arbogast shook it.

“I am not an engineer,” Clayton said.

“Does the old man know?” Arbogast asked. “He was adamant about getting an engineer.”

“He knows.”

“If you are not an engineer,” Arbogast asked, “what did you study?”

“English lit.”

“English lit?” Arbogast scoffed. “Talk about pissing up a rope. What good is it?”

Lieutenant Junior Grade Douglas Clayton shrugged and spread his hands.

“So, let me ask,” Arbogast filled his coffee cup. “Who did you piss off to get this assignment?”

“What do you mean, ‘piss off’? I have not pissed off anybody, not that I know. Why?”

“You know why we need an engineer so badly?”

“No, why?” Clayton asked.

“Because of the accident, this sub sunk, right here at the dock.”

“I thought submarines are meant to sink,” Clayton said.

“Not the way this one did. Somebody left a torpedo door closed, but not locked down. Water pressure pushed the door open when most of the crew were on shore leave. The two guys left on watch were on deck smoking cigarettes and it took them a while to notice the sub sinking relative to the dock. By the time they did, this deck had six inches of water in it. By the time they found and closed the open torpedo door, there was three feet of water on this deck.” Arbogast reached out and touched a red painted dash about three feet above the deck. “You will see these dashes all over the boat. That is how high the water got. You know what happens when you combine water and electric circuits?”

“Sparks?”

“Sparks and rust. We spent the last month in drydock trying to replace all the electrical connections below these dashes.”

“Is everything OK now?”

“We will know tomorrow. We are taking her on her first sea trial since the accident.”

“Wow! What happened to the captain?”

“Lieutenant Commander Larry Coe, the captain at the time of the accident, was reassigned to munitions inventory in Nevada. The Executive Officer, Lieutenant Cohen, was sent to Greenland. Captain Stefanowicz had nothing to do with the accident. In fact, he was only assigned to the *Izac* three weeks ago. He was sent to clean up the mess. The only thing you need to know about him is that he graduated last in his class at Annapolis. You know Annapolis, the U.S. Naval Academy,” Arbogast flailed on hand in the air.

“I know what Annapolis is,” Clayton said. “How do you know he graduated last in his class?”

“The captain has a picture of his graduating class in his cabin. If you look on the back, it lists his classmates in alphabetical order with their class rank.”

“Didn’t you get into trouble, snooping on the captain?”

“It was not snooping. I was investigating. I want to know everything I can so I can survive this war.”

Doug Clayton said nothing. He just sat quietly for a moment then asked, “What did you study?”

“Economics, the oppression of the working class, how the military-industrial complex starts wars to make the rich richer, things like that.”

“Wow!” Clayton said. “That sounds depressing. If you are so concerned about the military-industrial complex, why did you sign up?”

“In 1938, there were no jobs for economists. The Navy provided three square meals a day, a place to sleep, and I would not have to crawl around in the mud, like in the army. I thought it would be a nice cushy job. I had no idea we were going to war.”

“Do you plan to stay in?” Clayton asked.

“We are all in until we beat Japan or Japan beats us,” Arbogast said. “Or we decide to withdraw from the Pacific and let the Japanese control it.”

“What about the Germans?”

“I think the war in Europe will exhaust itself and we will end up with trenches and fortifications dividing Europe. My bet is that Germany will hold 80% of Europe, and there will be a sliver of non-German countries along the Atlantic coast.”

“Wow!” Clayton murmured.

“You know,” Arbogast leaned across the table a little, “there is a one in five chance we won’t return from our first mission.”

“That means sub crews have an 80% survival rate. That is a lot better than the survival rate for bomber crews.”

“Yeah, odds are we will survive our first mission, but what about the second mission and the third one? If we go on five missions, our odds of surviving drop to one in three.”

“How do you figure that?” Clayton asked.

“It is statistics, lieutenant. Something they do not teach in English lit.”

“What are you saying?” Clayton asked.

“The fewer the missions we go on, the longer our odds of survival,” Arbogast said.

“I don’t see how we can control our number of missions. When they say go, we go, don’t we?”

Arbogast looked into his coffee cup as though trying to read the grounds like they were tea leaves. Then he looked up. “For now, we need to concentrate on passing our sea trials without killing ourselves. Do you know where your bunk is?”

“I think so.”

“Did the captain tell you what to do?”

“Yeah, find First Class Petty Officer Kowalski, then find Second Class Petty Officer McElwaney and introduce myself.”

“Good luck with Kowalski.”

“Why do you say that?”

“He thinks the chiefs and first class run the Navy and the officers are decorative nonsense that get in the way.”

“We will see what we see,” Clayton said.

Arbogast turned toward the coffee pot and said over his shoulder, “Stow your kit and get going. Breakfast is promptly at 0700 and is over at 0720.”

Chapter Three: Sea Trial

Lieutenant Junior Grade Douglas Clayton retrieved his duffle bag from the deck and stowed his kit in his bunk, then he asked a passing sailor where he could find Petty Officer First Class Bodin Kowalski.

The sailor said, "Engine room," pointed aft, and kept walking.

Clayton made his way to the engine room. As he stepped through the hatch, someone said, "Officer on deck."

Four people were there. Everyone stood.

"I am looking for Petty Officer First Class Kowalski."

A muscular young man of twenty-five wearing a light blue dungaree shirt with the sleeves rolled up raised his hand. "I am Kowalski. Are you the new engineering officer?"

"I am Doug Clayton." He stuck out his hand. "Pleased to meet you."

Kowalski shook it. Then asked, "Are you a ninety-day wonder?" It was a term used to describe college graduates sent to 90 days of training then commissioned as officers.

"More like a nine-month wonder. I went to the SOCS, Submarine Officer Candidate School.

Kowalski stepped back. "This is Munson, Newman, and Pettibone. So, what kind of engineer are you? Electrical? Mechanical? Please do not tell me you are a Civil Engineer."

"I am not an engineer."

"But the old man...the captain specifically asked for an engineer. What did you study?"

"English literature," Clayton said.

"English literature?" Kowalski croaked.

The four men broke out laughing.

"With respects, lieutenant, sir," Kowalski asked, "what the hell good is English literature going to do on a sub?"

"Well, I did not know there was going to be a war when I went to college. And the recruiter promised a billet as a Naval attaché at some embassy somewhere."

"An attaché," Newman's voice rose half an octave as he said it.

"I was promised a cushy billet in the Caribbean," Munson said, "nothing but sandy beaches, Cuban cigars, and women with long legs."

"I was promised Hawaii," Pettibone said, "and I got Hawaii, but I was promised shore patrol, which meant I could go from bar to bar."

"I was promised Key West," Newman said. "I was going to set up a deli as a side hustle."

“I thought everyone in the submarine service was a volunteer,” Clayton said.

“There are volunteers and volunteers,” Kowalski said. “Would you have volunteered without getting a letter that said, ‘Greetings from the President of the United States’?”

“Probably not. But I am here; and I have a job to do; so, I am going to get to it.”

“Don’t worry, lieutenant,” Newman said. “If there is anything worth knowing about diesel engines, Kolowski knows it.”

The ceiling in engineering was low. Clayton reached up and put his hand on two valves that were right next to each other. “Mr. Kowalski, what do these valves control?”

“I haven’t got a clue, lieutenant, sir.”

There was a row of four switches in a panel to his right. They had masking tape over them. “What do those switches control?”

“You got me, lieutenant, sir. The new engineering officer was supposed to explain it to me. And just for your information, the number one rule aboard a submarine is that if you do not know what a valve or switch does, do not touch it. I want to live to see my next birthday.”

“Gentlemen,” Clayton turned to leave, “is there anything else you would like to tell me?”

“Yeah,” Kowalski said. “Promotion exams are January 4th. I am taking the Chief’s exam and Newman is taking the First-Class exam. Mac, Petty Officer McElwaney, was supposed to order the exams so we can take them while at sea. Do you know whether he did it?”

“I will find out. But if you want to make chief, you better know what every valve and switch in engineering does,” Clayton slipped out the hatch and headed off to find McElwaney.

The height of the corridor from the deck to the overhead was six-foot six inches, except where pipes or cables were strung below the overhead. Then the clearance from floor to ceiling could be as little as five foot eleven. Douglas Clayton was six foot three. It was claustrophobic.

He worked his way along the corridor until he found the first sailor. “Where can I find Petty Officer McElwaney?” Clayton asked.

“Probably in stores,” the sailor pointed toward the bow.

Clayton pushed along the corridor looking for a door marked stores. The room was piled high with crates and boxes. Off to one side, there was a pile of boxes that reached nearly to the overhead. A thin, beat-up mattress lay on the boxes. A couple of lights had been rigged over the mattress. A baby-faced young man lay on the mattress reading a magazine.

“Petty Officer McElwaney, I presume,” Clayton said.

“Yes, sir,” McElwaney jumped to the floor and stood.

“I am Lieutenant JG Doug Clayton. I am the new supply officer.” He stuck out his hand.

McElwaney shook it. “Pleased to meet you, sir.”

“Sit,” Clayton motioned as he sat himself.

“Have you ordered the Chief’s Exam for Mr. Kowalski and First-Class exam for Newman?”

“Yes, sir. Exams are geared to a person’s rating. Kowalski and Newman are enginemen.”

“And your rating, Mr. McElwaney?”

“I am a Petty Officer Second-Class, Supply and I am also a qualified torpedoman. I expect to take the First-Class exam for supply on January 4 when Kowalski, Newman and the others are taking his exam.”

“What others?” Clayton asked.

“Petty Officer Second Class Bobbie Lee Boone is taking the First-Class exam for sonarman, Andy Mulford is taking a First-Class exam for corpsman, and a couple of seamen first class, Johnson and Rivera, are taking their Third-Class exams.

“May I ask who administers the exam?”

“That would be the executive officer, sir. Lieutenant Commander Lewis Reynolds. He gets sealed exams, administers them, grades them, and sends results to the BUPERS, the Bureau of Naval Personnel.”

“Since I am new on the boat, is there anything you would like to tell me? Or anything you would like to warn me about?”

“Like what, sir?”

“Nothing special, just asking. Did you want to ask me anything?”

“Like what, sir?”

“I don’t know,” Clayton said, “my background, perhaps.”

“BUPERS assigned you to the *Izac*, so that is good enough for me.”

“You are an optimist, Petty Officer McElwaney.”

“I am a realist, sir. Once BUPERS makes an assignment, we must live with it.”

“Tell me about this shakedown cruise,” Clayton asked.

“You know about our ‘accident,’ don’t you?” McElwaney pointed to the red painted dashes placed strategically around the room.

“I heard about it.”

“The shipyard says we are good to go, but saltwater is very corrosive. We, the crew, are worried it got in somewhere the shipyard could not find or did not look and something is going to crap out on us when we are a hundred feet underwater trying to survive Japanese depth charges.”

“I understand. I am the chief engineering officer as well as the chief supply officer, so starting tomorrow, Kowalski and I are going to go over every inch of pipe, every inch of electrical cable, every valve, and every switch in this boat so nothing does crap out on us a hundred feet down.”

“Good luck with that, sir.”

“Why do you say that?” Clayton asked.

“Kowalski is a law unto himself and a bit of a bully.”

“Kowalski wants to make chief, and I will help him, if he helps me.”

“Then you might need these,” McElwaney picked up a box filled with paperback books. “These are our engineering manuals. Our last engineering officer never cracked their spine. He was a sort of a ‘What happens if I throw this switch?’ kind of engineer, then he would try it and say, ‘Oh, shit!’ if it did something bad. The manuals got soaked when the sub sank but they are still readable...probably.”

“What happened to the last engineer?” Clayton asked.

“He was transferred because of nerves.”

“Nerves?”

“Yeah,” McElwaney said, “He claimed that working on a sub was too stressful. He kept breaking out in a rash.”

“Where is he now?”

“BUPERS reassigned him to bomb disposal.”

“What exactly does he do in bomb disposal?” Clayton asked.

“There are a lot of unexploded bombs from the attack, hundreds I am told. His job is to dig them up and disarm them.”

“That sounds a lot more dangerous than working on a sub,” Clayton said.

“It is. That is why I keep my mouth shut and just do what I am told.”

“Thanks, Mac. Pull together a list of all the supplies we need for our deployment. I will look at it tomorrow when I am done with Kowalski. I think we are going to get along just fine.”