

AT THE WATER'S EDGE



A PLAY FOR RADIO

FACTUAL DRAMA



CHARLES RICHARD TRUMPESS
TELEPHONE: +44 (0)2076100698
EMAIL: CHARLIE@CHARLIE-THE-COPYWRITER.CO.UK

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At the Water's Edge

Characters

- Narrator
- Joe Staunton
- Stan Jarvis
- Jean, Stan's sweetheart
- NCO
- Col. Canham
- Anne, Stan's sister
- Turnbull
- Medic
- Lucy, Joe's sweetheart
- GI One & Two
- Lt. George

Prologue

SFX:

AT FIRST THE AUDIENCE HEAR ALL THE SOUND AND FURY OF A SUMMER GALE IN THE ENGLISH CHANNEL. THEREAFTER, AS IF CARRIED FROM A DISTANCE ON THE HIGH WINDS, THE SOUND OF MEN'S VOICES. ORDERS ARE BEING GIVEN IN THICKLY ACCENTED ENGLISH, AMERICAN, CANADIAN, FRENCH AND POLISH. NEXT, WE HEAR THE RHYTHMIC DRUMBEAT OF A SHIP'S ENGINES FOLLOWED BY THE NOISE OF KLAXONS AND SIRENS. HUNDREDS OF SECOND WORLD WAR ALLIED SHIPS, FROM BATTLESHIPS TO LANDING CRAFT, STEAM RELENTLESSLY ON. AND THEN, QUITE SUDDENLY, THERE IS A MOMENT OF CALM, A PAUSE, BEFORE WE HEAR THE DEAFENING REPORT OF NAVAL GUNFIRE.

THE ROARING ENGINE NOISE OF ALLIED AIRCRAFT GRADUALLY DROWNS OUT THE POUNDING OF NAVAL BROADSIDES. AFTER WHICH WE HEAR THE SCREAMS AND SHOUTS OF MEN EXITING LANDING CRAFT AND STRUGGLING ASHORE. THESE SOUNDS MERGE WITH THE DISTINCTIVE PURR OF GERMAN MG-42 MACHINE-GUNS PLUS EXPLODING MORTAR AND ARTILLERY SHELLS. JUST THEN, AS THE BLARE OF BATTLE REACHES A CLIMAX, IT FADES;

REPLACED BY THE GENTLE LAPPING OF WAVES AGAINST THE SHORE. THIS IN TURN ABATES, LEAVING SILENCE.

NEXT, THE DISTANT CHATTER OF MACHINE-GUN FIRE AND THE 'CRUMP' OF EXPLODING ARTILLERY SHELLS.

Narrator: Twice during the first half of the 20th century the world was engulfed in the flames of war; the first of these two World Wars tragically setting the fuse for the second.

SFX (background): THE VOICE OF ADOLF HITLER GIVING A SPEECH AS GERMANY'S NEW CHANCELLOR PLUS THE SOUNDS OF AN SA POLITICAL MEETING.

Narrator (continues): Germany 1933: In a period of economic chaos and political extremism, the government of the day hands power to the National Socialists, or Nazi party.

The Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler, promises to restore Germany to its former glory, and build an empire that will last a thousand years. This new German State, or Reich, will be built upon a foundation of racial and political discrimination, mass murder, and, finally, an aggressive war of conquest.

SFX (background): FIRST, THE SOUND OF GERMAN TROOPS MARCHING TO THE STEADY BEAT OF A MILITARY DRUM. NEXT, THE SOUNDS OF TANKS AND PLANES - THE BLITZKRIEG.

Narrator (continues): Although denied the capacity to wage war by the Treaty of Versailles, secretly, Germany rearms.

1936 sees German troops reoccupy the Rhineland. Two years later the Germany Army or Wehrmacht is welcomed into German-speaking Austria. Next, Czechoslovakia falls under German control: a victim of the Anglo-French policy of 'Appeasement'. But Hitler will not to be appeased. And when Germany launches a surprise attack on Poland in September 1939, Europe is once again plunged into war.

SFX (background): ARCHIVE SOUNDS OF BRITISH AND FRENCH FORCES TRAPPED AT DUNKIRK FOLLOWED BY THE EVACUATION – THE ARMADA OF LITTLE BOATS.

Narrator (continues): May 1940: German troops take Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. By June, British and French forces are trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk, and a German invasion of Britain seems inevitable.

But the invasion never comes. Britain's Royal Air Force defeats the German Luftwaffe in the skies over Southern England. Britain holds on - alone.

SFX: HEAR AN EXTRACT FROM WINSTON CHURCHILL'S NOW FAMOUS BATTLE OF BRITAIN SPEECH: "NEVER IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN CONFLICT HAS SO MUCH BEEN OWED BY SO MANY TO SO FEW..."

NEXT, THE DISTINCTIVE SCREAM OF A JU-87 STUKA DIVE-BOMBER AS IT PRESSES HOME AN ATTACK.

Narrator (continues): Hitler's eyes then turned eastward. Ignoring his earlier pact with Stalin, Hitler launches operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, in June 1941. It is now the turn of a disorganised and poorly led Red Army to face the tanks and dive-bombers of Blitzkrieg – the lightning war.

SFX (background): ARCHIVE RECORDING OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT, POSSIBLY ADDRESSING CONGRESS ON THE NEED TO PREPARE FOR WAR.

Narrator (continues): As the global crisis deepens, an isolationist America has no other option than to prepare for the worst while still hoping for the best.

Cast in the role of "the arsenal of democracy", the United States Lend-Leases guns, tanks, planes, ships, trucks, fuel, ammunition and even food to its beleaguered European allies. America is willing to do almost anything to stave off outright war. But then...

SFX: ARCHIVE SOUNDTRACK OF THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOUR. THIS SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY ROOSEVELT'S RADIO ADDRESS TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ANNOUNCING THE JAPANESE ATTACK: "A DAY THAT WILL LIVE IN INFAMY..."

Narrator (continues):

December 7 1941: Greedy to expand her Pacific empire Japan launches a surprise air and sea attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbour. Within days Nazi Germany declares war on the United States.

Now, with the exception of a few neutral countries, the entire world is at war.

1943: Germany starts to reap the whirlwind of fighting a war on two fronts. The news from both North Africa and Russia is bad. Boggled down in a bloody war of attrition in the East, Hitler knows it's only a matter of time before the Allies attempt a landing in Western Europe.

SFX (background):

THE SOUNDS OF ALLIED TROOPS AND MATERIEL ON THE MOVE IN FINAL PREPARATION FOR THE NORMANDY LANDINGS ON JUNE 6 1944.

Narrator (continues):

But what Hitler cannot imagine is the sheer scope or daring of the Allied invasion plans. In one night and day 175,000 men and all their equipment, including 50,000 vehicles ranging from bicycles to tanks will cross the English Channel and land on Normandy's heavily defended shores.

Code-named Overlord, it will be the largest armada the world has ever seen. An armada of over 5,000 ships of every possible size and shape, from supply vessels and minesweepers to the infantry landing craft known as Higgins boats. Giant harbours, oil pipelines under the sea plus 11,000 aircraft, all massing for the mighty task ahead.

And for German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, commander of the so-called Atlantic Wall, the sure and certain knowledge that the decisive battle for Western Europe will be decided at the water's edge. Better than anyone, Rommel knows that once the Allied armies are ashore in strength there will be no stopping them – until Germany is beaten.

End.

Act I. Scene I.

Narrator:

The Queen Mary was a famous ship: a luxury ocean-going liner. But that was during peacetime. Now she is a troop transport, crammed with American GIs. Just four days out of New York and the Queen Mary is already more than half way to Britain. In fact, she's considered such a fast ship that no escorts are required to shield her from possible German U-boat attacks. Speed protects her, and the men within.

One of hundreds aboard is a young PFC or Private First Class from Bedford, West Virginia. Joe Staunton belongs to the 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division. But Joe is yet to be assigned to a Company or Battalion. Wanting to escape the stench of seasickness, sweat and countless pairs of Army boots, Joe climbs up through the ship and eventually manages to get topside.

SFX:

THE SOUND OF THE WIND AND THE OCEAN. THEN A METALLIC SOUND AS JOE CLICKS OPEN A ZIPPO STYLED CIGARETTE LIGHTER. NEXT THE AUDIENCE HEAR HIM MAKE A COUPLE OF ATTEMPTS TO LIGHT A CIGARETTE, IN SPITE OF THE WIND, AND FINALLY SUCCEED.

Joe Staunton:

Will you look at all that water. I never saw so much water my whole life. This is a fearsome lonely place. Like a great rolling wilderness - full of dangers. The sea wolves are out there, somewhere, hungry for a kill. Watching, listening and waiting. Ready to snap off a torpedo salvo and send us straight to the bottom, I bet. That's so much for my dollar-a-day in the Virginia National Guard, eh?

SFX:

JOE PLAYS WITH THE CIGARETTE LIGHTER, MAKING A CLICKING SOUND BY FLIPPING THE TOP OPEN AND THEN CLOSED.

Joe Staunton (continues):

Wonder if it was like this for my Pa in the Great War? Him and all them *doughboys* just like him. Just like us, except now we're all Government Issue.

I'm hoping one thing's different, that's for sure: Pa's ship was carrying something more than just troops. They had a stowaway that proved more deadly than any German bomb or bullet, that's for sure.

The way I heard it, the influenza started taking men while they were still aboard ship. Pa reckoned that by the war's end it was killing more of our guys than the fighting. Told me he'd seen big ol' Kentucky farm boys drown in their own blood: gasping; purple-faced. Many of 'em never got to see a German, or fire a shot. Instead, they just got sick and died. Armies of germs, and ships like this one the perfect breeding ground. Makes my flesh crawl to think on it, I don't mind telling yah.

SFX:

JOE PAUSES.

Joe Staunton (continues):

They say that this is a fast ship; may be one of the fastest across the Atlantic; too fast for a U-boat to catch, anyhow. I sure hope that's the truth. We're an infantry division, after all, so drowning would be something of an embarrassment, I reckon.

Gee, I sure wish I had a letter from my Lucy. She's waiting for me back home in Bedford. Reckon it'll take a spell before our mail catches up to us. In the meantime all I really have are my thoughts and memories. So, I close my eyes and imagine Lucy. Ah, there she is walking down Church Street. She's wearing one of them white cotton dresses. You know, a summer dress. It kind of reminds me of a sail or a flag, the way it flaps and billows when it's caught by a breeze. Her head held high, like the prow of a ship. She moves with such grace that I'm totally spellbound. The slightest tilt of her hips is all she needs to change speed, course and direction. And all I can do, as always, is follow in her wake.

SFX:

JOE EXHALES LOUDLY BEFORE CONTINUING.

Joe Staunton (continues):

I'd sure liked to have seen something of New York City before we left. But no liberty passes for us. Instead, we were moved straight from behind the wire of Fort McClellan to another, almost identical, khaki and canvas latrine: Camp Shanks. Some General somewhere seemed to think that a carton of cigarettes, candy bar and a copy of Life magazine was somehow fair trade for the bright lights of Broadway. Just how wrong can you be?

Anyhow, the next thing we know is we're getting our marching orders, again. Only this time we're moved over to the naval dockyards, ready for embarkation.

SFX: JOE'S MONOLOGUE TAKES ON A MORE CYNICAL, SARCASTIC TONE.

Joe Staunton (continues): Dockside, and we're greeted by the starched uniforms and red lips of the American Red Cross, gals. Fine looking women wearing painted smiles. Dispensing coffee and kind words, along with jelly donuts and little canvas bags. We all got one. Like a little khaki going-away present from good old Uncle Sam. Inside mine I found a cake of soap, some razor blades, bootlaces; a dime store novel and a whole mess of other stuff.

SFX: JOE PAUSES, AND ONCE AGAIN HIS TONE CHANGES, BECOMING SADDER AND MORE THOUGHTFUL.

Joe Staunton (continues): Later, as we were preparing to board, one of them Red Cross gals comes right up to me and says, "Now, you take care, soldier." Now, I'm not one of those superstitious types, like some of the guys. I don't hold with lucky charms and such. And I don't spook easily, let me tell yah, but there was something in her tone that sent a shiver up and down my spine. There was something awfully final in that last goodbye.

SFX: WE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE ATLANTIC BREAKING OVER THE SHIP'S HULL PLUS WIND AND WAVES, ETC.

Scene ends.

Act I. Scene II.

Narrator: Originally from the Crookes area of Sheffield, Stan Jarvis was called up in November 1941. He was just eighteen. Now, in the early days of 1944, Stan is a Corporal serving with 14th Platoon, C. Company, 2nd Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment. The 2nd Battalion is stationed at Inverary, 17 miles northwest of Aberdeen, Scotland. Having trained for the invasion of Sicily, the battalion is now being held back for the Second Front: the Allied invasion of Western Europe.

Exhausted, Stan returns to his billet after a filthy, wet, miserable, freezing day of amphibious assault training. Stan is a young man with much on his mind. The constant training and unremittingly harsh weather is taking its toll

on everyone. Boredom threatens morale. People are starting to make mistakes due to fatigue. Men are getting injured, some seriously.

To make matters worse, Stan recently received a letter from his sweetheart, Jean, in which she told him of her new job at the Risley Royal Ordnance Factory. Working at Risley is a dangerous occupation. Not only is it one of the Luftwaffe's prime industrial targets for bombing, but the whole place is like a giant powder keg of high explosive.

After practising loading, embarkation and landing from an LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) since sun-up, Stan has had enough for one day. While everyone else has already gone off to the NAAFI, Stan, still sopping wet and shivering from the day's activities, has been assigned the job of stripping and cleaning his squad's Bren light machine-gun (LMG).

The squad's billet is depressingly drab, without a hint of comfort or colour. Utility is the order of the day; the billet contains only the bare essentials of military life, including two identical rows of equipment lockers and iron-framed beds. The only heat comes from a small, seldom lit, wood and coal burning stove. A cloying smell of damp socks and stale sweat hangs in the air so thick and overpowering that it's almost a taste.

Resisting the urge to collapse on his bed, Stan carefully places his Enfield rifle and the LMG on the red waxed floor. Next, he takes off his helmet, rain cape and pack. Then he removes his sodden webbing and rough woollen khaki tunic. When all are arranged in a neat steaming pile, Stan reaches for his pack of Army and Navy cigarettes. Of course, these too are soaking wet and utterly spoilt.

Stan Jarvis:

Shit! All this lot to do, and not a fag to take the edge off things.

SFX:

HEAR STAN GO OVER TO HIS LOCKER, OPEN IT AND SEARCH OF A DRY CIGARETTE.

Stan Jarvis (continues):

There's got to be a smoke in here somewhere. Hello, what's this? Oh, Jean's letter; I'd completely forgotten, what with the Sergeant Major trying to drown us at every opportunity he gets.

SFX: WE HEAR STAN RIP OPEN AN ENVELOPE AND UNFOLD THE SHEETS OF PAPER.

Stan Jarvis (continues): Now let's have a look here and see what she has to say for herself.
(Pause.)

SFX: THE SOUND OF STAN SLAPPING THE SHEETS OF LETTER PAPER WITH THE BACK OF HIS HAND. FOLLOWED BY JEAN'S VOICE READING HER LETTER ALOUD.

Jean: Dear Stan,
How are you? The family all sends their love, and trust that you're keeping in the pink. I've been chatting with the girls and have visited the Labour Exchange, and have volunteered for war work. Please don't be angry, as I know you're against it, but I can't help the way I feel. I simply have to do my bit.

Do you remember, as a nipper, how old soldiers and sailors used to go door to door selling writing paper and brushes and the like? They used to look at you as if to say, "I fought for you. I nearly gave my life for you, and now look at me." And I used to feel so awful, you know. Even then, as a nipper, I used to promise myself that if war ever came again I'd do my bit too, you know. And that's why I've decided on war work.

I'll be working in an ammunition factory, which sounds a bit scary, but someone's got to do it, so why not me? Anyway, I've made my mind up to do whatever I can to help win this war and bring you home, regardless. I've even had a liberty haircut: you'd hardly recognise me.

I know you think that I'm a bit impressionable and believe everything I see in the newsreels, hear on the wireless or read in *Miss Modern*. But that's not it, honestly. I know the difference between propaganda and the truth. And the truth is that the Germans are overhead dropping their bombs and causing destruction, and have been since December of '40. Do you remember that first big raid? The roads blocked with rubble, tramcars upended and the whole city centre aflame. High Street, King Street and Church Street blasted beyond recognition. The war is here, Stan. You can't protect me from it, and I can't sit idly by doing nothing.

Anyway, write soon dearest, even if it's just a few lines, and please don't be too angry, as we all have to do our bit, and that's about the size of it. Everyone's keeping their chins up here, and praying for the day we'll see you safely home. Bye for now, love, your one and only, Jean.

SFX:

FIRST, WE HEAR THE SOUND OF AN AIR RAID SIREN FOLLOWED BY THE DRONING OF GERMAN BOMBER AIRCRAFT. NEXT, THE AUDIENCE HEARS THE WHISTLING SOUND OF AERIAL BOMBS FALLING TO EARTH, AND FINALLY THEIR DETONATIONS. STAN'S VOICE COMES IN OVER THE SFX OF THE AIR RAID.

Stan Jarvis:

The raids are always the same. That eerie wailing of the sirens sends people striding determinedly towards the shelters. It's rare that anyone runs or shows any signs of panic. You might see a woman drag a hesitant child or a fretting dog along the street toward the nearest shelter. And occasionally you might notice someone standing on a street corner, mesmerised, and staring straight up: struck like a statue, back arched and mouth agape, gazing to heaven. Even in the shelters you can catch the drone of aircraft engines approaching. People pressed together, fearful and expectant. While closer and closer comes the gathering storm. Ack-Ack shells and high explosive reach out to greet them, and in reply they release their bombs.

Six to eight bombs delivered with typical German precision. From whistle to clap of thunder you can calculate the closing distance: getting closer and closer. An awful '*crump*' sound followed by a ringing detonation.

Counting: one, two, three... You feel the sudden change of air pressure and a sensation like being pushed by invisible hands. The concrete shelter seems to shift on its foundations, and then, an almighty bang. Everything reels momentarily, and the lights flicker or briefly dim. Someone yelps while another gasps, but no one cries out.

Counting: Four, five, six... The planes are moving away now. Again the air pressure changes. This time as everyone breathes a sigh of relief. Nervous laughter escapes from the children and spreads amongst the adults. Finally, the all clear sounds.

Apprehensive, blinking, people emerge, and quickly shuffle off to inspect the damage, or find a loved one. Nearby houses are smashed and burning. The air is thick, oily and smoke-laden. Water gushes from a broken main. Remnants of normality, such as furniture and clothing, litter the streets. And someone, somewhere is screaming.

I sometimes wonder what was worse, staying to watch Sheffield burn or getting called-up.

STAN ASSUMES AN AFFECTED TONE WHEN RECOUNTING THE CONTENTS OF THE WAR OFFICE'S LETTER, SENT ON THE OCCASION OF HIS CALL-UP FOR MILITARY SERVICE.

"You are to present yourself at the Assembly Rooms, Doncaster, for a thorough medical examination," the call-up letter said.

Surprised by the War Office's sudden concern for my health, I decided to gracefully accept their kind invitation. And so, on the appointed day, I dutifully took myself off. On arriving at the Assembly Rooms, a scene reminiscent of a cattle market greeted me. A herd of startled and slightly panic-stricken men, just like me, were being pushed, pulled and prodded by officious looking chaps in white coats. And it wasn't long before I found myself corralled into a medical cubical. Next, in marches this army doctor: all business and no bedside manner, you know the type, brusque, irritable and impatient. Anyway, then he starts bombarding me with questions: How do I feel? Have I ever suffered a serious illness? What makes me nervous or anxious? But, of course, before I can stammer out a coherent answer, he's already asking me another question. And that's how this medical interview goes on. Finally, he asks me how do I think I'll get along in the Army, and do I like girls? And then, with no preamble or explanation, he orders me to drop my trousers.

Somewhat flummoxed, and not really understanding what's going on, my dithering provokes an immediate response from the Medical Officer. Shaking with rage, this scarlet-faced doctor now calls in a big, burly Sergeant Major type to take me in hand. Pressing his face within an inch of

mine while fixing me with a look of utter disgust and loathing, the Sergeant bawls at me: “Your trousers, lad! Drop ‘em!”

All this bellowing has the desired effect, and off come my trousers. Well, in the next instant, the doctor has a hold of me *Old Fella* in his vice-like grip. Then, without loosening his grip, he simply says, “Cough.” Stupidly, I interpret this as another enquiry about my health, rather than a command, and so tell the MO that I’m fine: no cough. A quick glance at the Sergeant, his expression one of amusement, astonishment and contempt, confirms my mistake. Shame-faced, I produce the required cough, after which my groin is released for active service. The MO pronounces me FFI – Free from Infection. And the next thing that I know, I’m heading for basic training.

It was tough at first, being away from home like, living with a load of strangers and their strange and annoying habits. And then you’ve got the Officers and NCOs screaming at you day and night. But it’s funny what you can get used to. The way I looked at it, being a civilian was easy and being a soldier is easy. It’s making the transition from one to the other, now that’s hard. Aye, it’s hard to give up everything you know and love in exchange for a draughty billet and a rain swept parade ground.

For most of us now, home is more like a dream than a reality. And we’ve learned the importance of little victories, such as avoiding jankers while keeping dry when on sentry duty of a night. In fact, keeping dry has become something of obsession after weeks of wet weather and incessant training on landing craft. We repeat the assault drills again and again until we can do ‘em in our sleep. They’ve turned us into machines, unthinking and hardened against the elements. Our minds and bodies are dulled and aching from the repetition and physical demands of the training. The thought of going into action seems like a positive relief compared to all this.

The latest rumour going about says that we’ll be moving to one of the south coast ports soon, although it’s all terribly hush-hush. Until I joined up I would have never believed soldiers were such terrible gossips. The rumours are like the weather, always changing, and growing darker and more threatening.

Originally we were supposed to be on for the invasion of Sicily, until some bright spark decided we needed to see Scotland instead. Most of the lads think we're bound for France. Almost time to pay Jerry back for Dunkirk. Shame about Sicily though, could have done with some sun. In the meantime, here we sit, killing time rather than Germans. It's the first thing you learn to kill as a soldier, time.

For the most part the training is so tough that it robs you of your senses. I did six months in the mills before I joined up, and I thought that was hard work. Well, it seems I was wrong about that.

Here, we're up before dawn, billet and kit inspection, and then out onto the mountains or down to the sea. Most days, come rain or shine, we'll march 10, sometimes 20 miles with full pack and weapons. Usually it's raining. And when we're not marching up to the top of the hill or marching down again, then we're on weapons or marine assault practice.

Now, if you can imagine being lifted up by a giant hand, placed inside a metal box and then shaken to the point of unconsciousness, that's amphibious assault training. Soaking wet, we're tossed, pitched and rolled about on a black-hearted sea in full kit. Teeth-loosening, stomach-retching and ensuring that your basic infantry soldier arrives safely on the beach in a state of utter stupefaction, just in time to get cut to pieces by enemy machine-gun fire, aye, that's how we're preparing for a coastal assault.

SFX: STAN HEARS SOMEONE CALL HIS NAME FROM BEYOND THE BILLET WALLS.

NCO: Jarvis! Jarvis! Get youse over to the NAAFI! Jarvis d'youse hear me?

Stan Jarvis: Aye, okay! I'm on my way!

SFX: WE HEAR STAN STAND UP AND QUICKLY PUT HIS KIT AND WEAPONS AWAY. SOUND FADES OUT.

Scene ends.

Act I. Scene III.

Narrator: Since being transported from Greenock, Scotland to a replacement camp, PFC (Private First Class) Joe Staunton has joined 'Mike' Company, 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, US 29th Division at Crown Barracks in Plymouth, South West England. The 29th Division is undertaking combined amphibious assault training with other Allied forces such as British Commandos.

Joe sits alone in a Nissan hut, writing a letter home to his sweetheart, Lucy.

SFX: WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF A PENCIL ON PAPER.

Joe Staunton: There. Finished.

SFX: NEXT, THE SOUNDS OF SHEETS OF PAPER BEING PICKED UP AND SORTED OUT, PRIOR TO BEING READ ALOUD.

Joe Staunton (continues): My darling Lucy, I haven't had a letter from you in about two weeks now, but I know it takes a little time for the mail to reach us here.

The weather has improved some and England is starting to look pretty good. It's very green here. Sorry I can't tell you where 'here' is. All of the houses roundabouts are small, cottages I guess, and made of stone or brick, not timber like at home.

Anyhow, the local townsfolk seem real neighbourly. It's hard to imagine these people have been fighting since '39, except every now and then you get a glimpse behind the curtain, so to speak, and see what sacrifices they've made. Outside of our training area there really isn't much to do here. The USO and Red Cross occasionally arrange dances, and we get a new movie about once a week. We watched 'Bombers Moon' just the other night: George Montgomery doing his bit for the war effort. Have you seen it, darling?

SFX: THE SOUND OF A SHEET OF PAPER BEING TURNED AS JOE READS ON.

Joe Staunton (continues):

Oh, and did I tell you that there were coloured GIs here in town my last visit. The folks round here don't seem to pay them much mind. They seem to treat 'em just like anybody else. One of the guys from the company says it's because of the British Empire or something. He reckons with all them different colonies and races the British just have to be more tolerant. Whatever the truth of the matter, can you imagine the riot it would cause at home?

How are things in Lynchburg? I sure miss our walks down Main Street on a Saturday night. I was wondering have you had a chance to visit my folks in Bedford?

And darling, are you still thinking of joining the WAACs? I don't want you to rush into anything. Please promise me you'll think more about it. I reckon there's enough of us in uniform as it is. What do your folks say? Maybe you should speak with your Minister before you decide on anything final.

Anyhow, I guess that's about all I have to say for right now. Everything is fine here, so please don't worry about me. I'm with the best bunch of guys in the whole ETO.

Take care my darling, and write soon. Your ever loving, Joe.

SFX:

WE HEAR JOE FOLD UP THE LETTER AND PLACE IT INTO AN ENVELOPE. WE THEN HEAR HIM WRITE THE ADDRESS ON WITH A PENCIL.

Joe Staunton (continues):

We've been organised into boat teams. Everyone in the team has his own special job to do, like me with the BAR.

We seem to live, eat and sleep in our boat teams these days. It's all pretty hush-hush, but basically, when the time comes we'll be attacking a section of enemy beach someplace. And our job will be to neutralise the enemy and overcome all obstacles.

In reality that'll mean us fighting our way up the beach loaded like pack mules, storm a series heavily defended pillboxes, and finally attack any German troop concentrations.

We've a Lieutenant, a radioman, two BAR teams, a flamethrower and his assistant, a five-man demolition team plus our four-man mortar team. The rest are your basic dog-faced riflemen. And that's it, about 30 guys in all.

The only thing we don't know for sure is when or where we'll be landed.

Maybe we are green but we know it's gonna be rough. It's not the thought of dying so much that bothers the guys, but the possibility of failing, of being a coward when the time comes, now that's terrifying. Sometimes I think it's only the fear of letting your buddies down that keeps us here at all. But then, what do I know?

SFX:

JOE'S VOICE FADES OUT TO BE REPLACED BY THE VOICE OF COL. CHARLES "STONEFACE" CANHAM.

Col. Canham:

Just to put you guys fully in the picture, it's going to get pretty rough. The long awaited day is near, and I want to wish each one of you the best of luck in your forthcoming venture. There is one certain way to get the enemy out of action and that is to kill him. War is not child's play and requires hatred for the enemy. At this moment we don't have that hatred. I hope you get it when you see your friends wounded and killed.

Learn to take care of yourself from the start. Remember that the Hun is a crafty, intelligent fighter and will have no mercy on you. Don't have any mercy on him. In all your contact with the enemy be ruthless, and always drive hard. The Navy and Airforce will give us plenty of support. We may be able to walk in without any trouble, but we may have to fight for every inch of ground, even to the last man. Be prepared to fight for your life. Make up your minds now that you will face the worst the enemy can dish out, and go forward regardless.

I have the utmost confidence in your ability to take it and dish it out. There is one final word of warning. The Hun will try and lower your morale by firing artillery or mortars in your area during the time our own artillery is firing. They will do this in an effort to make you believe our artillery is firing on us. It's a dirty trick.

All I have left to say is Happy Landing, and come off those craft fighting like hell.

SFX: COL. CANHAM'S VOICE FADES OUT.

Scene ends.

Act II. Scene I.

Narrator: Stan Jarvis and the men of the British 3rd Infantry Division are now sealed within transit camps, just like thousands of others, up and down the south-western coast of England. Since arriving in early May 1944, Stan and the 2nd Battalion have been living a life under canvas, surrounded by makeshift barbed-wire fencing, which is patrolled by armed sentries. To ensure security, no-one gets in and nobody comes out. Camouflaged from prying-eyes, the camp is surrounded by huge stockpiles of equipment, vehicles and ammunition. And with just days before embarkation, the men of the 2nd Battalion finally get to see their objective using models, maps and reconnaissance photographs, although its name remains a secret. Overlord will be a massive combined Allied forces amphibious assault along 70 miles of the Normandy coast of occupied France.

Prior to the camp being sealed Stan heard that a number of workers had been killed or wounded in an explosion at Risley, the Royal Ordnance Factory where his sweetheart Jean works. But Stan has received no word. The last letter he got was from his sister, Anne, a WRN serving with the Fleet Air Arm, and that had been written weeks before the accident. With the camp now sealed and the Battalion ready to jump off at a moment's notice, Stan knows that he won't get anymore post until after they're ashore in France.

Sitting inside the Battalion's briefing tent, surrounded by models, maps and photographs of their objective, which is just west of La Breche and has been designated Queen/Red sector of Sword Beach, Stan is gnawed at by fears and worries, but not for himself.

Stan Jarvis: I should have known that something was up when they started handing out '*invasion money*'. Exactly what we're supposed to buy with it is beyond me.

Maybe they expect us to pay for anything we break or damage during the invasion. Nothing would surprise me.

To be honest, I'll be glad when the curtain finally goes up on this show. I must have read the same copy of the *Picture Post* a dozen times or more. And my throat's raw from countless Woodbines. This sitting around waiting for the weather to break is making us all jittery. Too much time to think and brood and imagine the worst. Especially after that stupid bastard of a Second Lieutenant told some of the lads that the *brass* didn't expect most of the first wave to make it off the beach in one piece, so they needn't worry about reaching their secondary objectives too much.

And still no word about Risley going up. Of course, they won't print anything in the newspapers which might be considered bad for morale. I don't suppose I'll get word now. Aye, well, not until after we make the landings anyhow. No reply to my last letter home. The camp's out of bounds to the locals, and they've got us sealed up in here as tight as a drum. Now I know how a condemned man feels.

That damned factory. Who would have believed it; and there's everyone thinking that it'd be me likely get knocked off. You just can't credit these things.

SFX: WE HEAR THE SOUND OF STAN LIGHTING A CIGARETTE, AS THE SCENE FADES OUT.

Scene ends.

Act II. Scene II.

SFX: FADING IN, WE HEAR THE SOUND OF MEN AND VEHICLES MOVING ABOUT PLUS VOICES, NEAR AND FAR.

SLOWLY THE SOUNDS FADE OUT TO BE REPLACED BY A WOMAN'S VOICE. IT'S STAN'S SISTER, ANNE, READING FROM HER LAST, UNDELIVERED, LETTER.

Anne: Somewhere in England.

Dear Stan, Thanks for your last letter. I hope these lines find you well? It certainly sounds like the army is making you sing for your supper. I bet I would hardly recognise you now. All grown up and looking every inch the soldier. Everyone is very proud of what you're doing. I know Mum and Dad think you're especially brave after Tom being killed. And I'm sure you're doing your bit, and a good bit more besides. But please promise me you'll try and keep your head down. Sometimes I think this family has done enough, but then I think about all the other families, and all the men and women everywhere, making daily sacrifices. And then I know it will only ever be enough when Mr Churchill comes on the wireless to say that Germany is finished, and victory is ours.

SFX: FADE IN THE SOUNDS OF AN AIRCRAFT WORKSHOP AS BACKGROUND.

Anne (continues): Listen to me getting so serious. Well, how about some good news, instead? I'm now a fully qualified Aircraft Fitter: what about that? No job for a woman I seem to recall someone saying when I first joined up.

To be honest, when I first joined the WRNS and pushed for a mechanics posting with the Fleet Air Arm everyone responded the same way. "Fitter! It's no job for a nice decent girl like you, young lady," was the typical comeback from officialdom. Guess I showed them.

SFX: AIRCRAFT WORKSHOP SOUND AFFECTS FADE OUT.

Anne (continues): The girls at my station are a nice crowd. And most of the chaps seem decent enough. There's a fair bit of leg pulling goes on, as I'm sure you can imagine. You've got to give as good as you get around here, which can be easier said than done sometimes. Although we enjoy a lark from time to time, the work comes first, especially for the girls here. After all, we know we're being constantly scrutinised, and will be harshly judged for any mistakes. But it's not fear of being ostracised that motivates us. No. We know aircrew lives depend on the quality of our work, and that's all we need to know.

I got a letter from Mum and Dad yesterday with all the latest tittle-tattle from home. I'm sure you have heard about the accident at Risley and Jean's narrow escape. Jean was sent home sick that particular day. It was nothing to worry yourself about, really. She had a fainting spell, which the work's doctor put down to a combination of exhaustion and not eating properly. It just seems she's been overdoing things, that's all. Mum says the accident caused terrific damage but didn't stop production. Everyone went straight back to work.

Sorry Stan, I have just noticed the time. My shift starts in about 10 minutes so I'd better close for now. Please try and drop me or Mum a line when you get a moment. Keep safe. Your loving sister, Anne.

Scene ends.

Act II. Scene III.

Narrator:

Sunday June 4th 1944 finds PFC Joe Staunton and the men of the 116th Infantry Regiment aboard the assault ship Charles Carroll, as she rides at anchor. Other vessels have already slipped their moorings and are steaming out into the tumultuous waters of the English Channel.

For a ship so tightly packed with men the Charles Carroll seems unnaturally quiet. And then, quite suddenly, the ship's tannoy system crackles into life, breaking the tension. The announcer's voice, probably the captain's, sounds scratchy, metallic and strained. "Due to deteriorating weather conditions," he says in a slow, deliberate monotone, "it's my duty to inform you that on orders from SHAEF the invasion has been postponed for 24 hours. That is all."

Across the waiting armada the news of Overlord's postponement is universally met with a groan of frustration and despondency rather than a sigh of relief.

The amassed troops know that time and the tide waits for no man, and are an essential element in the success of the operation. They also realise that with fast depleting food and fuel supplies any further delays could mean cancellation.

Boredom among the embarked troops breeds rumours, gossip and counter-rumours. Men uncomfortably packed into every nook and crevice mark time by writing letters, playing cards, reading or checking, and then re-checking, every article of equipment. On average, every infantryman is issued with about 65 to 75pounds of gear, items such as bandoleers of ammunition, blocks of TNT, a Mae West life-preserver, grenades plus C-rations, cartons of cigarettes and candy bars, for example.

Among this great chunk of huddled humanity, being pitched and tossed on the deck of the Charles Carroll, sits Joe. Writing with the stub of a wax pencil, Joe is having almost as much trouble keeping the paper dry and out of the wind's grasp as he is composing each word of every sentence.

SFX:

THE SOUNDS OF A HOWLING GALE WITH ROUGH SEAS AND SHIPS RIDDING AT ANCHOR, OCCASIONALLY BUMPING ONE ANOTHER'S HULLS.

Joe Saunton:

God damned Limey weather. How's a fella supposed to write to his girl! Everything here is either soaking wet or in constant motion: usually both. Up and down! Up and down! It's no wonder half the company has already thrown-up. And breakfast sure didn't help none. Generally the navy's food's been pretty good, but I mean, what the hell was that? Looked to me like a mixture of powdered eggs, corned beef hash, stomach bile and axle grease. What a great idea! So now the decks are awash with seawater and vomit. And the stink is something else.

All this and we've just been told we're on a twenty-four hour postponement. That means a whole day more stuck on this tub. After that, if we don't get the green light then the shows off. We can't stay out here indefinitely, what with food and fuel being used up all the time. God damned Limey weather.

SFX:

WE HEAR THE DISTINCTIVE SOUND OF A FLAME-THROWER BEING IGNITED FOLLOWED BY A CHORUS OF MEN'S HOLLERS AND INSULTS AS THEY SCAMPER FOR COVER. THE HOWLING GALE BLOWING ACROSS THE DECK CONTINUES, UNABATED.

JOE SCREAMS AT THE MAN PACKING THE FLAMETHROWER, ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE.

Joe Saunton: Jesus Christ Almighty! Turnbull! You stupid bastard!

Turnbull: Jeez! You guys! A little jumpy ain't yah? I was just lighting me a cigarette is all. What yah gonna be like on them there beaches?

SFX: ANOTHER CHORUS OF CURSES AND GENERAL INSULTS ARE HURLED AT TURNBULL.

Joe Saunton (Aside): That Trunbull, what a joker. You see Turnbull has figured himself a neat little trick with that flamethrower of his. Scares the crap out of everyone else but amuses him mightily.

Don't ask me how, but he's figured a way of lighting a cigarette straight from the nozzle of that damned thing, without it actually firing. Of course it still makes that God-awful scary noise, just like it's firing. It drives everyone crazy. It's a real neat trick, to be sure, until he makes a mistake and hoses everyone with burning petrol, or lights himself up like a candle. It's no surprise that Turnbull's the only man aboard this ship with more than enough deck space.

SFX: JOE PAUSES WHILE THE SOUNDS OF THE GALE PLUS THE CHATTER AND ACTIVITY ON BOARD THE SHIP ARE HEARD.

Joe Staunton (continues): What was the name of our beach? Oh yah, Omaha. Sounds like the sort of place you could take your girl weekends. Omaha Beach: all hot sand, snow cones and cotton candy by day. And later, couples necking along the boardwalk, a few cold beers and dancing. Boy, what I'd give for a warm breeze, a cold beer and Lucy right now.

Today's Sunday, right? Sunday. Back home I'd be going to church, then I'd hurry over to Lynchburg to meet Lucy on the corner of 12th and Church Street. You know, just outside the City Armoury.

This time of year Lucy would be wearing one of those cotton-print dresses. We'd just walk and talk. Not really going anywhere. Other times we'd picnic

down by the lake or roam around the woods all day. Lucy would tell me about her dreams. About how she's gonna be a famous photographer for *Life* magazine someday. And how she's gonna live in New York City.

As for me, no, I don't have any fancy dreams or big ambitions. I guess growing up during the Depression kind of cured me of such notions. Although I do have a small ambition now, which burns as bright as daylight, and that's to finish this war and get home in one piece, God willing.

Scene ends.

Act III. Scene I.

Narrator:

As the first light of morning creeps over the horizon it gradually reveals the greatest amphibious landing force of the modern era. With 255 minesweepers leading the way, every conceivable type of vessel, from battleships and cruisers to LCTs and Rhino barges, steam relentlessly towards a 70 mile stretch of the Normandy coast. Hours before, wave after wave of C-47 Skytrains had dropped over 13,000 American and 7,000 British airborne troops by glider or parachute to secure the flanks of the assault beaches, code-named Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword.

Having already received a fearsome, but somewhat ineffectual, aerial bombardment, Hitler's much exalted Atlantic Wall is about to be placed under a thunderstorm of naval gunfire. A fresh wave of bombers drones in the skies above. It is the morning of the 6th of June 1944, H-hour, D-day!

SFX:

ARCHIVE SOUNDTRACK HERE, IF AVAILABLE, OF THE 12-INCH, 14-INCH AND 16-INCH BROADSIDES DELIVERED BY SHIPS SUCH AS THE USS NEVADA AND TEXAS OR HMS WARSPITE.

NEXT, WE HEAR ARCHIVE SOUNDTRACK OF THE MEN ABOARD THE VARIOUS LANDING CRAFT, FROM THE LCMS, LCTS AND HIGGINS BOATS TO LCIS AND LCAS, AS THEY START RUNNING INTO THE BEACHES.

Narrator (continues):

Slamming into the oncoming waves the flat-bottomed assault landing craft pitch and roll dangerously as they hurl themselves towards the beaches. A

combination of seasickness and fear makes many of the men violently ill, further adding to the already atrocious conditions. Then, as they approach the shoreline, with the waves still pounding into the open boats, a hailstorm of German shells and machine-gun bullets washes many of the men away.

SFX:

SOUND OF EVERYTHING FROM GERMAN 7.92MM MG-42 MACHINE-GUNS TO 37MM, 75MM AND 88MM ARTILLERY PLUS MORTARS AND ROCKETS. THIS COMBINED WITH THE RETURN FIRE OF AMERICAN M1 GARANDS, BARS PLUS BROWNING .30 AND .50 CALIBRE MACHINE-GUNS ALONG WITH BRITISH MADE .303 LEE ENFIELD RIFLES, BREN GUNS, 9MM STEN SUB-MACHINE-GUNS AND MILLS GRENADES. TO COMPLETE THE CACOPHONY, WE SHOULD ALSO HEAR THE SOUNDS OF THE MEN STRUGGLING OFF THE LANDING CRAFT AND ON TO THE BEACHES PLUS THE DIN OF AMERICAN SHERMAN DD TANKS, BRITISH PETARDS PLUS ALLIED AIRCRAFT.

Narrator (continues):

Below the waterline Teller mines explode as landing craft pass over them, blowing the boats, their crews and the assault troops to pieces. Deadly accurate German 88mms hole other boats, starting fires and sending heavily laden men into the water to drown rather than burn. As the ramps go down men are ripped open by machine-gun bullets or cleaved by white-hot shell fragments. The noise is deafening – terrifying!

Here and there the sheer concussive force and proximity of exploding shells kills men where they stand, leaving no apparent marks or injuries. Amid the chaos, men bent double by the weight of their equipment, bloody but determined lean into the maelstrom and advance up the beaches.

SFX:

WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF ACTIVITY ABOARD STAN'S TROOP SHIP PLUS THE POUNDING OF THE HEAVY SEAS.

Stan Jarvis:

It were still dark when someone handed me two thick slices of white bread and butter. The show started about 7.20am. The navy provided the overture with some of their big 14 and 16-inch guns.

We got into the boats and started making our way towards the shore. The weather was a bit choppy for my liking. And many of the lads suffered something terrible from seasickness. But me, no, I was fine.

As we headed in, the noise of the naval bombardment was absolutely deafening. And it was a comfort to think of all that power directed against the enemy, and for our protection.

In the dark it suddenly struck me that we could hit a mine or have the hull ripped open by hidden obstacles as we approached the beach. The navy couldn't protect us from that.

I knew, if everything was going to plan, that tank support and Sappers would already be ashore to clear our path. And as we drew closer to land I could hear the sound of rifle, machine-gun and mortar fire. So this was it.

Suddenly our boat touched bottom, the ramp went down and the lads piled out. We went into about 3-foot of water, and immediately started to wade ashore. It was then that I noticed a body floating face-up in the shallows.

Once on the beach we could hear shelling and small arms fire, but none of it actually seemed directed at us. It was like we were spectators. Witnesses to this great event, but not yet part of it.

We knew from the sand tables we'd studied that this stretch of beach gently sloped up to a line of small dunes, beyond which was a road and some houses or holiday chalets. No doubt that's where we'd find a Jerry welcoming committee.

Sword beach itself was littered with obstacles, a couple of knocked out Shermans sat at the water's edge and other assorted debris lay scattered about. I also happened to notice wooden poles or stakes were sticking out of the sand. And each one seemed to have an artillery shell lashed to it. Some kind of improvised mine, I imagine, designed to blow as we came ashore. It was just then, as I was taking in the scene, that someone started shooting at us.

SFX: STAN'S VOICE FADES OUT.

Narrator: Before retiring to bed on the night of the 5th of June, British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill turned to his wife, Clementine, and said: "Do you realise

that by the time you wake up in the morning twenty-thousand men may have been killed?"

SFX: AUDIO ARCHIVE OF BOTH GERMAN AND BBC RADIO REPORTS OF THE INVASION AS A BACKDROP TO THE NARRATION, IF AVAILABLE.

Narrator (continues): German radio was first to announce the invasion of Europe. The BBC in London picked up these reports and started repeating them before receiving any official confirmation from Allied sources.

By six o'clock in the evening people sat in rapt silence listening to the wireless reports of what was happening across the Channel on the Normandy coast.

The Evening Dispatch ran with the headline: 'Invasion going well: tanks ashore.'

Winston Churchill told the House of Commons that everything was "proceeding to plan – and what a plan!"

SFX: NARRATOR FADES OUT TO BE REPLACED BY JOE STAUNTON.

Joe Staunton: I started feeling seasick right off the bat. And once we were in the landing craft I felt ten times worse. I guess we launched a couple of miles out. During the run into shore I couldn't see or hear a damn thing. The sea was pounding on the hull like a jackhammer, and I felt sure we'd get swamped, capsize and sink before we ever managed to reach the beach. Then I threw-up.

Someone behind me, the coxswain I guess, shouted for us to get ready. And it was just then that Sergeant Lewis took a peek over the metal ramp. I saw him fall, and figured he'd just slipped or something. I mean, the boat was bucking like a young colt. Anyway, someone went to get him up. It was only then that I noticed all the blood. He was dead. Shot clean through the head.

I could feel the panic rising in me, and struggled hard to remain clam and focussed. Then I threw-up, again.

The next thing I remember, there was a hand on my shoulder, as I turned to see who it was the boat suddenly lurched sideways. The force of the impact knocked everyone over, and we all fell into a big heap. I didn't see a flash or hear an explosion, but as I lay trapped beneath a tangle of arms and legs, I knew we'd been hit.

SFX: THE SOUNDS OF JOE'S LANDING CRAFT GETTING HIT FADES OUT.

Lucy: Something woke me that particular morning; I don't quite recall what it was. The moment I opened my eyes though I had this strange feeling, silly really. It was about 2am. I crept downstairs and switched on the radio, pressing my ear right up against it. Quite suddenly the Announcer's voice said that the invasion was underway. You see, in Normandy it was already 8am. I guess I must have made a noise or yelled out or something, as the next thing I knew my folks were all crowded around the radio. The volume was turned up loud.

A couple of hours later the radio said that under the command of General Eisenhower strong naval and air forces had started landing Allied armies on the coast of northern France. And I knew that my Joe was among them. I just knew.

SFX: LUCY'S VOICE FADES, POSSIBLY ACCOMPANIED BY AUDIO ARCHIVE OF THE VARIOUS RADIO ANNOUNCEMENTS THAT REPORTED THE LANDINGS THAT MORNING.

NEXT WE HEAR THE VOICES OF BRITISH MEDICS AND STRETCHER-BEARERS TENDING A WOUNDED SOLDIER, WHO WHIMPERS AND CRIES. THEN THE SOUNDS FADE, SLIGHTLY.

Stan Jarvis: We rallied in some shell holes and waited for orders to move off the beach. Our first objective was to be a place called La Brèche. We had to clear a corridor through the German positions for the French Commandos that were due to come in behind us.

While we were waiting I noticed a bit of a commotion going on nearby. Some poor sod was making a terrible racket. In the end I decided to crawl over and see what was going on.

I found a medical orderly and a stretcher-bearer literally wrestling with a wounded man. The man's face was badly burned.

This chap were shrieking, whimpering and imploring by turns, but no bugger could lay a hand on him to help. He thrashed about and kicked wildly while pleading for us to finish him. Eventually, between the three of us, we managed to hold him down long enough for someone to get some morphine into him. That calmed him.

He was still conscious, and one of the medics said that I should talk to him while they worked. Just then it suddenly struck me how coldly inadequate my words of comfort must seem, even to him in that state. Problem was that every time that I grew silent he got all panic-stricken and agitated-like, which just annoyed the medics.

Something of a heated exchange then took place, after which it was politely suggested that I should "bloody-well bugger off and go and find some Germans to harass".

Now much quieter, the wounded man was then unceremoniously bundled onto a makeshift stretcher and carted away. It was then that we got the nod to move up and clear out some Jerry snipers.

If I live to tell the tale, which isn't that likely round here, granted, then I reckon the memory of that black, burned, wreckage of a face is going to be stuck in my mind, like a damned splinter, forever.

SFX:

THE SOUNDS FADE ONCE AGAIN FROM STAN JARVIS ON SWORD BEACH AND RETURN TO JOE STAUNTON, AND THE NOISE OF BATTLE AS HE ATTEMPTS TO LAND ON OMAHA BEACH.

WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF MEN SHOUTING PLUS CONSTANT SHELL AND SMALL ARMS GUNFIRE.

Joe Staunton:

It seems like a miracle now, but the boat somehow managed to stay afloat rather than keel-over and sink. The ramp went down and suddenly I could see a small square of beach about 200 or 300 yards in front of me. There was a lot of smoke and firing from all directions. Somewhere up on the bluffs above the beach a couple of MG-42s had got us zeroed good. Our boat was being swept clean by machine-gun fire. Everyone forward of me was already hit or had gone over the side and into the water. My God, I kept thinking, someone's made a terrible mistake. This isn't right. The beaches are supposed to be clear.

Guys were pushing and shoving, desperate to exit the landing craft. It was a death-trap. We were just sitting ducks. But there was nowhere to go. No cover.

SFX:

WE HEAR JOE SLIP AND FALL ONTO THE FLAT-BOTTOMED HULL OF THE LANDING CRAFT, WHICH IS SWAMPED WITH SEAWATER.

Joe Staunton (continues):

Suddenly I go down. Slip and fall down, actually. Not hit. The rest of the guys push on pass me or go over the side. No one stops to help me. Of course, once you're down it's not so easy getting back up again with 70-pounds of equipped strapped to your back. The seas rushing in and you can't get a handhold on anything.

SFX:

THE SOUND OF FLAMES 'CRACKALING' FOLLOWED BY THE CUTTING OF THICK CANVAS WEBBING STRAPS.

Joe Staunton (continues):

So I manage to reach down and draw my combat knife and cut away my pack. It's only then, as I'm struggling to stand, that I notice all the smoke. The engine compartment or fuel must have ignited when the boat was hit. Suddenly oily black smoke obscures everything. I can't see and I can't breathe.

Narrator:

After freeing himself from his equipment, Joe wastes no time going over the side of the Higgins Boat. The tide does the rest. It carries him ashore, where he plays dead in the rolling surf rather than attract any unwanted attention from the German gunners. There's almost nothing on the beach that offers the slightest cover or protection from the constant and deadly accurate gunfire.

Joe looks back out to sea where his landing craft is now burning fiercely as it drifts in the shallows. With no way back, advancing seems the only option. In the water Joe is surrounded by dead bodies and bits of bodies. The beach itself is a similar scene of horror and carnage. There is little evidence of the promised tank support, and of the few vehicles that he can see most are now useless, burning wrecks. The amphibious DD-tanks are nowhere to be seen.

Looking around him, Joe can see the next wave of landing craft starting to make their run into shore, and catching hell as they do so. But Joe has his own problems, what with the continuous rain of machine-gun bullets; pounding of artillery and mortar shells; and blinding, choking smoke from brushwood fires and blazing landing craft. With few options, Joe decides that this is the moment to move. After all, if he can't see the Germans then surely they can't see him either. Well, that's the way Joe figured it.

Scene ends.

Act III. Scene II.

SFX: THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE, NEAR AND FAR, SUCH AS INTERMITTENT SMALL ARMS FIRE AND EXPLODING MORTAR ROUNDS, AS BRITISH FORCES START TO MOVE INLAND FROM SWORD BEACH.

Medic (shouting): Where are you hit? Where are you hit?

Stan Jarvis: WHAT?

Medic: You're wounded. You're bleeding. Where's the bleeding coming from?
Where are you hit?

Stan Jarvis: I'm hit? I don't know. I mean, I don't know. I can't feel anything. I'm hit?
Are you sure?

Medic: Don't worry! Try to stay calm, and let me take a look at you.

Stan Jarvis: Christ! Where did all this blood come from? Is it bad? I don't feel anything. Is that a bad sign?

Medic: Don't worry! Try...

SFX: LOUD EXPLOSION NEARBY INTERRUPTS THE MEDIC.

Medic: I know it's difficult, but try to stay calm and let me sort you out! Okay, mate?

Stan Jarvis: Anything you say, Doc. Just sort me out. Sort me out.

SFX: VOICES AND SOUNDS OF BATTLE FADE OUT.

Narrator: Moving off an increasingly crowded 'Queen' sector of 'Sword' beach, Stan and his comrades of the 2nd East Yorkshire Regiment are now meeting stiff resistance from the German 716th Infantry Division. Every point of strategic importance from the beaches to the city of Caen has either been mined or heavily fortified against Allied attack.

It was during the fighting around La Brèche that Stan caught some fragments of an exploding mortar round. But before he could recover his senses or struggle to his feet a medic arrived to dress his wounds and assess his condition. Almost immediately after being hit a dark red stain rapidly spread across Stan's battledress tunic. And by the look on the medic's face, which was one of increasing concern, things had to be bad.

The medic's quick, skilled fingers expertly felt their way to the source of the bleeding. The warm stickiness and sickly-sweet smell was both overwhelming and all too familiar. There was something about the blood.

Pondering his red-stained hands, a look of intense concentration fell across the medic's face. Then, after a few moments, he suddenly popped a blood-soaked finger into his mouth. Stan looked on, too dumbfounded and horrified to move.

SFX: THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE FADE BACK IN.

Medic: Soup.

Stan Jarvis: Soup?

Medic: Of the tomato variety I'd hazard a guess. Tomato soup!

SFX: STAN PAUSES.

Stan Jarvis: What?

Medic: You weren't, by any chance, carrying a tin of tomato soup in your pack?

Stan Jarvis: Ye...yes...YES! One of the yanks on board ship gave me a couple of tins during the crossing. You mean...

Medic: You're no more wounded than I am. But I reckon one of those cans caught a packet: probably saved your life.

SFX: STAN'S RELIEF AND HAPPINESS IS PALPABLE IN HIS VOICE.

Stan Jarvis: Oh, thank you, Doc! Thank you! Oh, my, what a relief. I thought I was a goner for sure.

SFX: THE MEDIC STRUGGLES TO SUPPRESS HIS OBVIOUS AMUSEMENT AT THE SITUATION.

Medic: Well, I've seen it all now. But you'd better get a move on, mate. Your chaps seem to have moved off. And I'm betting that you'd rather not have to explain this to your platoon sergeant or CO, however much they're in need of a good laugh. Anyway, thanks.

Stan Jarvis: What for?

Medic: What for? I reckon I'll be telling this one for years. Well, I'd better push off and see if I can't find some real casualties. Good luck, mate!

SFX: THE AMBIENT SOUNDS OF BATTLE FADE AS DO THE RETREATING MEDIC'S FOOTFALLS.

Scene ends.

Act III. Scene II.

SFX: SOUNDS OF PEN ON PAPER FOLLOWED BY LUCY READING ALOUD THE LETTER SHE HAS WRITTEN TO JOE.

Lucy: June 4th, 1944. Dearest Joe, at last I got a letter from you. For a moment there I was starting to think that you'd dropped me over for one of those fancy English girls. Anyway, how are you, my darling?

I've enclosed some pictures, which I'm sure will bring a smile to that handsome face of yours. My favourite is the one of Jefferson and Martha outside your Father's bookstore. I would have taken more, but you just can't get the film. It seems like every time you ask for anything these days you get the same response. If one more person says to me, "Don't you know there's a war on?" I think I'll scream. How could I forget there's a war on when it's taken you so far away from me, my darling?

Your Mom took the picture of me on Main Street. What do you think of it? Have I changed much? I keep your picture at my bedside and kiss it every night, and pray to God that he keeps you safe from harm.

Town is full of girls from Fort Belvoir: Women's Auxiliaries and alike. They seem to have come from all over the states, and it's exciting to think that I'll be joining up myself soon.

There sure is plenty of talk about just when the 'Second Front' will get started. Everyone is talking about it: you and the rest of the boys are the talk of the town, especially among all the Armchair Generals. They seem to love it so, safe at home while you and the rest of the boys prepare to go into the lion's den. But I hate this war, darling. I hate the separation and the silences between your letters. Everyone just wants you home.

There seems to be some confusion but we're hearing reports that the 5th Army is outside of Rome and the city is likely to fall any time soon. You probably know more about this than us civilians, but it's wonderful news, isn't it?

My folks are fine. They send their love and best wishes. We're all immensely proud of you, and the rest of the boys in the 'Blue-and-Grey'. But darling, please don't do anything too heroic. And promise me that you'll bring yourself back in one piece.

You have made me so happy, knowing that you love me so much. And I want you to know that my heart is forever yours. I miss you and love you, and long for you to return. I have to close now so I can catch the mail.

Your ever-loving sweetheart, Lucy.

Narrator: News of the Normandy landings provoked few celebrations across the British Isles. There was no great cheering or dancing in the streets. The British people had endured too much and understood too well the price yet to be paid in blood and broken lives before the war would finally be won. And when the King addressed the nation that afternoon, he spoke of fighting now to win the final victory after the long hard road that had started on the beaches of Dunkirk.

SFX: BBC SOUND ARCHIVE OF KING GEORGE VI'S RADIO BROADCAST TO THE NATION ON THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 6, 1944. EXCERPTS FADE IN AND OUT.

Narrator: All along the south coast of England, even as the King spoke, ships were making port. The bright, promising young men that had left that morning were already returning from the fight. Grim-faced doctors and nurses awaited them: the wounded, the dying, the dead.

Scene ends.

Act III. Scene III.

SFX: THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE ON OMAHA BEACH.

Narrator: As the battle for 'Bloody Omaha' rages all about him, shrouded by a curtain of smoke from burning vehicles, Joe decides to make a dash from the water's edge to the seawall.

SFX: THE SOUNDS OF VOICES, AS TWO GIS EMERGE OUT OF THE WATER BEHIND JOE.

GI One: Hey, Buddy! Hey, Buddy! You seen anything of Captain East?

Joe Staunton: No, nothing. I'd get your heads down if you value 'em at all, boys.

GI Two: What you doin' here, Buddy? Where's your CO? Where's your Company?

SFX: A MORTAR ROUND EXPLODES NEARBY.

Joe Staunton: Shit! We have to get off the beach, fellas. My Company's scattered...dead. I haven't seen Captain Kidd since first light.

Listen. I think the smoke is almost thick enough to give us some cover from the Krauts. If we can make it to the seawall then maybe we've got a chance. What d'ya think?

GI One: What do I think? Hey, Buddy, I think, where are all those God-damned craters the air force was supposed to leave for us? Where's our tank and artillery support? Where's our air cover? Shit! That's what I think.

GI Two: What the hell you talkin' 'bout? Craters or no craters this guy's right. We can't stay here. Look. The tides comin' in.

Joe Staunton: Make up your minds, fellas. What's it to be?

SFX: A SUDDEN BURST OF MG-42 GUNFIRE, FOLLOWED BY THE SOUNDS OF THE TWO GIS GETTING HIT.

Joe Staunton (continues): Medic! God almighty! Fellas? Fellas! Medic! Medic!

Narrator: In an almost blind panic Joe staggers to his feet and starts running across the beach, which is littered with abandoned equipment and the broken, mutilated remains of the 116th Infantry Regiment.

SFX: WE HEAR THE SOUND OF JOE'S LABOURED BREATHING AND HIS FOOTFALLS ON THE SAND. THE SOUND OF SMALL ARMS FIRE AND REPORT OF ARTILLERY CONTINUES, UNABATED.

Narrator (continues): Miraculously, somehow, Joe makes it across the open beach. He collapses behind the relative safety of the seawall. But the scene that greets him is one of utter confusion. Traumatized and cringing, the bedraggled remnants of the 29th Division huddle together in small groups. Almost entirely leaderless, without focus or direction, many of the men are paralysed as much by uncertainty as fear. And all the time the German defenders continue their murderous barrage. Artillery fire crashes in. Shrapnel and machine-gun bullets scythe through the ranks of freshly deposited troops, as they stagger up the beach, bent-double under the weight of their equipment. Here and there a junior officer or senior NCO can be heard screaming orders. Others, crouching, race from one position to another, attempting to rally men nearing panic and defeat.

To Joe's mind, the landing has clearly been a catastrophe. The possibility of pressing home a successful attack with men too shocked and fatigued to think straight or act decisively now seems remote. Without a coherent command structure, substantial reinforcements and much greater fire support, the choices are stark: evacuate the beach or surrender.

Just at that moment, a guy about an arm's length away from Joe decides to break cover. He is immediately hit, and slumps face down. Joe edges over to him, and rolls him onto his back. The guy's lower-jaw has been completely blown away. And there is a gapping, jagged hole in the man's throat. Great bubbles of blood form each time the man exhales. His eyes are wide, and remain fixed on Joe's face. His expression, as far as Joe can read it, is one of complete surprise.

SFX: WE HEAR THE GASPING OF THE WOUNDED MAN AS HE STRUGGLES FOR BREATH.

Joe Staunton: You're going to be okay, Buddy! Just hang on. MEDIC!

SFX: WE HEAR JOE SEARCHING THE MAN FOR HIS FIRST-AID PACK.

Joe Staunton (continues): Where's your aid pack, Buddy? It's gotta be here, somewhere.

SFX: JOE FINDS A FIELD DRESSING, APPLIES SULPHA POWDER AND THEN STICKS THE WOUNDED MAN WITH A SYRETTE OF MORPHINE.

Joe Staunton (continues): Ah, got it! Now, don't worry about a thing. I'm gonna fix you up real good. First a little sulphur powder, okay? That's it. Then put this field dressing on. You're going to have to raise your head a little for me; can you do that? That's good. Okay. Now I'm gonna stick you with a Syrette for the pain, okay? Hope you don't mind needles?

Now, you try and take it easy. And I'm gonna see about getting you to an aid station. MEDIC!

Scene ends.

Act III. Scene IV.

SFX: THE SOUND OF TELETYPE MACHINES CLATTERING OUT TELEGRAM MESSAGES. THIS IS FOLLOWED BY THE NARRATOR SPEAKING IN A STEADY, UNEMOTIONAL MONOTONE, READING THE CONTENTS OF THE OFFICIAL TELEGRAM.

Narrator: Post Office Telegram. Priority communication. Mr and Mrs L. Jarvis, 19 Harvest Road, Sheffield. Regret to inform you that your son, 3607812, Pte. J. Jarvis is reported killed during land operations 6 June. Any further information will be immediately communicated to you pending receipt of official notification from Allied Expeditionary Force. O.C. 2 E. Yorks.

SFX: THE SOUND OF TELETYPE MACHINES FADES OUT. NEXT, WE HEAR LT. EDWARD GEORGE READ OUT HIS LETTER TO STAN'S PARENTS.

Lieutenant Edward George: Lt. E. George, 2nd Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, 8th Infantry Brigade, AEF. Letter dated: 22nd June 1944.

Dear Mr and Mrs Jarvis, it is with deep regret that I can now confirm that your son, Stanley, was killed in action during the Allied landings of 6 June.

It may comfort you to know that Stan, as we all knew him, played a vital role in the initial assault and eventual capture of heavily fortified German positions around the town of La Brèche, on the Normandy coast.

Having spoken to a number of eyewitnesses, I can verify that Stan's end was both quick and painless. He would surly have known nothing about it.

Stan was a vital, energetic and extremely popular young man. He also demonstrated all the best qualities of a typical British Tommy, something of which you can be justly proud.

In closing, please allow me to extend my deepest condolences to you and your family, both personally and on behalf of the Battalion.

Yours sincerely, Edward George, Lieutenant.

Scene ends.

Epilogue

SFX: THE SOUND OF THE SEA GENTLY LAPPING AGAINST THE SHORE ACCOMPANIED BY THE REPORT OF DISTANT GUNFIRE.

Narrator: At 08.30 hours on the morning of 6 June 1944 the landings on Omaha beach paused, temporarily. Instead of immediately taking the high ground and moving inland, as originally planned, those American troops not already dead or wounded were trapped. The draws leading off the beach were blocked while the bluffs above remained in German hands.

Few amphibious D-D tanks had made it ashore intact, most were lost at sea, and the men already ashore had no artillery support whatsoever. It seemed that Rommel's assertion that the Allies would be defeated at the water's edge would prove prophetically, tragically correct.

However, with their backs to the sea and little expectation of rescue or reinforcement, Joe Staunton, like many other men of the 116th Infantry Regiment, realised they had only one option: to advance.

Even as the Germans looked down on the carnage they had inflicted, and believed the Americans were beaten, small groups of men were beginning to pick their way up the bluffs between Vierville and Les Moulins. Supported by the few surviving tanks that had made it ashore, and the invaluable services of the navy's big guns, Joe and his comrades started to engage and destroy the enemy.

Little by little, under the inspired leadership of men such as General Norman Cota and Colonel Charles Canham, the tide of battle was turned against the defenders. And, by day's end, regardless of an enormous traffic jam and continued enemy shelling, Omaha Beach was open for Allied business. Joe had seen it, been a part of it, and survived to tell the tale.

As dusk turned to darkness on the evening of June 6 1944, Omaha Beach had cost the American's some 2,400 dead, wounded and missing. The price paid to successfully land some 34,000 troops. In contrast, the German 352nd Division suffered 1,200 dead, wounded or missing for no gain.

During those first horrific minutes and hours on the beach some companies of the 116th Infantry Regiment lost nearly every man either killed or wounded. And many other units were mauled almost as badly. Ninety-percent casualty rates were not uncommon. And yet with courage, determination, fortitude and sacrifice, ordinary men, civilians in uniform, prevailed.

SFX:

WE HEAR THE BBC EYE-WITNESS REPORT FROM THE NORMANDY BEACHES, RADIO BROADCAST ON THE EVENING OF 6 JUNE 1944, AFTER THE 9 O'CLOCK NEWS, OR THE OPENING OF THE PATHE NEWSREEL REPORT FOR THE SAME EVENTS.

Narrator (continues):

Approaching from the sea, Sword beach ran east to west from Lion-sur-Mer to Ouistreham. On D-Day the final objective of the 3rd Infantry Division was the city of Caen. But this objective was never realised as the 21st Panzer Division intervened to slow the Allied advance during the afternoon of 6 June. In fact, Caen would prove a very tough nut to crack.

The British landed 29,000 troops plus armour, artillery and all the other paraphernalia of modern warfare. The fighting itself was often bitter, but

thankfully brief for the most part. British casualties totalled around a 1000 men killed, wounded or reported missing while German losses were considerably higher with many men captured.

SFX: STAN JARVIS SPEAKING IN THE THIRD PERSON.

Stan Jarvis: Stan's screams unnerved his mates as they desperately tried to quiet him.

Narrator: The Germans had missed their chance to halt the Allies at the water's edge and hurl them back into the sea. Instead, the bulk of their armour sat uselessly waiting for the supposed "real invasion" to come at the Pas-de-Calais.

Stan Jarvis: Stan was sent to the Regimental Aid Post, just outside Lion-sur-Mer. His body was raked with shell fragments, some deeply imbedded in his skull and others lodged in his stomach.

Narrator: By the time it had grown dark the Allies had established a bridgehead. In the days to come two prefabricated harbours, each the size of Dover, would be towed across the Channel. These Mulberry harbours, as they were known, ensured the constant flow of men and materiel necessary to drive the Allied advance inland. Finally, with huge Russian armies poised to strike in the East, it was the long awaited beginning of the end of World War Two.

Stan Jarvis: Stan lapsed in and out of consciousness for hours, and then, towards evening, he died. A medical orderly wrapped Stan's broken and lifeless body in a filthy oilskin. It was all the man could find. And with respect, but no ceremony, Stan's body was laid outside - anonymous among the dead.

SFX: THE SOUND OF THE SEA LAPPING AGAINST THE SHORE THEN SLOWLY FADING OUT.

The End

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