

## CHAPTER 1

The piercing shriek of the train whistle startled him into consciousness, and yet as soon as his eyes opened, Mac Kelsey knew he was dead.

He could see he was no longer aboard his battleship, the USS *Nevada*, let alone anywhere near Pearl Harbor. Gone was the scent of seaweed mixed with ocean salt that always lingered over the water. Nor was there any trace of the diesel exhaust and burning oil that had nearly choked him minutes earlier.

But the most obvious change was the relative quiet. The earsplitting explosions and frenzied mayhem that he had witnessed just moments ago, devastating the Pacific Fleet and consuming so many lives, had been abruptly silenced.

Rather than on a navigation bridge, he found himself standing on a railway platform, teeming with passengers anxious to board a pair of trains that sandwiched the platform and snaked back for some distance. Squinting into the afternoon sun, his eyes swept across the crowd, studying the endless parade of travelers forming into long queues to board the passenger cars. There wasn't a single suitcase in sight, and yet nothing about that surprised him.

He allowed the brilliant sunshine pouring from the sky to warm him for a few seconds. It was the starkest of contrasts. Within minutes of the attack, the morning sky over Pearl Harbor had darkened, the sun almost completely obscured by the layers of smoke billowing up from the destruction across the harbor. Here the sky was a crisp, magnificent blue, the air dry and cool.

The throngs of passengers continued to stream by him. They seemed eager and anxious to board, their spirits buoyant. Uniformed men abounded, a blur of white, blue and khaki. He looked down, surprised at the transformation of his own uniform. The Navy dress whites were as gleaming and freshly pressed as the day he purchased them in San Diego three years ago, not a crease to be found.

Amid the large pack moving toward the closest train, he thought he heard his name. Faint at first, then louder. He saw a hand shoot up among the boarding passengers. He heard it clearly now, the voice familiar.

"Commander Kelsey!"

The figure emerged from the crowd. He was a compact young man, wearing Navy khakis with the insignia of an ensign on his collar tabs. As he approached, there was a wide grin behind his short stubble; the young man's abiding eagerness as transparent as ever.

Kelsey was surprisingly pleased. "Mr. Daniels," he said, as he grasped the other man's extended hand. "You look like you're in one piece."

"As do you, Sir," replied Ensign Bryce Daniels, happily pumping Kelsey's arm. He pointed with his thumb over his shoulder. "I saw Chief Middleton back there; he's with a group from the *Arizona*. We may see some of our other shipmates soon."

Kelsey scanned the crowd for familiar faces. "Do you know where we are?"

"Sure do, Commander," said Daniels with a wink. "Looks like I didn't waste all those Sundays at the First Baptist Church of Portsmouth."

Daniels looked past Kelsey and pointed toward one of the nearby trains. "That conductor seems to be eyeballing you, Sir."

Kelsey followed the ensign's indication and saw a uniformed gentleman perched on the steps of a passenger car, accepting tickets as a queue of travelers shuffled aboard. It looked as if the passengers were peppering him with questions, or possibly directions, but the man was clearly preoccupied, staring right at Kelsey and Daniels. He waved the two officers over.

They joined the long procession and made their way to the entry, climbing the handful of steps to reach the conductor. He was an older man, clearly nearing his retirement years. His uniform fit loosely over his lithe frame and the shock of white hair protruding from his hat had a matching, bushy mustache that covered his upper lip.

The conductor checked his pocket watch. "Train is leaving in one minute, Commander Kelsey," he said, snapping the watch shut and slipping it back into his vest. "You coming aboard, son?"

"You know my name?"

“Malcolm Anderson Kelsey. Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy. Right?”

“Right.”

“Are you coming aboard?”

“I don’t have a ticket.”

“Then what’s that in your hand?”

Kelsey lifted his hand and saw the small piece of paper, not even realizing how tightly he was clutching it. He handed it to the conductor who didn’t bother to examine it. “First class. All the way forward, Commander. You’re welcome to some refreshments, complimentary of course.”

Kelsey felt a rumble in his stomach. “They serving any breakfast?”

The conductor stopped taking tickets from the others and looked at Kelsey curiously. The reflection of sunlight gave the man’s soft blue eyes a charcoal-colored appearance. “You’re hungry?”

“I’ll live,” Kelsey shrugged, stepping onto the train. “Ensign, give him your ticket.”

The conductor directed a thumb to the other side of the train. “You’re in third class, Mr. Daniels. Any of the cars in the back. Find yourself a seat, we’re filling up fast.”

Daniels waived a hand. “With rank comes privilege. I’ll see you on the train, Sir.”

Kelsey watched him go, sensing something was amiss. It was. This was the first time in months the two had separated without Kelsey barking at him over some triviality.

He thought of Chief Middleton’s rebuke minutes before the first bombs fell. The sharp words had struck a nerve with Kelsey, who heard the plain implication in the man’s message, loud and clear. Kelsey’s unwillingness to mentor Daniels was a failure of leadership. That had pissed Kelsey off. Maybe because he didn’t think it was true. Maybe because he knew it was.

“Bryce!” Kelsey called, chasing after him.

Daniels turned as Kelsey approached. “Sir?”

He struggled to find the words. “You did good today.”

Daniels smiled. “Thank you, Commander.”

Kelsey took a step toward him. “The *Arizona*, the *Oklahoma*, the *West Virginia*. That would have been us if we hadn’t been able to raise enough steam. You can be an arrogant little bastard. But your deck crew respected you. Chief Middleton and the other warrants relied upon you. You had a fine career ahead of you. I—I’m sorry I never shared that.”

The surprise was evident on the ensign’s face, unused to such words from his prickly superior. He stood there gazing at Kelsey.

*Oh, come on. I’m not that much of an asshole, am I?*

Unable to find any words, the ensign finally gave Kelsey a simple nod of gratitude. He then turned and resumed his trek to the rear passenger cars, hiding from Kelsey the grin plastered on his face. Kelsey turned as well and made his way forward where the conductor had directed him. He gripped a nearby railing as he felt the train begin to lurch ahead and stepped into a dining car.

“Wet your whistle, sir?”

A small bar sat at the fore of the car, the counter a rich mahogany grain, highly polished and framed in stainless steel. The bartender looked at him expectantly, offering a wide grin that stretched the deep ebony skin hanging loosely from his chin. He was a heavy man, wearing a starched white service jacket and black bow tie.

Kelsey lowered himself on to a stool. “Just what the doctor ordered. Martini, bone dry.”

“Sorry sir, we’re out of olives. Had a full train earlier today. Seems to be a busy day in these parts. How about a Gibson?”

“No idea what that is, but you look like a man who knows his liquor.” Kelsey read the man’s name tag. “Red. Interesting name.”

The bartender looked up after pouring ice into a shaker. “First name tag said Colored. Then I got me promoted to Red.” He winked. “Old joke.”

Kelsey wasn’t listening. He looked around the dining car.

Red noticed. “Help you find someone, Mr. Kelsey?”

*Everyone knows my name.*

“No, I guess this just wasn’t what I was expecting.”

“What were you expecting?” Red asked, amused, as he emptied the contents of the shaker into a glass and pushed it across the bar.

“I don’t know. Clouds maybe. Angels with harps.”

Red chuckled. He leaned over the bar, his voice a whisper. “I hear that a lot.”

Kelsey took a sip of his drink, then a longer one. “That’s not bad.” He looked at his glass thoughtfully. “Also thought their standards here might be a little higher. Wouldn’t expect a jackass like me to make it.”

A half-truth. He could hope. And while Kelsey was hardly a religious man, nearly every day for the last two months he had considered the question of whether such a place could exist for Lucy. He cared much less about his own fate. He knew he only needed to escape the despair that engulfed him, leading him to his flirtation with death more than once these last several days. His little girl was all he had, and there seemed little point in going on. And though the peace he was so desperate for had always seemed so close, he was never able to take that final step.

Until the Japs took it for him.

## CHAPTER 2

Forty Minutes Earlier

December 7, 1941

Honolulu, Hawaii

Even in the early morning hours, with the sun still low in the sky, the air was warming quickly. The heat would become searing by late morning, baking the fleet like loaves of bread in an oven. His bronzed skin was a testament to the tropical environments that had become his home these last few years.

“We’ll have you to the *Nevada* in a jiffy, Commander,” said the coxswain at the tiller.

Malcolm Kelsey ignored the young man’s cheerfulness, continuing to stare at the churning blue water below him. He was leaning on the gunwale of the small whale boat that was ferrying him from the Navy Yard to his ship, moored adjacent to Ford Island. His visored cap fit tightly on his head, which was more square than rounded, and barely covered his tussled dark hair. A flat nose and high forehead were his most prominent features, followed closely by his eyes, a shade of blue that his wife had once called gunmetal.

He yawned and tried to wipe some of the sleep from his eyes. Kelsey was barely in one piece. He had made it through last call at the Officers Club again, and then endured another short, sleepless night. He caught the eye of the boatswain’s mate in charge of the gig, seeing what he thought might be a hint of disapproval.

*Probably because I smell like a still.*

He knew his appearance was wretched. A starched uniform and clean shave could only cover up so much. His tunic was stained and reeked of beer and stale cigarette smoke. And even though he had squeezed every last ounce out of the toothpaste tube, he couldn’t mask the heavy traces of Scotch on his breath.

The cox’n eased the small craft alongside the quay. Kelsey hopped out without a word, crossing over to the ladder leading up to the quarterdeck of his battleship. When he reached the deck, he saluted the officer on duty, who had found a patch of shade behind Number Three turret.

“Morning, Pete,” said Kelsey. “Permission to come aboard?”

Lieutenant H. Peter Brown was one of the *Nevada*’s supply officers, and junior enough to draw the Officer of the Deck assignment on an early weekend morning. He looked up from his crossword puzzle, returning the salute with a smile. Though Kelsey outranked Brown, they had previously served together in San Diego, and reported for duty on the *Nevada* on the same day.

“Ah, Lieutenant Commander Kelsey. Permission granted, Mac. Early bird getting the worm?”

Kelsey shrugged. “Nothing better to do.”

Brown eyed the stubble on Kelsey’s face and the disheveled uniform. “Hey, XO’s team could use that left-handed bat of yours this afternoon. California’s got a lot of big hitters I hear. One of their guys is being scouted by the Cardinals.”

The *Nevada*’s baseball team was the defending Pacific Fleet champion, thanks to Mac Kelsey and his power slugging. Without him the last two months, the team had slipped to the bottom of the Battleship Division standings.

Kelsey’s eyes grew distant as he recalled bringing his daughter to watch him play in last year’s championship game. He still held the image of her sitting on the UCLA Bruins blanket, sipping her Coke.

Brown cleared his throat and held out a pack of Wrigley’s. “Mac?”

Kelsey stirred back to the present and nodded his thanks, accepting a piece and jamming it in his mouth.

“Knee is still bothering me,” he lied, unconvincingly. “Skipper back yet?”

“Not yet, I don’t think he’s due in for another hour or two. And given this weather, I would imagine he’ll be hitting the greens this morning rather than eating ham and eggs in his state room.” Brown skimmed the page on his clipboard. “We have the presentation of Colors in about fifteen minutes. Civilian work crews coming aboard at 0900. Ensign Daniels has the bridge right now. You may want to check on him, he’s been up there all night.”

Brown paused. "He had a second boiler lit off last night."

Kelsey frowned, putting his hands on his hips. "Without Hayward on board? Who authorized him to do that?"

"I did."

The baritone voice carried across the deck. The officers turned and saw Francis Middleton approaching. The Warrant Officer Boatswain, or bos'n in Navy-speak, was an imposing presence. He stood some six feet three inches, and probably weighed close to 225 pounds. He came from a family of Maine fishermen and had been in the Navy since the two officers who stood before him were children. He was a hard man, a legend on the *Nevada*. The bos'n oversaw the deck crews and was responsible for virtually every rivet and piece of ground tackle and teakwood decking on board. Middleton saluted the two officers.

"Bos'n," said Kelsey, returning the salute. "The boiler was your idea?"

"No, sir. It was Ensign Daniels' idea, and when he asked, I backed him."

"With all due respect, Bos'n, you're not an engineer."

Middleton squared his jaw. "Commander Hayward was not on board. As for why it was necessary, I suggest you ask Mr. Daniels." He paused. "Sir, a private word if I might?"

Kelsey nodded to Brown and followed Middleton away from the quarterdeck. The bos'n pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He offered one to Kelsey, who declined, and then fished one out for himself.

"Commander," he said, thumbing the wheel of his Zippo. There was a breeze, strong-enough to loosen a few strands of Middleton's Brylcreemed hair, and he had to cup his hand around the lighter. Middleton pressed the flame to his cigarette.

"Permission to speak freely?" he asked, inhaling the rich smoke and flipping the lighter closed.

"Go ahead."

"You ride that kid awfully hard. He's made some mistakes, but I've seen worse. Much worse."

"He's a wiseass, Bos'n. Cocksure in abilities he has yet to master."

"That could describe every midshipman coming out of Annapolis."

"I'm trying to make him into a competent watch officer."

Middleton pinched a piece of tobacco off his tongue. "Commander, we've got twenty-four ensigns aboard this bucket. Slapping them around is my job, and the job of the other warrants, chiefs and senior enlisted men. Your job is to mentor these kids, teach them how to do their jobs. Give them some confidence."

"Confidence? Daniels is so busy polishing his Academy ring that he doesn't know how wet behind the ears he really is. He needs to get his head out of his ass."

"Seems to be quite a bit of that going around here. Sir."

Middleton took a final drag, looking up to see if Kelsey had taken his meaning.

He had, and he wasn't appreciating the lecture. Not now. His next words were terse. "Anything else?"

"One last thing, Sir." Middleton softened his voice, as much as the big man could. He flicked his cigarette over the railing. "Maybe you'd like to grab a beer sometime?" The bos'n grinned. "No 'O' Club, we'll go where real men drink." His tone became more serious. "I got a baby girl of my own. Just turned five. Anyway, just thought maybe you'd want to have a drink sometime. Talk about things."

Kelsey felt his anger abating. "Thanks, Middleton," he said, his voice almost pleasant. "I'll consider the offer, as long as you're buying."

Middleton understood a polite brush off when he heard one. "I've got to shove off, Commander. The offer stands." He saluted and began moving aft.

Kelsey headed for the bridge, climbing the series of ladders that would lead him near the top of the foremast on the forward superstructure. As he passed the third deck, he glanced down the bow of the mighty ship. She was twenty-seven years old; he had just turned four when she was commissioned. Neither of them had ever seen a day of combat.

Men were stirring on each deck, but far fewer than normal as a large number of the *Nevada's* complement of fourteen hundred officers and men were on shore liberty in Honolulu. Kelsey continued

his climb, spitting his wad of gum into the water as he heard a faint echo of church bells in the distance.

As he neared the bridge hatch, he paused to take in the commanding view of the harbor. Part of that view was obscured by the line of sister ships directly ahead. The *Nevada* was moored by herself at the end of the long column of vessels. Battleship Row they called it, right smack in the center of the harbor. The *Nevada* was at the rear, just behind the *Arizona* and repair ship *Vestal*. Beyond that, jammed together side-by-side and flanking Ford Island, lay the *Tennessee* and *West Virginia*, followed by the *Maryland* and *Oklahoma*. The venerable *California* was perched at the tip of the alignment.

Kelsey entered the bridge, perspiring from his ascent in the early morning humidity. He had served on the *Nevada* for nearly a year, most of that time as the Damage Control Officer, and recognized most of the skeleton crew that was manning the watch. He saw the diminutive Bryce Daniels propping open one of the forward windows and raising his binoculars in the direction of the nearby airfield on Ford Island.

Daniels was a unique one, Kelsey had to admit. Nearly every newly-commissioned ensign is required to endure some form of hazing when they report to their first ship. But for Daniels, his initial weeks on the *Nevada* were brutal. When word spread that his father was a three-star admiral in the Navy Department, most of the wardroom officers immediately assumed the boy had coasted through the Academy thanks to a few phone calls from his old man. Fairly or not, that smear did little to endear him to the other officers. He was shunned by his peers and handed crap assignments by the junior officers.

Unlike most of the others, however, Kelsey had read Daniels' service jacket. At Annapolis, he had made the varsity boxing team as a 126-pound featherweight, earning his capital "N" letter after busting the jaw of his West Point opponent. He had narrowly avoided expulsion after school officials learned he had knowledge of a classmate's cheating and had refused to report it, a clear violation of the honor code. After graduation, Daniels had eschewed submarines, where his father had earned his bullish reputation and applied himself at surface warfare school, where he excelled at targeting and gunnery.

No, there was something to this young man. He had something of a streak of independence in him, and Kelsey respected that. Daniels just took it too far, refusing to rely on the guidance of others, always insisting he knew the proper course of action. His arrogance led to a series of failures and mistakes, most of which Kelsey, as his direct supervisor, was compelled to take responsibility for.

Kelsey squinted in the direction that Daniels appeared to be looking. The airstrip on the small island appeared quiet other than a few mechanics and maintenance people milling around the parked aircraft. He approached Daniels and slapped him on the back, startling the young ensign. "I hope you're not bird watching, mister."

Daniels lowered the binoculars and snapped to attention, the fatigue evident on his face. Kelsey knew from his own experience the boy had probably downed a gallon of coffee during his watch.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," Daniels said nervously in his thick Rhode Island accent. "We just got some radio traffic about low-level aircraft buzzing Hickham Field. I was checking to see if any of our fighters were up early this morning."

Kelsey rolled his eyes. "First of all, Ensign, why would any of our planes be flying over an army airfield on a Sunday—"

"But, Sir—"

"Do not," Kelsey snapped at him, louder this time, "interrupt a superior officer. This isn't your grandfather's yacht in Newport."

Daniels opened his mouth to protest, and quickly shut it after seeing the death glare on Kelsey's face.

"Second of all, why did you light a second boiler?"

Daniels swallowed hard, but the young man was self-assured if nothing else. "The snipes told me a single engine has been providing juice to the entire ship since Thursday, Sir. I thought it would make sense to light a second boiler and transfer the power over."

Kelsey couldn't argue with that, but wasn't about to admit it. "Third, perhaps your time would be better spent preparing the bridge for your relief. Where is my duty roster? Are we fully provisioned? Are the civilian work crews for the engine re-fit on board yet?"

Daniels paused to make sure the commander was finished and began to answer, but was interrupted by a petty officer.

“Commander, 0800, the Color Guard is standing by.”

Kelsey nodded. “Begin.”

Everyone turned aft as the ship’s complement of musicians, gathered on the fantail and awaiting a signal from the bridge, began playing the hallowed notes of “The Star Spangled Banner.” A detail of Marines hoisted the American flag as a squad stood by in their dress khakis. Kelsey and Daniels rendered a salute but both men looked upward as their ears picked up the sounds of muffled machine gun fire and explosions in the distance.

Kelsey spoke softly. “Maybe someone is taking some target practice after all.”

He raised an eyebrow as the explosions grew closer; louder now than even the notes from the brass horns that carried across the ship. “Pretty early to be doing any shooting with live ammo. Especially on a Sunday.”

Daniels vigorously bobbed his head up and down. “That’s what I was thinking, Sir, not to mention—”

“Commander!” cried out a sailor, who appeared in the passageway leading to the weather deck. “You ought to see this!”

The band continued to play as Kelsey stepped through the passageway. Following the sailor, he quickened his pace to the Captains’ Bridge, the small exposed deck on the starboard side used during docking procedures. The sailor pointed to the northwest, out over Ford Island, and Kelsey spotted a small formation of aircraft making their way over the Pearl City peninsula. Suddenly, the aircraft began strafing two light cruisers moored on the opposite side of Ford Island from the *Nevada*.

“What the hell?” Kelsey muttered to himself. He grabbed a pair of binoculars resting on a nearby ledge and raised them to his eyes as the fighter planes finished their strafing run and passed a couple of hundred yards aft of the *Nevada*. Kelsey immediately felt a cold chill pass through his body as he identified the distinctive red circles on the wings of the dark green aircraft. He shifted his binoculars higher in the sky to the north, where he saw an endless number of Japanese aircraft descending on Pearl Harbor.

“My God,” he gasped.

Kelsey raced back to the bridge, stuck his head in the hatch and yelled at Daniels. “Sound General Quarters!”

Daniels jumped in surprise, and Kelsey could see the confusion sweeping over the young ensign’s face. “Do it now, goddamn it! We’re under attack!”

Daniels stood planted, his feet encased in concrete. The ship’s duty bugler was nearby however, and heard Kelsey’s order. He stepped to the public address box, blowing out the notes for the men to move to their battle stations.

Kelsey cursed and rushed into the bridge. Pushing past the bugler, he reached the engineering panel and slammed his palm on the general alarm. Immediately the familiar klaxon began blaring across the ship and hundreds of men on board the *Nevada*, most still dressing or eating their breakfasts, sluggishly responded to the alarm as they had been endlessly drilled to do. The sailors dutifully climbed to their posts, grousing to each other about the officers scheduling an early morning drill on what was usually considered a day off.

Kelsey moved back to the Captain’s Bridge and spotted a handful of torpedo planes darting across the harbor towards the *Oklahoma* and *Maryland*, anchored near the head of Battleship Row. As the aircraft sent their torpedoes splashing into the water, Kelsey raised his binoculars again and locked his eyes on the small slivers streaking towards the helpless warships. Two of the torpedoes struck the *Oklahoma* just below the waterline on the bow, the massive explosions causing the warship to pitch slightly upwards and then back down on the water. Kelsey looked on in shock as a third torpedo struck the wounded ship directly amidships.

The successive blasts enveloped the entire ship, throwing crewman overboard and tearing lethal holes in her hull. It had taken mere seconds, but one of the most powerful warships in the entire Navy was already fully ablaze and beginning to list.

Kelsey ran back into the bridge and shouldered his way past several new arrivals, expressions of confusion and early morning fatigue covering their faces as they hastily strapped on their life jackets and moved to their posts. Several were wearing only tee shirts and one was still in his boxer shorts. Kelsey grabbed the ship's intercom, switching on the public address mode.

“ALL HANDS! BATTLE STATIONS! BATTLE STATIONS! THIS IS NOT A DRILL! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!”

“Commander!” called one of the newly arrived lookouts on the forward mast. “Off the starboard quarter!”

Kelsey did not have time to respond as three fighter planes swept in from the north and began strafing the *Nevada* from stern to bow. A handful of sailors and Marines who had taken station on the stern for colors were torn apart by the stream of machine gun fire as others dove for cover behind the aft seaplane crane and catapult base. With Kelsey's frantic announcement, the sound of high-caliber ammunition tearing into the main deck and the screams of the wounded, the crew finally understood this was a real attack and rushed to man their guns.

The attack had only begun just minutes ago and already several of the battleships were crippled and afire, barely able to defend themselves any longer. Kelsey looked out the thick windows ahead of him and saw bombs falling on the *West Virginia* and *Tennessee*, while an explosion rocked the bow of the *Arizona*.

The *Nevada*'s bridge suddenly seemed to explode as a burst of bullets shattered the glass windows and tore into the enclosed space. The petty officer who had been standing in front of Kelsey was thrown backward like a rag doll as bullets ripped through his body and tore off half of his skull. The impact of his mauled corpse knocked Kelsey off his feet. Splattered with the man's blood, he pushed the remains off of him and stared in wide-eyed horror at the dead eyes. Eyes he had seen before.

“Commander! You okay?”

“Commander Kelsey, can you hear me? Are you hit?”

He felt hands lifting him off the deck, and he looked around the bridge. There were now roughly a dozen men standing at their stations. Blood was splashed across the navigation table and the deck. Besides the fallen petty officer, several others had facial lacerations from flying shards of glass. All were gripping their life jackets and looking at him for direction. Kelsey wiped the sweat from his brow. The Captain was not on board and neither was the XO. That left him in charge.

“Sir, we need to get out of here. Right now.” It was Middleton, the bos'n. *When did he get here?*

“Clear the bridge,” Kelsey ordered, though his voice was quiet and uncertain.

“No, Sir, I don't mean the bridge. We need to get out of our moorings. We've got a lane to maneuver the ship.”

Kelsey was coming back to his senses and stared at Middleton, incredulous. “Maneuver the ship? We need steam and tugs. We don't even have a pilot aboard.”

Middleton grabbed Kelsey's bicep. “Sir, the boilers.”

*The boilers!*

Kelsey felt a surge of adrenaline and lifted the receiver from a sound-powered phone. “Engine Room, Bridge.”

“Engine Room, aye!” came the reply.

“This is Commander Kelsey. We're getting underway. Make all preparations, fire up the service generators that we've got steam for and light off the other boilers and generators as fast as you can.”

“You got it, Commander!”

Kelsey hung up the phone and turned to Middleton, realizing he was the one man who seemed to have his wits about him. “We need to keep those planes off of us. Is Lieutenant Hotchkiss on board?”

“He should be, Sir.”

“Find him and tell him to open up every ammunition locker we have. Take command of our starboard anti-air battery; make sure every gun is firing.”

He turned to Ensign Fowler. “Billy, same drill, port side.”

“Aye, Sir!”

The two men hurried out of the bridge. A warning was shouted and Kelsey's eyes followed the extended arm of one of the crewmen. Another torpedo plane had appeared across the harbor, firing her missile at the *Nevada* and then banking away. Kelsey watched the torpedo plow through the water and head directly amidships.

"INCOMING!" he cried out as the torpedo slammed into the ship, the loud explosion causing the ship to shudder and rock to one side.

Thick smoke obscured their visibility from the bridge, so Kelsey quickly scampered down a ladder to Deck Five to survey the damage. Gun crews in helmets and life preservers were urgently loading and firing the five-inch and .50 caliber anti-aircraft gun mounts sprinkled throughout the ship. He leaned over the railing and through the dense smoke saw that the torpedo had fully punctured the hull, creating a hole the size of a pickup truck. As Kelsey was attempting to calculate just how much water they were taking on, his eardrums nearly burst at the sound of a thunderous blast followed by several successive explosions. The blast concussion was so severe it knocked several of the men off their feet and Kelsey found himself struggling to maintain his own balance. He grabbed a nearby sound-powered phone and rang the crow's nest, his ears still ringing.

"Forward lookout! This is Commander Kelsey. What the hell was that?"

Kelsey waited a few moments before he heard the reply. "*Arizona*, Sir! Must have taken a hit to her magazine! Jesus Christ, Sir, it took out half the ship!"

Kelsey cursed under his breath as his mind was slowly overtaken by the names and faces of old friends serving on the *Arizona*. Realizing the *Nevada* would suffer a similar fate if she didn't clear her moorings soon, he rang engineering again.

"Main Engine Room, Smalls."

"Chief, it's Kelsey. Report!"

"We're getting four of the steam generators on line, giving us two engines for propulsion," said the chief, yelling into the phone so he could be heard above the din of the machinery space. "We should have enough steam up to get underway in about twenty minutes!"

"Push harder, Chief, we don't have twenty minutes."

Kelsey hung up, not waiting for a response. He moved to a twin .50 caliber gun mount where Middleton was directing a crew of Marines, their chattering guns throwing up streams of lead at a flight of Zeroes that had crossed over Ford Island in a strafing attack on the maintenance buildings and aircraft hangers.

"How're you doing over here, Bos'n?"

Middleton pointed into the water. "See that dark current? That's oil, probably from the *Arizona*. If we don't get underway soon, we'll be sitting in a barbecue pit."

"We should have enough steam any minute now. Find your line-handling detail. Get down to the quays, cast off as quick as you can. And then get your ass back on this ship."

Middleton grinned and gave Kelsey a quick salute, running off. One of the lookouts suddenly called out a hysterical warning as the distinctive high-pitched whistle of a falling bomb grew louder. Kelsey and the other men dropped down to their feet and hugged the main deck as the bomb landed just off the *Nevada*'s bow, sending a fountain of water onto the foc'sle.

Kelsey picked himself off the deck and hustled back up to the main bridge. He realized then he had forgotten to leave someone in charge. As he entered the bridge, he saw Daniels standing next to the helm, the phone in one ear and a finger in the other. Kelsey almost smiled, feeling a surprising tinge of pride in the young man.

Daniels saw him and hung up the phone. "Sir," he said, his face flushed now with excitement. "Main Control reports we've got some power up. We can make turns for six knots now, and fifteen by the time we clear the harbor."

"Good enough. I'm short on deck officers right now and I need every available man on the AA guns. Find a starboard section to command and blow a few of these Japs away. Understood?"

Daniels's eyes opened wider and flickered with excitement. "Aye, aye, Sir!" came his reply, anxious to finally get in the fight. He moved toward a nearby locker and grabbed a life jacket and helmet.

Embarrassed, Kelsey reached into the next locker and quickly slipped into his own helmet and life jacket. As he did so, he looked down at the quay and could see Middleton and his crew hacking away at the lines with axes. Under steam but still anchored, the ship had already begun to move away from her moorings, pulling the lines taut like a dog on a tight leash. After an agonizing minute, the last line was cut free and the ship began to pull away. The line-handlers were unable to get back aboard, diving for cover as a fighter began a strafing run in their direction. Middleton dove as well, but into the water, and began frantically swimming the thirty feet or so to the stern of the *Nevada*. One of his shipmates spotted him and threw him a line. Kelsey couldn't contain a grin as the burly bos'n, covered in oil, nimbly climbed the rope like a monkey and pulled himself over the lifelines.

"Unbelievable," muttered Kelsey, shaking his head in awe. He turned his attention back to the bridge, knowing he had to prepare the ship for sortie. Kelsey had no pilot but hoped that if he kept the ship in the center of the channel, she would be okay. He heard more cries of alarm and another explosion rocked the ship, throwing Kelsey and the others to the deck. He gathered himself and looked down through the gaps in the smoke that enveloped the ship. An armor-piercing bomb had ripped through the foc'sle and exploded below decks, gutting the forward section of the ship. Kelsey could see the fire crews gamely attempting to douse the flames with water and pull wounded men to safety.

The battered ship was now underway; he just needed to maneuver away from the flaming wreckage of the *Arizona*.

"Starboard engine, ahead one third."

Ensign Cirillo moved the lever on the engine order telegraph into the appropriate position, sending their speed request to the engine room. Kelsey turned and was relieved to see Radinovich, the Chief Quartermaster, at the helm.

*Need to make sure we clear the Arizona aft.* "Helm," he called out, "left standard rudder."

"Left standard rudder, aye, Sir!" echoed Radinovich, turning the wheel fifteen degrees.

Seeing what the brave ship was attempting, more planes descended on her and blasts ripped through the air as the *Nevada* was rocked by two more bombs. The bridge crew was tossed around the room and Kelsey slammed both knees into a bulkhead. He grimaced in pain, wondering if the entire superstructure was going to come apart.

*How much more can she take?*

The breeze from their forward movement cleared some of the smoke and Kelsey could see fires raging throughout the main deck. He prayed the damage control teams would get the flames under control before they reached the magazines below decks.

"Rudder, midships," he called out.

"Midships, aye, Sir," acknowledged the helmsman, straightening the wheel in his hands.

It took some time for the *Nevada* to limp past the carnage of Battleship Row, but she finally cleared the suffocating smoke and heat of what once comprised the heart of one of the most powerful fleets in American naval history. Slowly, the *Nevada* approached the last of the burning vessels, the *California*, flagship of the Pacific Fleet. Her gun and damage control crews paused to wave and cheer as one of their sister ships was boldly steaming away.

They had sortied roughly a half-mile, and Kelsey figured they had maybe a mile to go to clear the channel and reach open water.

One of the lookouts entered the bridge and approached Kelsey. "Sir, signal from *California*. We're being ordered not to leave the harbor."

"What?!?"

Before the lookout could reply, Daniels rushed in through the bridge hatch, breathless and soaked with perspiration. "Couldn't reach you from Deck Four, Sir, and wasn't sure you could see with all this smoke. One of those bombs took out Number One Turret, and it looks like Number Two Turret has been abandoned because of the fire." Daniels paused to cough some of the smoke out of his lungs. "The last bomb hit the foc'sle. Chief Lewis says he lost at least twenty men below decks and probably a handful more from the topside gun crews."

Kelsey thought for a moment. "Are we taking on water?"

“Some, Sir,” confirmed Daniels. “But the pumps are still working and the hull forward appears to be intact, other than the hole in our port side from that first torpedo.”

Kelsey bit his lower lip and looked ahead, straining to see the harbor entrance through the thick smoke. Then he remembered that the approach was not only narrow, but shallow as well.

“They’re worried we won’t make it through,” he reasoned out loud. “If we sink in the channel, we’ll block the harbor, bottle up the fleet.”

“What fleet, Sir?” asked Daniels bitterly. “We’ll make it. We’re doing at least eight knots right now and we’ll be up to ten by the time we reach the entrance.”

Kelsey ignored him, knowing what had to be done. He looked across the smoke and haze and saw Hospital Point, the area of land that marked the southeastern end of the channel entrance. That is where he would beach the *Nevada*. “Helm, left rudder, ten degrees. Steady as you go.”

“You can’t do that, she’ll run aground!” protested Daniels.

Something inside snapped and Kelsey grabbed Daniels by the front of his life jacket and pulled him close. “You ever question an order of a superior officer when this ship is under fire and I will personally throw your ass to the sharks.” Kelsey took a breath, resisting the temptation to deck the snot-nosed ensign. But for some inexplicable reason, he suddenly thought of Chief Middleton. He released Daniels and took a step back. “You get me?”

Daniels, trembling and near tears, nodded his head.

“Now get back with those gun crews. I need you out there.”

“Aye, aye, Sir,” Daniels replied automatically, fleeing from the bridge.

Kelsey moved toward the wheel to make sure the helmsman was on the right heading. They all ducked instinctively as another fighter strafed the superstructure. The bridge had become enveloped in smoke again, so Kelsey grabbed a pair of binoculars and stepped out onto the Captain’s Bridge.

It was slick with blood. A young Marine, in his dress uniform of a khaki shirt and blue trousers, was lying on his back in a pool of blood. The kid had obviously been taking potshots at their attackers with his .30 caliber rifle and had been hit in the chest and face with shrapnel from one of the bomb blasts. Another body, an officer in khaki uniform, was sprawled out on his stomach, his torso mangled from several bullet holes, most likely a victim of a strafing run. Kelsey quickly looked away from the gruesome corpses and stepped over the Marine to look across the channel. They were less than a thousand yards from the shoreline.

As the ship’s rudder sluggishly responded to their new heading, the bow slowly came about, pointing now towards Hospital Point. Suddenly the *Nevada*’s starboard AA guns opened fire in unison and Kelsey saw three fighters approaching from the west for another strafing run. Kelsey grabbed the .30 caliber rifle that lay by his feet and fired at the fighters as they passed over the ship. He got off five rounds before the rifle emptied. The gun crews cheered as a five-inch shell blew a wing off one of the fighters, spiraling now into the water.

“Bastards,” growled Kelsey, as he grabbed another clip from the cartridge belt of the dead Marine, careful to avoid stepping on the other corpse, and reloaded. He pulled back the bolt and heard the distinctive whistle of bombs being dropped from high-altitude attack planes. One fell less than fifty yards from the ship’s port stern, spraying the gun crews near the fantail with water. But seconds later two successive bombs ripped through the *Nevada*’s aft quarterdeck. The force of the explosion knocked Kelsey off his feet and his head slammed into the railing as he fell to the deck, falling between the two corpses.

His head felt like he had been hit with a hammer and there were sharp pains in his shoulder and side. He opened his eyes a few moments later, realizing he couldn’t hear anything except a loud ringing in his ears. His vision was blurred by water dripping down from his forehead.

Still lightheaded, Kelsey grabbed a nearby railing with his uninjured arm and managed to prop himself up against a bulkhead. He raised his hand to wipe the water from his forehead, and the bloodstained khaki uniform lying beside him came into focus. Kelsey felt a tightness in his gut as he found himself staring at the open eyes of the lifeless officer.

“Daniels,” he whispered. The water continued to drip past his eyelids, and as he raised his hand

again he saw that it was wet not from water, but with his own blood. Kelsey tried to call out for help, but he was fully disoriented now, losing sight of everything around him. His head slowly slumped forward as he lost consciousness; his last thought one of thankfulness for the coming peace that had evaded him for so long.