

Sixteen

Yasif Hassan did not go back to Cairo, then or ever.

He flew from Palermo to Rome, where he tried to get a flight to Annaba or Constantine, both ~~on~~^{near} the coast of Algeria. The nearest they could offer him was Algiers or Tunis. He went to Tunis. There he found a young taxi driver with a newish Volkswagen and thrust in front of his face more money in American dollars than the man normally earned in a year. The taxi took him across the 100-mile breadth of Tunisia and over the border into Algeria, and dropped him at a fishing village with a small natural harbour.

Waiting for him there was one of the Fedayeen, Hamid. Hassan found him on the beach, sitting under a propped-up dinghy, sheltering from the rain and playing backgammon with a fisherman. The three men got~~d~~ into the fisherman's boat and cast off.

The sea was rough as they headed out in the last of the day. Hassan, no seaman, was afraid the little motor boat would capsize, but the fisherman grinned cheerfully through it all. It took them less than ~~an~~ half an hour to reach Mahmoud's ship. Hamid paid the fisherman while Hassan was clambering up on to the deck.

Mahmoud was waiting for him. They embraced. Mahmoud said: 'Thank God we don't have to fight yet - half my men can do nothing but throw up.'

Hassan knew there was a joke coming. 'What are the other half doing?' he said obligingly.

'Praying for the ^{rest} others.'

Both men laughed. Hassan said: 'We must weigh~~d~~ anchor immediately - things are happening very fast now.'

'Come to the bridge with me.'

Hassan followed him forward. The ship was a small coaster, apparently quite new and in good condition. Hassan guessed her tonnage at about 1,000. She was sleek, with most of her accommodation below deck. There was a hatch for one hold. She had been designed to carry small loads quickly and to manoeuvre in ^{local} ~~small~~ North African harbours.

'She's just what we need,' said Hassan.

'I have renamed her the Nablus,' Mahmoud told him. 'She is the first ship of the Palestine Navy.'

'Where did you get her?'

'From a Libyan businessman who wants to save his soul.'

The bridge was compact and tidy. Mahmoud introduced the captain, also a Libyan - the businessman had provided a crew as well as a ship, for none of the Fedayeen were sailors. The captain gave orders to weigh anchor and start engines.

The three men bent over a chart. Hassan said: 'The Coparelli was due to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar at midday today. She is heading for Genoa. The Stromberg left the south coast of Sicily at the same time. They are sister ships, with the same top speed, therefore the earliest they can meet is half way between Gibraltar and Sicily.'

'They will meet south-west of the island of Minorca,' said the captain.

'~~X~~ We should intercept the Coparelli no less than eight hours earlier.'

The captain ran his finger back along the trade route. 'That would put her just south of the island of Ibiza, at dusk tomorrow.'

'Can we make it?'

'Yes, with a little time to spare, unless there is a storm.'

'Will there be a storm?'

'Some time in the next few days, yes. But not tomorrow, I think.'

'Good. Where is the radio operator?'

'Here. This is Yaacov.'

Hassan turned to see a small, smiling man with tobacco-stained teeth. Hassan said: 'There is a Russian aboard the Coparelli, a man called Tyrin, who will be sending signals to a Polish ship, the Karla; you must listen on this wavelength.' He wrote it down. 'Also, there is a radio beacon on the Stromberg which sends a thirty-second tone every thirty minutes. If we listen for that occasionally we will be sure the Stromberg is not outrunning ~~us~~ us.'

The captain was giving a course. Down on the deck, the first officer had the hands running around making ready. Mahmoud was talking to one of the Fedayeen about an arms inspection. The radio operator began to question Hassan about the Stromberg's beacon. Then, over all the talking and shouting, the ship's engines roared, and the deck tilted, and the prow broke water, and they were on their way.

*

The officers of the Coparelli had coq au vin for dinner that night. The cook opened a two-litre bottle of Spanish red wine, put two cupsful in the casserole, and drank the rest himself. At three a.m. he was flat out, snoring.

Pyotr Tyrin

The snoring helped ~~Kozhukhov~~ Kozhukhov to stay awake. He waited a little longer; then, when the night was darkest and the officers on watch at their sleepest, he got up.

He put on a sweater, trousers, sea boots and an oilskin. He opened his cabin door as quietly as he could. The cook snored on. Tyrin went along the gangway and up the ladder to the deck.

It was still raining. He could see only a few yards, which

was good, because it meant the officer on the bridge would not see him. This was the big snag about his little hiding-place in the bows: to get there he had to walk the full length of the open deck.

In this weather, he thought, a man could drown without falling into the sea. Somehow the rain got down the neck of his oilskin and under its hem on to his trousers in the few minutes it took to reach the prow.

He ducked under the companionhead and entered the store. It was empty, as always. He turned on his torch and set it on a shelf.

He had decided to make his hiding-place more secure. There was a good chance Dickstein would have the ship searched after he had taken over, and Tyrin wanted to be able to evade that search. He began to move barrels and boxes across the floor to the door of his little radio room.

Again he was grateful for the weather. The noises of the sea and the wind covered the bumps and bangs he made.

He stacked stores in front of his door in such a way that they obscured the door, but left a narrow tunnel through which he could crawl to get in and out. When it was done, he shone his torch over the stack, and gave a satisfied nod: you would need a plan of the ship to know that his little room was there at all.

He heard a muffled thud from up on deck. He clicked out his torch and ducked into a corner behind a stack of pallets as the door opened. It was probably ^{Kavlo} ~~Samne~~, the drug addict, but ^{Tyrin} ~~he~~ would not show himself until he was sure.

The figure entered, closed the door behind him, and turned on a torch. Peeping through the pallets, Tyrin saw that it was not young ^{Kavlo} ~~Samne~~, it was the new engineer. What was he doing here? And at this hour of the night?

Tyrin recalled that the engineer had joined the ship at Antwerp.

He now realised that the manner of the engineer's joining had been similar to his own: the original engineer had simply disappeared, and the new one had been taken on hurriedly as the ship was about to sail. Obviously, then, this ~~man~~ was Dickstein's man.

As Tyrin watched, the engineer shone his torch around the store. It rested on a shelf containing boxed machinery: valves, gaskets, piping and other spare parts rarely needed. The engineer selected one of the biggest boxes, and Tyrin frowned, intrigued, when he saw what was written on ^{its} ~~the~~ side.

The engineer went to the door, killed his light, and went out. Tyrin, still curious, waited a few seconds then opened the door a crack and looked out. Peering through the rain and the darkness, he saw the engineer walk to the rail and drop the box overboard, then turn away and head aft toward the cabins.

Tyrin closed the door, crawled through his stack of barrels and boxes, and entered his radio room. He connected up his transmitter, called the Karla, and waited for them to come in.

After the usual preliminaries Tyrin made: Dickstein has a man on this ship.

There were long pauses between signals, because each time the incoming message had to be decoded and the reply encoded.

Eventually Rostov's signal came back: What is he doing?

Don't know, Tyrin made, but he has thrown our spare oil pump into the sea.

*

The engineer, Robert Koch, lay sleepless on his bunk for two hours, staring into the darkness, then he got up and went into the galley for some coffee. The cook's apprentice was there, standing in a couple of inches of water, frying bacon for the crew.

'Filthy weather,' Koch said.

'It will get worse,' the apprentice replied.

Koch drank his coffee, then refilled his mug and a second mug and took them up to the bridge. The first officer was there. Koch said: 'Good morning.'

'Not really,' said the first officer, looking out into a curtain of rain.

'Coffee?'

'You're a good chap. Thankyou.'

Koch handed him a mug. 'Where are we?'

'Here.' The officer showed him their position on a chart. 'Dead on schedule, despite the weather.'

Koch nodded. 'See you.' He left the bridge and went down to the engine-room. He had to stop the ship in about fifteen minutes.

His number two was below, looking as if he had taken a good long nap during his night's duty. 'How's that oil pressure?' Koch asked him.

'Steady.'

'It was going up and down a bit yesterday.'

'Well, there was no sign of trouble in the night.'

'Good,' Koch said. 'Perhaps it's repaired itself. He put his mug down on a level cowl, then picked it up again as the ship rolled. 'Wake Larsen on your way to bed.'

'Right.'

'Sleep well.'

The number two went out, and Koch drank down his coffee and went to work.

The oil pressure gauge was located in a bank of dials aft of the engine. The dials were set into a thin metal casing, painted matt black and secured by four self-tapping screws. Using a large screwdriver, Koch removed the four screws and pulled the casing away.

Behind it was a mass of many-coloured wires leading to the different gauges. Koch swapped his large screwdriver for a small electrical screwdriver with an insulated handle. With a few turns he disconnected one of the wires to the oil pressure gauge. He wrapped a couple of inches of insulating tape around the bare end of the wire, then taped it to the back of the dial, so that only a close inspection would reveal that it was not connected to the terminal. Then he replaced the casing and secured it with the four screws.

When Larsen came in he was topping-up the transmission fluid.

'Can I do that, sir?' Larsen said. He was a Donkeyman Greaser, and lubrication was his province.

'I've done it now,' Koch said. He replaced the filler cap and stowed the fluid in a locker.

Larsen rubbed his eyes and lit a cigarette. He looked over the dials, did a double-take, and said: 'Sir! Oil pressure zero!'

'Zero?'

'Yes!'

'Stop engines.'

'Aye, aye, sir.'

An engine has many moving parts very close together. The oil, pushed through the engine under pressure by the oil pump, forms a layer a few thousandths of an inch thick between the moving parts, reducing friction and carrying away heat. Without oil, friction between the metal parts causes a very rapid build-up of heat until the metal melts, the parts fuse together, and the engine stops, never to go again. So dangerous is a sudden ~~drop~~ absence of oil pressure that Larsen might have been justified in stopping engines without an instruction from Koch.

Everyone on the ship heard the engine die and felt the vessel lose way: even those dayworkers who were still asleep in their bunks

heard it through their dreams and woke up. Before the engine was completely still the first officer's voice came over the pipe: 'Bridge! What's going on down there?'

Koch spoke into the voice-pipe. 'Sudden loss of oil pressure.'

'Any idea why?'

'Not yet.'

'Keep me posted.'

'Aye, aye, sir.'

Koch turned to Larsen. 'We're going to drop the sump,' he said. Larsen picked up a toolbox and followed Koch down a half-deck to where they could get at the engine from below. Koch explained: 'If the main bearings or the big end bearings were worn, the drop in pressure would be gradual. A sudden drop means a failure in the oil supply. There's plenty of oil in the system - I checked earlier - and there are no signs of leaks. So there's probably a blockage.'

Koch released the sump with a power spanner and the two of them lowered it to the deck. They checked the sump strainer, the full-flow filter, the filter relief valve and the main relief valve without finding any obstructions.

'If there's no blockage, the fault must be in the pump,' Koch said. 'Break out the spare oil pump.'

'That will be in the for'ard store,' Larsen said. He went above.

Now Koch had to work very quickly. He took the casing off the oil pump, exposing two broad-toothed meshing gear wheels. He took the spanner off the power drill and fitted a bit. Then he attacked the cogs of the gear wheels with the drill, chipping and breaking them until they were almost useless. He put down the drill, picked up a crowbar and a hammer, and forced the bar in between the two wheels, prising them apart until he heard something give with a loud,

dull crack. Finally he took from his pocket a small nut made of toughened steel, battered and chipped, which he had brought with him when he boarded the ship. He dropped the nut into the sump.

Larsen came back and said: 'It's not there, sir.'

'There must be one somewhere,' Koch said. 'Get a few hands to help you look for it.' He fished the nut out of the sump. 'This is what caused it.' He showed Larsen the ruined gear wheels of the oil pump. 'The nut must have been dropped in last time the filters were changed. It got into the pump, and it's been going round and round in those gear wheels ever since. I'm surprised we couldn't hear the noise, even with the engine running at the same time. Anyway, the oil pump is beyond repair, so you'll have to find that spare. Off you go.'

As soon as Larsen was out of the way ~~xxx~~ Koch wiped his hands and went above to the main engine-room, where he again removed the casing on the gauges. This time he reconnected the oil pressure gauge. He replaced the casing and threw away the used insulating tape.

Of course, Larsen and his helpers did not find the spare oil pump, as Koch had thrown it overboard. When they finally admitted defeat, Koch went up on to the bridge to report to the captain.

'A mechanic must have dropped a nut into the oil sump last time the engine was serviced, sir.' He showed the captain the nut. 'At some point - perhaps while the ship was pitching steeply - the nut got into the oil pump. After that it was just a matter of time. The nut went around in the gear wheels until it had totally ruined them. I'm afraid we can't make gear wheels like that on board. The ship should carry a spare oil pump, but it doesn't.'

The captain was furious. 'There will be hell to pay when I find out who's responsible for this,' he said.

Koch said: 'It's the engineer's job to check the spares, but as you know, sir, I came on board at the last minute.'

'That means it's Sarne's fault.'

'There may be an explanation - '

'Indeed - such as he spent too much time chasing Belgian tarts to look after his engine. Can we limp along?'

'Absolutely not, sir. We wouldn't ~~gax~~ move half a cable before she seized.'

'Damnation. Where's that radio operator?'

The first officer said: 'I'll find him, sir.' He went out.

'You sure you can't cobble something together?' the captain asked Koch.

'I'm afraid you can't make an oil pump out of spare parts and string. That's why we have to carry a spare pump.'

The first officer came back ^{the} with radio operator. The captain said: 'Where the devil have you been?'

The radio operator was a short, stocky man with a very big nose. and a middle-European accent: apparently he was Austrian. He looked hurt, and said: 'I was helping to search the for'ard store for the oil pump, sir, then I went to wash my hands.'

'All right. Make a signal to the owners as follows: Report engine breakdown at ... What's our exact position, Number One?'

The first officer gave the radio operator the position.

The captain continued: 'Require new oil pump or tow to port. Please instruct.'

Half an hour later the reply came from the owners: Coparelli sold yesterday to Savile Shipping of Zurich. Your message passed to new owners. Stand by for their instructions.

Almost immediately afterwards there was a signal from Savile Shipping: Our vessel Gil Hamilton in your waters. She will come

alongside at approximately noon. Prepare to disembark all crew except engineer. Gil Hamilton will take crew to Marseilles. Engineer will await new oil pump. Papagopolos.

*

The exchange of signals was heard sixty miles away by Solly Weinberg, the master of the Gil Hamilton and a Commander in the Israeli Navy. He muttered: 'Right on schedule. Well done, Koch.' He set a course for the Coparelli and ordered full speed ahead.

*

It was ^{heard} not by Yasif Hassan and Mahmoud aboard the Nablus 150 miles away. They were in the captain's cabin, bent over a sketch plan Hassan had drawn of the Coparelli, and they were deciding exactly how they would board her and take over. Hassan had instructed the Nablus' radio operator to listen out on two wavelengths: the one on which the Stromberg's radio beacon broadcast, and the one Tyrin was using for his clandestine signals from the Coparelli to Rostov on the Karla. Because the messages were sent on the Coparelli's regular wavelength, the Nablus did not pick them up. It would be some time yet before the Fedayeen realised they were hijacking an almost abandoned ship.

*

It was heard 200 miles away on the bridge of the Stromberg. When the Coparelli acknowledged the signal from Papagopolos, the officers on the bridge cheered and clapped. Nat Dickstein, leaning against a bulkhead with a cup of black coffee in his hand, staring ahead at the rain and the heaving sea, did not cheer. His body was hunched and tense, his face stiff with strain, his sad brown eyes slitted behind the plastic spectacles. One of the others noticed his silence and made a cheerful remark about getting over the first hurdle. Dickstein's muttered reply was uncharacteristically peppered with the strongest

of obscenities. The cheerful officer turned away, and later, in the officers' mess, observed that Dickstein looked like the kind of man who would stick a knife in you if you ~~dx~~ trod on his toe.

*

And it was heard by David Rostov and Suza Ashford ~~xxx~~ 300 miles away aboard the Karla, where the radio equipment was sophisticated enough to pick up several wavelengths simultaneously.

Rostov had had nothing to do for the past twenty-four hours at sea. The crew of the Karla were, for the most part, the lowest kind of KGB thug, and the officers were from Naval Intelligence, part of the M.V.D., and consequently regarded the KGB as cowboys. So, for company, Rostov had had to choose between thugs, snobs, and a beautiful Arab girl half his age. He spent most of his time with Suza.

She encouraged his attention and watched his attitude carefully. Because she had led Hassan to Sicily he did not mistrust her, but at first he regarded her simply as an appendage to the foolish Arab. He soon discovered that she was much brighter than Hassan. Powerful and successful men could rarely resist the combination of beauty and brains in a woman, in Suza's experience. She did not have to flirt in order to consolidate her position in his confidence - indeed, flirting would have been a mistake, for he was too mature and, she guessed, too experienced to be intrigued by coquettishness. Her technique was to talk to him and, more importantly, to listen. It was not very difficult to be interested in David Rostov. He had a cold, powerful intellect, and he was cynical and sometimes witty about the Soviet Union in ^e general and the KGB in particular. They also talked about Oxford and about the Middle East. Suza pretended a kind of low-key, weary anger about Israel; the sort of attitude she would expect from an educated, middle-class, politicized Western Arab. She

knew all the arguments well: she had heard them from her father, many times over.

They had been having breakfast in the officers' mess when the Coparelli sent her first signal, and by the time the message from Papagopolos came over the airwaves they were down in the radio room, listening.

When it was over Rostov smiled, apparently delighted with the ingenuity of Dickstein's scheme. 'He's smart as hell,' he said.

Suza asked him: 'What is Savile Shipping?'

'A front for Israeli Intelligence. Look: Dickstein is eliminating all the people who have reason to be interested in what happens to the uranium. The shipping company aren't interested because they no longer own the ship. Now he's taking the captain and crew off the ship. No doubt he has some kind of hold over the owners of the uranium. It's a beautiful scheme.'

Suza said: 'I suppose the breakdown was rigged by the agent he put aboard as engineer.'

'Yes. Now Dickstein can take over the ship without firing a shot.'

'And so can Yasif Hassan, of course.'

'What?'

'Hassan can take over the Coparelli without firing a shot.'

Rostov stared at her. His eyes widened and the blood drained from his thin face. Suza was shocked to see him suddenly lose all his poise and confidence. He said: 'Hassan is going to hijack the Coparelli?'

Suza pretended incredulity. 'Are you telling me that you didn't know?'

'But who ... ? Not the Egyptians, surely!'

'The Fedayeen,' Suza told him. 'Hassan said this was your

plan.'

Rostov banged the bulkhead with his fist, looking very uncool and Russian for a moment. 'Hassan is a liar and a traitor,' he said.

'Have we got time to stop him?' Suza said, knowing that they had not.

Rostov shook his head. 'We're too far away.'

Suza thought: Now do this bit right, baby, or you're dead. She said: 'Then there's only one thing we can do.'

Rostov looked up at her with narrowed eyes. 'And what is that?' he said.

*

FROM: SAVILE SHIPPING, ZURICH

TO: ANGELUZZI E BIANCO, GENOA

FROM F.A.PEDLER

YOUR ~~XX~~ YELLOWCAKE CONSIGNMENT/DELAYED INDEFINITELY DUE TO ENGINE
TROUBLE AT SEA. WILL ADVISE SOONEST OF NEW DELIVERY DATES.
PAPAGOPOLOS.

*

As the Gil Hamilton came into view, Pyotr Tyrin cornered Ravlo, the addict, in the tweendecks. Tyrin adopted a bullying manner and took hold of Ravlo's sweater. 'Listen,' he said, 'you're going to do something for me.'

'Sure, anything you say,' said Ravlo.

'I want to stay on board this ship when the rest of you go on the Gil Hamilton. If I'm missed, you will say that you've seen me go over.'

'Right, okay, sure.'

'If I'm discovered, and I have to board the Gil Hamilton, you can be sure I'll tell them about your habit.'

'I'll do everything I can.'

'You'd better.'

All hands were summoned on deck for the changeover. The sea was too rough for the Gil Hamilton to come right alongside, so she sent a launch. Everyone had to wear lifebelts for the crossing. The officers and crew of the Coparelli stood still in the pouring rain while they were counted. Then the first sailor went over the side and down the ladder, and jumped into the well of the launch.

The launch was too small to take the whole crew. They had to go over in three detachments. While everyone's attention was on the first men to go over, Tyrin whispered to Ravlo: 'Try and get into the last lot.'

'All right.'

The two of them edged out to the back of the crowd on deck. Tyrin looked around. All the officers were peering over the side at the launch. The men were standing, waiting, facing toward the Gil Hamilton. Tyrin slipped back behind a bulkhead.

He waited. Nothing happened.

He was two steps from a lifeboat whose cover he had loosened earlier. The stem of the boat could be seen from the deck amidships, where the crew were, but the stern could not. Tyrin stepped to the stern, lifted the cover, dived in, and put the cover back in place from inside.

He crawled the length of the boat to a position from which he could see the deck through an eyelet in the tarpaulin. Now, if only Ravlo would do his stuff ...

The launch took the first detachment across and came back for more. When the second lot had gone down the ladder, the first officer said: 'Where's that radio operator, anybody know?'

'He went over with the first lot, sir,' said Ravlo.

Tyrin thought: Good man!

'Are you sure?' said the officer.

'Yes, sir, I saw him.'

The officer nodded, and said something in a quieter voice about not being able to tell one from another in this filthy rain. Then the captain called to Koch, and the two men stood talking in the lee of a bulkhead close to Tyrin's lifeboat.

The captain said: 'I've never heard of Savile Shipping, have you?'

'No, sir.'

'This is all wrong, selling a ship while she's at sea, then leaving the engineer in charge of her and taking the captain off.'

'Yes, sir.' Koch thought for a moment, then added: 'I should think they're not seafaring people, these new owners.'

'Bloody sure they're not, or they'd know better.' There was a pause. 'You could refuse to stay alone, of course, then I would have to stay with you. I'd back you up afterwards.'

'I'm afraid I'd lose my ticket.'

'Quite right, I should not have suggested it. Well, now. You're flying a white 'X' on a blue background, the semaphore letter M, which means "My vessel is stopped and making no way through the water." You've also got one black ball hoisted on the for'ard mast, which means you're at anchor. There's a white light on the mast to say the same thing at night - all you've got to do is switch it on.'

'Aye, aye, sir.'

'The radio is tuned to the owner's wavelength and set to receive, but you know how to operate it anyway.'

'Yes, sir.'

The third lot of sailors had boarded the launch, and the first officer was waiting at the top of the ladder, looking toward the captain.

'Good luck,' the captain said to Koch.

'Thankyou, sir.'

The old man doesn't want to go, thought Tyrin.

The first officer called: 'Ready when you are, sir!'

The captain turned around, crossed the deck, and went over the side. The first officer followed.

Tyrin turned his attention to Koch. The engineer watched the launch go across to the Gil Hamilton, then he climbed the ladder to the bridge.

'Shit,' Tyrin said aloud. He wanted Koch to go below, so that he, Tyrin, could get to the for'ard store and radio to the Karla. He watched the bridge, and saw Koch's face appear from time to time behind the glass.

If Koch stayed there, Tyrin would have to wait until dark before he could contact Rostov and report.

It looked very much as if Koch planned to remain on the bridge all day.

Tyrin settled down for a long wait.

Seventeen

When the Nablus reached the point south of Ibiza where Hassan expected to encounter the Coparelli, there was not a single ship in sight.

Mahmoud said: 'You have made a mistake.'

'Not necessarily,' Hassan replied. 'This was just the earliest point at which we could meet her. She doesn't have to travel at top speed.'

'Why would she be delayed?'

Hassan shrugged. 'Maybe the engine isn't running well. Maybe the weather has been worse where they've been. A lot of reasons.'

'So what do you suggest?'

'We travel south-west, backing along the Coparelli's route. We must meet her sooner or later.'

'Very well. Give the order to the captain.'

The relationship between the two men was a little strained. Mahmoud was the commander of the Fedayeen, Hassan one of his troops; yet now Hassan was making the decisions, and all Mahmoud could say was 'Very well.' In truth, there was no possibility of Hassan usurping Mahmoud's position, for the Fedayeen themselves knew nothing of this reversal of roles, and as soon as the fighting started Mahmoud would be giving the orders again. Nevertheless, Hassan felt uncomfortable about it.

The Fedayeen were restless, too. They had been expecting a fight at midday, and now they had to wait. They lolled about in the crew quarters and the galley, cleaning their weapons, playing cards, and bragging about past battles. They were hyped-up for combat, and inclined to play dangerous knife-throwing games to prove their courage to themselves and each other. One of them quarrelled with two sea^emen.

over a totally imaginary insult. He cut them both about the face with a broken ketchup bottle, and after that the crew stayed well away.

There was a false alarm at four-thirty p.m. when they sighted another ship coming toward them; but Hassan, after examining her through binoculars, announced that she was not the Coparelli, and as she passed they were able to read the name on her side: Gil Hamilton.

As daylight began to fade, Hassan became worried. In this weather, even with navigation lights, two ships could pass within half a mile of one another at night without seeing each other. In order to be sure the Coparelli did not pass them, they would have to go about and spend the night travelling toward Genoa at the Coparelli's speed. Then they would resume searching in the morning. But by that time Stromberg would be close by, and the Fedayeen would lose the chance of springing an ambush on Dickstein.

He was about to explain this to Mahmoud when a single white light winked on ~~xxx~~ in the distance.

'She's at anchor,' said the captain.

'How can you tell?' Mahmoud asked.

'That's what the single white light means.'

Hassan said: 'That would explain why she wasn't off Ibiza when we expected her.'

'If that is the Coparelli.'

Hassan looked through the binoculars. 'It could be, but I'm not sure,' he said. 'I think we should prepare to board.'

'I agree,' said Mahmoud. He went off to tell the Fedayeen.

'Turn out your navigation lights,' Hassan told the captain.

'We don't want them to see us.'

As the Nablus closed with the other ship, night fell. 'I'm

almost certain that's the Coparelli,' Hassan said.

The captain said: 'She has three cranes on deck, and all her upperworks are aft of the hatches.'

'Your eyesight is better than mine,' Hassan said. 'She's the Coparelli.' He went below to join the Fedayeen.

Mahmoud was addressing them in the galley. 'We do not expect much resistance,' he was saying as Hassan entered. 'The ship is crewed by ordinary seamen, and there is no reason for them to be armed. We will go in two boats, one to attack the port side and the other the starboard. Once we are on board, our first task is to take the bridge and prevent the crew using the radio. After that, we round up the crew on deck.'

He paused and looked around. 'I will command the first boat and attack the near side of the ship. Mename will command the second boat.'

Hassan had expected to command the second boat.

Mahmoud turned to Hassan and, with deliberate casualness, said: 'Go and tell the ~~captain~~⁷ captain to get as close as he can to the Coparelli and then stop engines.'

Hassan suppressed a smile as he went out. As easily as that, Mahmoud had reasserted his position as leader. He was a politician as well as a soldier: he had known precisely how and when to reduce Hassan to the role of errand-boy.

Hassan preferred it this way. He went up to the bridge, passed the message to the captain, and returned to the deck. He was already dressed for the attack, with a machine pistol in a waterproof bag hanging from his shoulder. It was very dark now, and for a while all that could be seen of the Coparelli was the light. Then, as he strained his eyes, a ship-shaped silhouette of solid black became just distinguishable against the wash of dark grey; and at that moment

the Nablus' engines died and two boats hit the water with a simultaneous splash.

The Fedayeen swarmed over the side and into the boats. Hassan found himself in Mahmoud's. The little launch bobbed like a cork on the waves, which suddenly seemed immense from Hassan's new vantage point.

There was no sign of activity on the Coparelli as they approached. When the launch came alongside Hassan thought that surely the officer on watch must hear its little engine over the noise of the wind; but no alarms sounded, no lights flooded the deck, no one shouted orders or came to the rail to look over.

Mahmoud went up the ladder first, and the others followed him. By the time Hassan got on deck Mename's team were coming over the rail on the far side.

The Fedayeen poured down the companionways and up the ladders. Hassan went to the bridge. There he found Mahmoud and Mename alone, looking around with mystification on their faces.

'Did they get to use the radio?' Hassan asked.

'Who?' said Mahmoud.

'There's nobody here?'

'Look around.'

Hassan nodded slowly. 'Somehow, Dickstein found a way to get the entire crew off the ship so there would be no resistance when he boarded.'

'But how?'

'I don't know. The important thing is, he will expect to board a deserted ship - which will give us an even greater advantage of surprise.'

Mahmoud nodded. 'Good. We must tell the Nablus to stand a few miles off, in case they see her and get suspicious. You get on the

radio. Mename, deploy the men on deck for the ambush.'

Two of the Fedayeen came up to the bridge with a sailor between them.

'Ah,' said Mahmoud. 'Not totally abandoned, then.'

'He is the only man aboard,' said one of the Fedayeen. 'We found him in the captain's cabin.' He paused, and grinned. 'He was asleep.'

*

As darkness fell Pyotr Tyrin had watched the engineer go forward to switch on the white light. Coming back, he had not gone up on to the bridge, but had walked farther aft and entered the galley. As soon as he disappeared Tyrin jumped out of the lifeboat and ran forward along the deck to the for'ard store.

When he entered his radio room, the set was emitting a short, repeated signal in a special two-letter code. Tyrin looked it up in the book and found that it meant he was to switch to another wavelength before acknowledging.

He switched the radio to 'Transmit' and followed his instructions. Rostov replied immediately. Change of plan. Hassan will attack Coparelli.

Tyrin made: Repeat please.

Hassan is a traitor. Fedayeen will attack Coparelli.

Tyrin said aloud: 'Jesus, what's going on?'

Rostov continued: He plans to ambush Dickstein. You must obey the following instructions precisely. Do you understand?

Understood.

In order that our plan may proceed, we must warn Dickstein of the ambush.

Tyrin frowned as he decoded this, then his face cleared as he understood. 'Then we'll be back to square one,' he said to himself.

'That's clever. I wonder who thought of it?'

He made: How?

You will call the Stromberg on Coparelli's regular wavelength and send the following message precisely repeat precisely. Message begins. Coparelli to Stromberg I am boarded Arabs I think watch Message ends.

Tyrin nodded. Dickstein would think that Koch had time to get a few words off before the Arabs killed him. Forewarned of the ambush, he might be able to take the Coparelli. Then Rostov's ship could collide with Coparelli as planned. But if Dickstein failed to take the Coparelli, the Russians would be no worse off than before.

Tyrin made: Understood. He heard a distant bump, as if something had hit the ship's hull. At first he ignored it, then he realised there was nobody on board but him and Koch. He went to the door of the forward store and peeped out.

The Fedayeen had arrived.

He closed the door and scurried back into his room. He made: They are here.

Rostov replied: Signal Dickstein now.

What do I do then?

Hide.

Tyrin signed off and tuned to the regular wavelength to signal the Stromberg.

*

The radio operator aboard the Karla adjusted a switch and began to scribble as the message came over on the Coparelli-Stromberg wavelength. When it finished he handed a sheet of paper to Rostov. 'It's exactly according to your orders,' he said.

'Good. Listen on,' Rostov said.

Another signal came through. The radio man wrote it down and handed it over. Rostov read: Stromberg to Coparelli. Come in please.

'That means they got Tyrin's signal,' Rostov said. 'You know, I was never in favour of the idea of women as officers in the KGB, but I'm thinking of changing my position. This was a brilliant stratagem.'

'Thankyou. I just hope it works,' said Suza Ashford.

*

'I've heard of being armed to the teeth, but this is ridiculous,' said Nat Dickstein, and they all laughed.

The message from the Coparelli had altered his mood. The tension was still there, coiled inside him like a steel spring, but now he could ride it and use it, now he had something to do with it. The twelve men in front of him in the messroom of the Stromberg sensed the change, and they caught his eagerness for battle, although they knew some of them would die soon.

Armed to the teeth they were. Each had an Uzi 9mm submachine-gun, a reliable and compact firearm weighing nine pounds when loaded with the 25-round magazine and only an inch over two feet long with its metal stock extended. They had three spare magazines each. Each man had a 9mm Luger in a belt holster - the pistol would take the cartridges from the Uzi magazine - and a clip of four grenades on the opposite side of his belt. Almost certainly, they all had extra weapons of their own choice: knives, coshes, bayonets, knuckle-dusters and others more exotic, carried superstitiously, more like lucky charms than fighting implements.

Dickstein knew their mood, knew they had caught it from him, knew where it ultimately came from. He had felt it often before, briefing a group of men before a fight. They were afraid, and -

paradoxically - the fear made them eager to get started, for the waiting was the worst part, the battle itself was like an anaesthetic against fear, and afterwards you had either won or you were dead and did not care any more.

'Koch's message simply said he was being attacked by Arabs,' Dickstein began. 'He didn't finish the signal, and afterwards we couldn't raise him, so I assume they took him while he was at the radio.'

'We don't know who they are. If Koch was right and they are Arabs, they could be regular army or Fedayeen.'

'Let's hope they're regulars,' one of the men interrupted, and the others laughed: they had no respect for the Arab armies.

Dickstein continued: 'We don't know how they got on to us. Somewhere along the line we've been betrayed, or I haven't been careful enough, or the opposition has simply been too clever. That question is likely to take all of my time for the next year or so; but for now there's no use speculating.'

'If they knew the uranium was there they must also know we're coming. Now, they can't move the ship, so they're bound to wait for us. I expect an ambush.'

'The layout of the Coparelli is exactly the same as the layout of the ship we are on now: it's designed like a miniature tanker, with the holds forward and amidships, the main superstructure on the afterdeck, and a secondary superstructure in the stern. The main superstructure contains the bridge, ~~officers'~~ officers' quarters, and mess; below it are crew's quarters. The stern superstructure contains the galley, and below that stores and the engine room. The two superstructures are separate above deck, but connected by gangways below.'

'Our problem in taking this ship is that it must be done in

the dark, otherwise we'd never get aboard - they'd pick us off as we came up the ladders and over the rails. However, in darkness we're liable to shoot each other as well as the opposition. For what it's worth, we'll have a recognition signal, Aliyah. If you see someone and you're not sure which side he's on, say 'Aliyah'. If he says 'Aliyah', he's one of us. If he says anything else, kill him. The word is sufficiently like the Arab name Ali to make one of the opposition hesitate before shooting.'

Dickstein smiled. 'However, we all know these signals work best in exercises and worst in battle. So our plan of attack is worked out to minimise the chances of encountering one of your own side where you expect to find an enemy.'

'We go over in three teams, each with a squad leader.'

'Bader, you lead Ish, Remez and Jabotinsky, and hit the stern ladder on the port side. Gibli, you lead Katzen, Feinberg and Dovrat, stern ladder on the starboard side. Abbas, with Sapir, Sharrett and Porush, go in at the bows.'

'Abbas, from the bows you control the whole of the foredeck, an open field of fire. Deploy your men behind cover and stay there. When enemy on deck reveal their positions, pick them off. Your main problem is likely to be hailing fire from the bridge. You've got the best chance of getting aboard unseen, so hold your fire until you hear fighting in the stern.'

'Bader and Gibli should reach opposite sides of the stern deck at about the same time. I want you to deploy one man each on deck, and take the others below. Your job is to flush out the enemy from below decks, working forward so that they come out on deck amidships and are driven forward, by you and by the men you've left on deck, until they come out into the open on the foredeck, without cover, and are caught in a crossfire between yourselves and Abbas' team

in the bows.

'This strategy is likely to leave a pocket of resistance in the amidships superstructure which will probably centre on the bridge. Bader and Gibli, your teams will come along the two below-decks gangways and up to deck level just below the bridge. You will each detail a man to continue upward and attack the bridge.

'I go across the afterdeck and up the funnel to hit the bridge from above and behind.

'When we take the bridge, we will sound the ship's foghorn. That ought to be a sign that we've won.

'I think that's all. Good luck, and don't take any prisoners.'

Eighteen

The three boats pulled away from the Stromberg in the last few minutes before dawn.

The ship behind them was invisible within minutes. She had no navigation lights, and all deck lights and cabin lamps had been extinguished, even below the waterline, to ensure that not a single ray of light escaped to warn the Coparelli.

The weather had got worse during the night. The captain of the Stromberg said it was still not bad enough to be called a storm, but nevertheless the rain was torrential, the wind strong enough to blow a steel bucket clattering along the deck, the waves so high that Dickstein was obliged to cling tightly to his bench seat in the well of the motor boat.

He could not see the faces of the four men in the boat with him. He knew that Gibli, the squad leader, was at the wheel, navigating blind in the troughs, able to set his course only while they crested a wave, when for a few seconds he could see the white light which was all that was visible of the Coparelli. Sitting next to Dickstein was Raoul Dovrat, a short, swarthy agent he had worked with before. Dovrat's beard was ~~growing~~ coming along fine. Opposite him was Katzen, a fair-skinned blond man whom Dickstein did not know.

'I still say we should have postponed this fishing trip until tomorrow.'

The joker was the ~~fourth~~ fifth man in the boat, Feinberg, a kid whose crewcut made him look younger than his twenty-one years. He was the one who had asked Dickstein what 'all us tough guys' were doing here if there wasn't going to be a fight. Well, now he knew.

They all wore oilskins and life-jackets, and carried their

submachine-guns under their coats in waterproof wrappings. Dickstein, as superstitious as the rest, wore an old striped waistcoat of his father's with a smashed watch in the pocket, over his heart: the watch had once stopped a German bullet.

They crested a wave and suddenly, there in the next trough, was the Coparelli.

*

Switching from forward to reverse several times in rapid succession, Levi Abbas edged his boat closer to the bows of the Coparelli. The white light above them enabled him to see quite clearly, but the outward-curving prow shielded the boat from the sight of anyone on deck or at the bridge. When the boat was close enough, Abbas said: 'Porush - take a rope and jump.'

Porush, who was married to Abbas' sister, tied a rope around his waist under his oilskin. He hesitated a moment, then he shrugged off the oilskin, unwrapped his gun, then slung the gun over his neck. He stood with one foot in the boat and one on the gunwale, waited for his moment, and jumped.

He hit the ladder with both feet and both hands. He untied the rope ~~fx~~ around his waist and secured it to a rung of the ladder. He looked back at Abbas.

'Up!' Abbas told him. 'Sapir - you next, then Sharrett. I go last.'

Sapir jumped, and scrambled up the ladder after Porush. Sharrett followed. Porush stopped near the top of the ladder. Observing this, Abbas realised it was good thinking: they should all go over the rail close together.

He killed the engine of the boat, shed his oilskin and gun-wrapping, and jumped for the ladder. He did not land as well as the others, for his hands were numb from steering the boat in the cold

rain, and he missed his grip; but he slipped down only one rung before he hooked and arm around the side of the ladder and arrested his descent.

'You okay?' Sharrett hissed from above.

'Yes,' Abbas replied. 'Let's go!'

The four men went over the rail quickly, one after the other. When Abbas hit the deck he saw that the other three were lying close to the gunwale; but despite that they were very exposed because of the white light above them.

Sharrett

~~Sapir~~ was the smallest of them, and he could wriggle like a snake. Abbas touched his shoulder. 'Take cover on the port side,' he said.

Sharrett bellied across two yards of open deck, then he was partly concealed by the raised hatch of the for'ard hold. He inched forward.

Abbas said: 'Sapir, find what cover you can on this side.'

Sapir looked up and down. Up in the stem he spotted the winding gear for the anchor, with a large pile of slack chain. He crawled to it and got into position behind it.

Porush looked expectantly at Abbas.

Abbas said: 'How do you like the crane?'

They both looked up at the derrick, towering over them ~~middle~~, dominating the whole of the foredeck.

'Terrific,' Porush said with a grin. He crawled forward, following Sharrett's trail. Abbas thought: He's got a fat arse - my sister feeds him too well. Porush gained the foot of the crane and began to climb the ladder. Abbas watched him reach the control cabin and nodded, satisfied.

And now for his own position. Behind him, in the prow, was a companionhead over a short flight of steps leading down to a door.

The area was not big enough to be called a foc'sle, and there was almost certainly no proper accommodation in there - it was simply a for'ard store. He crawled to it, crouched at the foot of the steps in the little well, and gently cracked the door. It was dark inside. He closed the door, and turned around, resting his gun on the head of the steps, content that he was alone.

*

With considerably less light to see by, Gibli was forced to take his boat much closer to the Coparelli's side. It was impossible to keep the boat in position alongside the starboard stern ladder: the two vessels shifted constantly with the rise and fall of the waves. Dickstein found a boathook in the well of the boat, and used it to hold the little craft steady, pulling toward the Coparelli when the sea tried to part them, and pushing away when the boat and the ship threatened to collide broadside.

Gibli, who was ex-army, insisted on adhering to the Israeli tradition that the officers lead their men from in front, not from behind: he had to go first. He always wore a hat, to conceal his receding hairline, and he had it on now. He crouched at the edge of the boat while it slid down the side of a wave; then, in the trough when the boat and the ship moved closer together, he jumped. He landed well and moved upward.

Dickstein said: 'Right - Feinberg, then Katzen, then Dovrat - go!'

On the edge, waiting for his moment, Feinberg said: 'Now, then - I count to three then open my parachute, right?' Then he jumped.

Katzen went next. The blond man did not wait for the best moment, but simply jumped. He landed all right, but the wave was rising, and he got soaked to the waist.

Dickstein said: 'Hey, Raoul, when this is over, why don't you try to grow a beard? It would make you look more manly.'

Raoul ~~Evrat~~ Dovrat punched Dickstein's shoulder, chuckled, and jumped.

Dickstein dropped the boathook and followed.

Safely on the ladder, he leaned back and looked up. Gibli was just reaching the level of the gunwale. Dickstein peered through the streaming rain and saw Gibli swing one leg over the rail.

Dickstein looked back over his shoulder, and saw a faint band of lighter grey in the distant sky, the first sign of dawn.

Then there was a sudden, shocking burst of machine-gun fire and a shout. Dickstein looked up again to see Gibli falling slowly backwards off the top of the ladder and down, down past Dickstein and into the sea.

Dickstein shouted: 'Go, go, go!' but it was unnecessary. Feinberg was already flying over the rail. He would hit the deck rolling, Dickstein knew, and then - Yes, there was the sound of his gun as he gave covering fire for the others -

And Katzen was over and there were four, five, many guns crackling, and Dickstein was scampering up the ladder and pulling the pin from a grenade with his teeth and hurling it up and over the rail, a good twenty or thirty yards forward, where it would cause a diversion without injuring any of the Mossad men already on deck, and then Dovrat was over and Dickstein saw him hit the deck rolling, gain his feet, and dive for cover behind the stern superstructure, then Dickstein went over in a high-jumper's western roll, landed on his hands and knees, and scampered, bent double under a sheet of covering fire, into the stern.

'Where are they?' he yelled.

Dovrat answered him. 'In the galley,' he said, jerking a

thumb toward the bulkhead beside them. 'In the lifeboats, and in the doorways of the amidships superstructure.'

'All right.' Dickstein got to his feet. 'We hold this position until Bader's team arrive. When we hear them open fire, we move. Dovrat and Katzen hit the galley door. Feinberg, cover them then begin to work your way forward along this edge of the deck. I'll make a dive for the first lifeboat and take it from there. Until then, let's give them something to distract their attention from the port stern ladder. Fire at will.'

*

Bader heard the first shots when he was half-way up the port ladder. 'Let's go!' he yelled, and began to climb the ladder at a run. He put his head above the level of the hull and looked through the rails on to the deck. All the action seemed to be on the far side of the ship. He vaulted the rail and crouched down.

Next over was the long, thin body of Jabotinsky, who had been a star basketball player in the army before transferring to Intelligence. He landed lightly and grinned, as if he had just jumped up to score a basket. Bader put his mouth to Jabotinsky's ear and said: 'When we move, take cover in the stern, then work forward.'

Jabotinsky nodded. 'Gotcha.'

Ish and Remez came over and crouched down beside them. Bader pointed to each of them in turn, then at ~~the~~ himself, then at the door to the galley. Then he held up his hand to tell them to wait.

He was staring at the nearest lifeboat. The others followed his gaze. The muzzle of a rifle was poking out from under the boat's cover. Bader edged toward the boat, pulling a grenade from the clip at his waist.

When he reached the boat he withdrew the pin from the grenade and said: 'One elephant two elephant three elephant four elephant

five elephant six elephant seven elephant eight - '

He lifted the edge of the cover and dropped the grenade into the boat, then he dived away. It went off with a whoomph and blew the cover into the air in tatters, along with two or three bodies.

Jabotinsky stood upright and fired along the deck, spraying the other lifeboats and all the doors.

Bader, Ish and Remez crossed the deck with their guns at the ready. Bader turned the handle of the door and kicked it open. All three men stepped inside firing.

The galley was a square room with a big table in the middle bolted to the deck. Boxes of stores were lashed to the for'ard bulkhead, and the cook's ovens and freezers were ranged aft. Six or seven Arabs stood along the far wall. Two were firing through the open door, another was ~~sitting~~ taking aim through a porthole, and the others were reloading and waiting their turns at the firing position. They were all in the act of turning toward the port door when the hail of fire from three submachine-guns caught them. Outline against the white bulkhead, they were perfect targets, and every one of them died before seeing who was killing them.

*

Abbas heard the first shot but, straining his eyes to peer into the rain and the darkness, could not tell which side it came from. Then there was another burst, and he saw the flashes and thought: Starboard side - Gibli's squad.

A storm of guns started up then, and Abbas tried to see where the fire was coming from. There were men in the lifeboats, he decided, and in the doorways below the bridge. He looked to his left and saw Sapir's arm swing upward and loose a grenade. Good thinking: that way he doesn't have to reveal his position yet.

Sharrett on the port side was holding his fire until he had something to shoot at, and Porush, up in the crane, was also waiting to take maximum advantage of his position. Abbas began to fire intermittent bursts in the general direction of the starboard lifeboats. He had no hope of hitting anyone, but the occasional spray of bullets from the wrong direction might help to confuse and immobilise the enemy.

It was slow, maddeningly slow: every minute seemed to last an hour. Then things began to happen very quickly.

Sapir sent off the last of his grenades and opened fire with his gun. There was an explosion on the port side, and Abbas just had time to think: Bader's here - before Sharrett began shooting. Looking up to the bridge, Abbas saw the glass crumble outwards, and two, no three guns fired on them from there. Sapir was all right behind his pile of anchor chain, but Sharrett had very little cover: he was squeezed between a capstan and the rail.

Abbas fired up at the bridge, to no effect. Then Porush, in the crane, threw all his grenades one after another and opened up with his submachine-gun. It was a long throw, and Abbas thought they would all fall short. The first two exploded on the deck harmlessly, and the third bounced on the roof of the bridge and rolled down to the starboard deck before going off; but the fourth reached its target. Porush had fired ten or twenty rounds when the grenade exploded, blowing out the remaining glass in the ports of the bridge and silencing all three guns.

There was a moment's quiet. Sharrett let out a victorious whoop. Suddenly another gun opened up from the bridge - someone else must have gone in there, for nobody could have survived the explosion in that confined space. For a minute Abbas could not figure out where all the bullets were going, for none landed near him. He looked to either side. Sapir and Sharrett were shooting at

the bridge, and neither seemed to be under fire. Abbas looked up at the crane - and saw Porush come toppling backward out of the control cabin.

The gunman in the bridge must have seen it too, for he stopped firing, then resumed with a burst in Sharrett's direction. Abbas and Sapir both shot at the bridge, but it was no good: in a moment Sharrett screamed, and jumped sideways, and jerked as if electrocuted while more bullets thudded into his body, until at last he lay still and the screaming stopped.

Abbas forced himself to stop thinking about how he would tell his sister about Porush's death and considered his situation. His team was supposed to command the foredeck, but at the moment the bridge commanded the foredeck.

Slowly, he came out of his little stairwell and, using the raised hatch of the hold for cover, crawled across the deck to the edge of the hatch. Then he sprang to his feet and jumped across the anchor winding-gear to where Sapir was.

'Cover me,' Abbas said.

He took a grenade from his belt, withdrew the pin, and threw it. It landed short of the bridge and exploded. The flash might dazzle the gunman on the bridge for a second or two. When the bang came Abbas was on his feet and running for the crane, the crash of Sapir's covering fire filling his ears.

He made the foot of the ladder and started climbing before the man on the bridge saw him. Bullets ricocheted off the girders all around him. It seemed to take him an age to climb each step. Some lunatic part of his mind began to count the steps: seven ... eight ... nine ... ten ...

Then he was hit. The bullet entered his thigh just below the hip bone. It did not kill him, but the shock seemed to paralyse all

the muscles in the lower half of his body. His feet slipped from the rung of the ladder. He had a moment of panicky incomprehension as he discovered that his legs would not work. Instinctively, he grabbed for the ladder with his hands, but he missed and fell. He turned partly over as he fell, and landed awkwardly, breaking his neck; and he died.

The door to the for'ard store opened slightly, and a wide-eyed, frightened Russian face peeped out; but nobody saw it, and it went back inside again, closing the door.

*

Dickstein, Feinberg, Katzen and Dovrat heard Bader's grenade explode on the port side, and almost immediately after heard the hail of machine-gun fire from inside the galley.

Dickstein yelled: 'Go!'

Feinberg lobbed a grenade around the corner, and as it went off he stepped from behind the galley across the deck to the rail, spraying bullets the length of the starboard deck.

Katzen sprinted for the galley door with Dovrat right behind him. The firing inside the galley seemed to have stopped. Katzen hit the door shouting 'Aliyah' and burst in.

'Aliyah.' The shout came from the opposite door. As Dovrat crashed in behind him, Katzen saw Bader, Remez and Ish on the far side of the galley, and took in the scattered bodies of the Arabs all around him.

It was the first time anyone had actually seen any of the enemy.

Now they knew who they were fighting, and realized they had been lucky so far.

'Fedayeen,' said Katzen grimly.

From the galley two companionways led below: one on the port

side, one on the starboard side. As Katzen headed for the starboard companion, Bader said: 'Where's Gibli?'

'They took him coming over the rail,' Katzen replied.

Bader motioned his men toward the port companion. 'Let's take some of them,' he said.

*

As Katzen and Dovrat rushed the galley door, Dickstein too took advantage of Feinberg's covering fire to move forward. He ran, bent double, past the point at which they had boarded the ship, and past the galley door, to throw himself behind the first of the lifeboats. From there, in the faint but increasing light, he could make out the lines of the afterdeck superstructure.

It was shaped like a flight of three steps, rising forward. At main deck level was the officers' mess, the officers' dayroom, sick bay and a passenger cabin used as a dry store. Above that were officers' cabins, heads, and the captain's cabin. On the top deck was the bridge with adjoining chart room and radio booth.

Most of the enemy would now be at deck level in the mess and the dayroom. He could bypass them by climbing a ladder alongside the funnel to the walkway around the second deck; but he would have to take out any soldiers in the cabins.

He looked back. Feinberg had retreated behind the galley. ~~again~~ He waited until Feinberg started shooting again, then he got to his feet. Firing wildly from the hip, Dickstein broke from behind the lifeboat and dashed across the afterdeck to the ladder. Without breaking his stride he jumped on to the fourth rung and scrambled up, conscious that for a few seconds he made an easy target, hearing a clutch of bullets rattle on the funnel beside him, until he reached the level of the second upper deck and flung himself forward across the walkway to fetch up, breathing hard and shaking a little, lying

against the door to the officers' quarters.

'Gawd, stone the bloody crows,' he muttered.

Then he reloaded his gun.

*

'Wait,' said Bader as they reached the companionhead. He pointed at Remez. 'Grenade.'

Remez pulled a grenade from his belt, unpinned it, and dropped it down to the next deck. On the far side of the galley, Katzen did the same. There was a double bang, then both teams went below.

Bader landed on the tweendeck, crouched, and swept his gun around in a half-circle, but there was nothing to shoot at. He found himself at the aft end of a long gangway with doors on either side leading to crew cabins. On the deck beside him lay the body of one of the Arabs, half in and half out of a door which led to the laundry. The Arab had presumably been killed by the grenade.

Ish and Remez jumped down beside him. Bader said: 'Ish - down again. Check the engine-room then sweep forward.'

'Gotcha.' Ish went to the next companionway and started down.

'We have to hit every cabin,' Bader said to Remez. 'I'll take every left door, you take every right door. Let's go.'

Bader reached the first door. He turned the handle, kicked the door open, and fired. The room was empty. He moved along. Turn, kick, fire; turn, kick, fire; turn, kick, fire. The fifth cabin was in darkness, and answering fire came back at him. He dodged out of the doorway and threw a grenade. The Arab came out in a rush, firing. Bader and Remez were both flat on the floor, firing upwards from opposite sides of the doorway. Neither was hit. The Arab took ten or twelve bullets in his torso.

Bader and Remez stood up and moved on: turn, kick, fire. Bader heard a single shot. He whipped around to see Remez fall. Remez was

not outside an open door. Where had the shot come from? At the aft end of the corridor, Bader saw the Arab whom he had presumed killed by the grenade. The man held a pistol and was aiming it at Bader. Bader dropped flat and heard a bullet sing over his head. He emptied his machine-gun into the Arab. In the confined space the noise and smell of the guns was almost overpowering.

Bader stood and turned, to see another Arab drop through the companionhead at the for'ard end of the gangway. Bader fired before the man hit the deck, but his magazine was empty. He ducked into a doorway as the Arab opened fire. He pulled a grenade and lobbed it out into the gangway, then ejected the empty magazine and snapped a fresh one in. He stepped out firing.

The Arab had gone.

Bader cursed.

He stepped back inside the cabin, lay down on the floor, and poked his head out at deck level.

Nothing.

He aimed along the gangway and waited. Sooner or later the bastard had to take a look.

Between Bader's position and the for'ard companionway was a lateral gangway connecting the two sides of the ship. The snout of a machine-pistol appeared around the corner and sprayed bullets. Bader ducked back in: so that was where he was. It was a stalemate. Neither man could move without presenting an unmissable target - but the Arab did not need to move: it was Bader who was supposed to sweep forward. He peeped out again: nothing.

He contemplated making a break, but it seemed merely suicidal. He could not go back, either. He looked around the cabin. The only way out was through the porthole. He would be better off staying here.

There was another burst of fire. He looked out again - and saw

the Arab fell forward into the gangway, dead.

There was a shout: 'Aliyah!'

'Aliyah!' Bader replied.

A head poked around the corner, and Bader recognised the blond hair and fair skin of Katzen.

'Thanks,' Bader said.

*

From the first tweendeck Ish descended a ladder which was enclosed for the first twelve feet or so. Looking down, he saw that the ladder led to a large, well-lit space that must be the engine-room; and that there was another twelve feet of ladder between the end of the enclosed section and the ~~bottom~~ deck.

He hesitated, wondering how to proceed. He could not throw a grenade ~~na~~ ahead, for the Coparelli had to be sailed to Haifa, and an explosion might wreck the engine. Yet for the twelve feet to the deck he would be very exposed.

With his feet on the last concealed rung, he crouched down slowly and tried to peer into the engine-room. He could not see it all, but the part he was able to see seemed empty.

He went down the ladder.

There was a single shot, and a sharp pain in his left calf. He jumped.

As he landed the pain shot up his leg like fire. He fell forward on to his hands and knees, and heard another shot ring out and a bullet thud into the bulkhead beside the ladder. He looked up, saw the Arab on the far side of the room, and dived behind the engine.

The other man was using a revolver. Another shot ricocheted off the engine and went up to imbed itself in the deckhead. But the Arab was badly poitioned, without cover in the far corner of the room, and Ish was able to pick him off with a single burst.

In the silence that followed a voice said: 'Aliyah.'

Ish replied: 'Aliyah.'

Down the starboard ladder came the stocky figure of Dovrat with his half-grown beard. He saw the body of the Arab and said: 'So far, so good.'

Ish said: 'Take a look at my leg, will you?'

Dovrat came over. Ish had to lie on his stomach so that Dovrat could look at the back of his calf.

'You lost a lump of muscle, but the bullet's not in there,' Dovrat said. He took a bandage from his pocket and wrapped it tightly around the wound.

'Thanks.' Ish got up.

'If you walk, you'll bleed,' Dovrat warned.

'I'm not going far,' Ish said. 'Let's get on with it.'

*

So far, so good, was what Dickstein thought as he lay by the door into the officers' quarters. He could see that the Arabs at deck level were being kept busy by Feinberg on the starboard side and Jabotinsky on the port side. Muffled explosions and gunshots from below-decks indicated that the others were seeing some action down there, and if Dickstein was right in thinking that most of the enemy were at main deck level, then the teams below should be able to sweep through according to plan. Dickstein could not tell what was happening on the foredeck, but that was only a holding operation anyway.

He put his back to the door and slowly slid upright. There was a porthole at eye level. He risked a look through it. He saw a passage with three doors either side and, at the far end, ladders going down to the mess and up to the ^{chartroom} ~~bridge~~. He knew that the bridge could also be reached by either of two outside ladders

leading up from the main deck.

He opened the door and stepped in.

He crept along the passage to the first cabin door, then he burst into action.

He opened the cabin door, threw a grenade in, closed the door, ran to the next door on the same side, threw a grenade in, ran to the next door, opened it, and rushed in firing from the hip.

There was one man in the third cabin, standing on the bunk and firing through the porthole. Dickstein's first burst put him out of action. Dickstein turned and faced the door, waiting. The grenades went off. The door of the opposite cabin flew open and an Arab stepped into the ^{gangway} ~~corridor~~, his gun aiming aft, the way Dickstein had come, then he looked across the ^{gangway} ~~corridor~~ and saw Dickstein in the opposite cabin, but it was too late and Dickstein was firing and the man fell dead.

Dickstein stepped into the ^{gangway} ~~corridor~~ and opened fire blind. There were two more cabins on the far side to be cleared. The door of the nearer one opened, a Dickstein fired, and a body fell out. One more to go. Dickstein watched. The door opened a crack, then closed again. Dickstein ran down the gangway, kicked the door open, and sprayed the cabin with bullets. The last man did not fire a shot. Dickstein ran forward again, pulled the pin from his last grenade, and threw it up through the companionhead into the ~~bridge~~ chartroom.

When it went off he was already running back down the passage to the door. He opened it, dropped to a crouch, stepped through, closed it, and lay down again, thinking it was remarkable what you could do when you didn't care whether you lived or died.

*

Two gangways led from the ~~lower engine~~ engine room through the lower tweendeck. Dovrat took the starboard gangway and Ish the port.

Ish's leg wound was bleeding steadily, and his face was grey with pain. He limped along the lower port tweendeck, pushing doors open, hardly caring whether he encountered any enemy or not. He saw no one until the end of his sweep. The last door, just past the companionway leading up, was locked. Ish leaned on the bulkhead, taking the weight off his injured leg, and shot the lock off. The room was dark. There was no movement inside. Ish found the light switch and flipped it with his left hand, keeping his gun level and ready to fire with his right. He almost opened up when he saw the figure lying on the floor; then he realised there was no danger.

The room contained electrical switchgear. The figure lay face down on the deck. The body was naked and horribly mutilated, as if by torture. With difficulty, Ish bent down and touched the shoulder. It was cool. The man was dead. Ish turned the head so that he could see the face. It was Robert Koch.

Ish turned out the light as he left.

He stood at the foot of the ladder leading to the upper tweendeck. He stretched up and grasped the rung at the limit of his reach. He took his weight on his arms, then bent his right leg, the good one, and placed his foot on the third rung. He pushed himself up until he could put his left foot beside the right. This way he could climb the ladder without using his left leg.

Bader was waiting for him at the companionhead. 'You hurt?' he said.

'Left leg. Flesh wound. Hurts like fuck.'

'We've got to go up to the main deck and take the officers' dayroom.'

'I can't move fast.'

'I don't think I can do it alone. There must be three or four guns up there.'

'Can you carry me?'

'Yes, but I can't shoot as well.'

'Carry me up the ladder, and we'll take it from there.'

Bader bent down and Ish got on to his back. They went up the ladder and emerged in a small space between the sick bay on the for'ard side and the officers' dayroom on the aft.

Ish sat on the floor, leaning against the bulkhead, in a position from which he could command the sick bay when the door was open. He took two grenades from his belt and gave one to Bader.

'Yours first,' Bader said.

Ish unpinned his grenade. Bader waited two seconds before doing the same, then stood still for another three or four seconds.

Bader threw open the door to the sick bay. As Ish hurled his grenade and opened fire with his submachine-gune, Bader spun around, flung open the door to the officers' dayroom, threw his grenade, and opened fire.

The two Arabs in the sick bay were killed, either by the grenade or by Ish's gun; but he was too close to the explosion, and it knocked him out.

On the opposite side, Bader took out three of the six people in the officers' dayroom. The others, not realising they were under attack by only one man, dived out through the doors on to the main deck.

Bader ran to a porthole. The three Arabs came under immediate fire from Jabotinsky. One of them took cover behind a lifeboat, and the others scattered on the for'ard deck. Jabotinsky had not succeeded in clearing the lifeboats, and there was someone up on the bridge firing down. Abbas' team should have been able to take out the Arabs on the foredeck, but maybe they were pinned down by fire from the bridge.

Bader returned to Ish, who was coming round. 'How did we do?' Ish said.

Bader said: 'We flushed them out of here, but now they hold the deck. We're going to have to find a way to take the bridge.'

'Okay, let's go,' Ish said. He tried to stand up, then passed out.

Bader caught him before he fell, and lay him down. He was out of it.

Bader went through the officers' ~~mess~~^{dayroom} and found the central companionway which led up, through the officers' quarters, to the ~~chartroom~~^{room} aft of the bridge. He climbed it. Passing through the second deck, he saw a gangway full of bodies, and thought briefly: Dickstein was here. He went on up, and paused before emerging into the ~~chartroom~~^{room}. Should he throw a grenade first? It might clear the room, but it would also forewarn whoever was on the bridge of his approach. He would have to take a chance.

He took another step up and poked his head into the chartroom. He was looking forward, toward the bridge. He brought his gun up, took another step upwards, and turned around. He looked into the barrel of a gun held inches from his face, and before he even saw who held it the gun went off and Bader died.

*

Feinberg had been more successful on the starboard deck than Jabotinsky on the port side.

He realised early on that he could not advance under fire from the lifeboats on his left and the officers' mess on his right. Searching for an alternative, he had looked over the rail and seen a ledge about eighteen inches wide running along the hull a couple of feet below the level of the deck. He slipped under the rail and eased himself down until he was lying full-length on the ledge. Then

he began to work his way forward. The darkest part of the night was passing, and in the faint grey light he could see the surging waves below. The ledge was slippery with rain and spray. Every time the Coparelli rolled to starboard Feinberg had to grip the edge with all his might in order to stay on.

He had three grenades left, and he used one of them on each of the three lifeboats on the deck. He thought he had probably taken them out without revealing his position to the men in the officers' mess.

When he drew level with the main door to the mess he settled in for a wait. If he went back on deck now he would be mown down. He would have to hang on to his precarious ledge until Katzen and Dovrat finished their below-decks sweep and came up to flush out the mess. He checked his gun. There were five rounds left in the magazine. He ejected it, dropped it in the sea, and took a fresh magazine out of his pouch.

His timing was bad. He had the gun in one hand and the magazine in the other when there was an explosion and a burst of firing from inside the mess, and the Arabs came out.

Feinberg smacked the new magazine home, hooked his left arm around the rail, and fired from a crouch. The Arabs coming out of the mess scattered forward. A burst of fire from the foredeck - Abbas' team? - was answered by a burst from the bridge. Dovrat and Katzen appeared in the mess doorway. Katzen dived across the deck and fetched up behind a ~~lifeline~~ pile of rope close to Feinberg.

Feinberg ducked under the rail and crawled on to the deck. Sporadic fire came at them from the foredeck. The Arabs had taken what cover they could around the near crane and the hatch.

Katzen said: 'Why isn't Abbas taking them out?'

'He must be pinned down by the people on the bridge,' Feinberg

said. 'They'll get us if we stay here long enough to be spotted.'

There was a shout from Dovrat. 'Cover me!' He pointed upward: he was going to hit the bridge. He, too, had figured out what was going wrong with the battle plan.

'I'll spray the foredeck,' Katzen said to Feinberg. 'You take care of the bridge.'

Katzen opened fire, indiscriminately scattering bullets across the width of the foredeck. Dovrat dived for the ladder which led up the side of the superstructure to the bridge. Feinberg trained his gun on the open doorway of the bridge and pulled the trigger.

Dovrat was half way up the ladder when a gun appeared around the edge of the companionhead. Feinberg shot at the gun, but he could not even see the hands holding it. The gun pointed down, directly at Dovrat, and fired one burst before it withdrew into the bridge.

Feinberg stopped shooting and looked at Dovrat.

The swarthy man was standing still on the ladder. As Feinberg watched, he seemed to lean backward, farther and farther, until he fell slowly, limp as a rag doll, and hit the deck.

Feinberg and Katzen sprinted across the deck, jumping over Dovrat's body, and went through the door into the officers' mess. Katzen sat by the door, poked his gun out, fired the last few rounds in his magazine in the general direction of the foredeck, then began to reload.

Feinberg went through to the dayroom and saw Bader's body at the foot of the ladder to the chartroom. So he, too, had died trying to take the bridge. He looked across the room and saw Ish in the doorway. At first he thought Ish was dead, then he saw him move. He went to him.

Ish opened his eyes and said: 'Aliyah.'

'You want a tourniquet on that leg,' Feinberg said. He took

a bandage from his pocket. 'See if you can cut that trouser leg away.'

Ish took out his knife. 'We lost Remez,' he said.

'You lost Bader, too.'

'Shit. What about your team?'

'First Gibli, now Dovrat.'

'Dovrat bandaged my leg.' Ish ran the knife along his trouser leg, cutting it open. 'The hell with it,' he said. 'Four men out of eight.'

'And we're pinned here, because they still hold the bridge.'

'Dickstein was supposed to take the bridge.'

'Well, he'd better hurry up. If he waits much longer he'll be the only one left.'

*

Lying on his belly, with arms and legs spread wide for traction, Dickstein inched his way across the roof. The roof was curved, and totally without handholds, and it was slick with rain. As the Coparelli heaved and shifted on the waves, the roof tilted forward, backward, and from side to side. With every tilt, Dickstein slid. All he could do was press himself to the metal and try to slow his slide.

At the forward end of the roof was ~~the radar scanner~~ a navigation light. When he reached that he would be safe, for he could hold on to it. His progress toward it was painfully slow. He got within a foot of it, when the ship rolled to port and he slid away. It was a long roll, taking him ~~almost~~ to the edge of the roof. For a moment he hung with one arm and half a leg hanging over a thirty-foot drop to the deck. The ship rolled a little more, the rest of his leg went over, and he tried to dig the fingernails of his right hand into the metal of the roof; then the Coparelli began to roll back

and Dickstein let himself go with the roll, sliding faster and faster, toward the navigation light.

But the Coparelli pitched up, the roof tilted backward, and Dickstein slid in a long curve, missing the light by yards. Once again he pressed his hands and feet into the metal, trying to slow himself down; once again he went all the way to the edge; once again he hung over the drop to the deck; but this time it was his right arm which dangled over the edge, and his machine-gun slipped off his right shoulder and fell into a lifeboat.

She rolled back and pitched forward, and Dickstein found himself sliding with increasing speed toward the navigation light. This time he reached it. He grabbed with both hands. The light was about a foot from the forward edge of the roof. Immediately below the edge were the front windows of the bridge, their glass smashed out long ago.

Dickstein held on to the light, but could not stop his slide. His body swung around, heading for the edge. He ~~w~~ saw that the front of the roof, unlike the sides, had a narrow steel gutter to take the rain away from the glass below. As his body swung over the edge, he released his grip on the navigation light, let himself slide forward with the pitch of the boat, grabbed the gutter with his fingertips, and swung his legs down. He came flying through the broken windows, feet first, to land in the middle ~~in~~ of the bridge. He bent his knees to take the shock of landing, then straightened up. His submachine-gun was lost, and he had no time to draw his pistol or his knife. There were two Arabs on the bridge, one either side of him, both holding machine-guns and firing down on to the deck. As Dickstein straightened up they began to turn toward him, their faces showing a picture of amazement.

Dickstein was fractionally nearer the one on the port side.

He lashed out with a kick which, more by luck than by judgement, landed on the point of the man's elbow, momentarily paralysing his gun arm. The Dickstein jumped for the other man. The machine-gun was swinging toward Dickstein just a split-second too late: Dickstein got inside its swing. He brought his right hand up fast in the most vicious and ^{two-stroke} deadly blow he knew: the heel of his hand hit the point of the Arab's chin, ~~he~~ snapping his head back ~~and exposing his throat~~ for the second stroke as Dickstein's hand, fingers stiffened for a karate chop, came down hard into the soft flesh of the exposed throat.

Before the man could fall Dickstein had grabbed him by the jacket and swung him around to get between ^{himself} ~~Dickstein~~ and the other Arab. The other man was bringing up his gun. Dickstein ~~threw~~ lifted the dead man and hurled him across the bridge as the machine-gun opened up. The dead body took the bullets and hit the other Arab, who lost his balance and went flying backward out through the open doorway and fell to the deck below.

The door between the bridge and the chartroom flew open and there stood Yasif Hassan.

Dickstein kicked the door. It swung back fast and hit Hassan as he pulled the trigger of his pistol, spoiling his aim. Dickstein was on him before he could fire again. Until this moment Dickstein had been like a machine, reacting reflexively to everything that confronted him, letting his nervous system plan every move without conscious thought, allowing training and instinct to guide him; but now it was more than that. Now blind fury possessed him and gave him added speed and power. He took Hassan's gun arm by the wrist and shoulder and broke it over his knee. Then, turning slightly, he brought his elbow back in a vicious blow which caught Hassan just under the ear. Hassan turned away, falling, and was probably dead already, but Dickstein grabbed him by the hair, pulling his head backward, and

lifted his foot high to kick forward. As his heel struck the back of Hassan's neck he jerked the head back, and there was a grisly snap as all the tension went out of the man's muscles and his head lolled, lifeless and unsupported, on his shoulders.

Dickstein let go, and the body fell to the deck.

Dickstein turned around and leaned on the ship's foghorn. Down on the deck his men moved forward, realising that there was now no danger from the bridge; and the Arabs on the foredeck, understanding the same thing, dropped their weapons and stood up with arms raised in the international sign of surrender.

Dickstein slumped against the bulkhead and let exhaustion possess him. The ship was his.

Looking outside, he saw that it was day.

Nineteen

'It's quite a set-up you've got here,' said Suza Ashford to the radio operator, giving him the British Airways Big Smile.

The operator was a big grey-haired man from Odessa. His name was Aleksandr. He spoke passable English. He said: 'It cost one hundred thousand dollar. You know about radio?'

'A little,' said Suza. 'I used to be an air hostess.' She had said 'used to be' without thinking, and now she wondered whether that life really was over for ever. She shelved the thought for later consideration. 'I've seen the air crew using their radios. I know the basics.'

'Really, this is four radios,' Aleksandr explained. 'One picks up the Stromberg beacon. One listens to Tyrin on the Coparelli. One listens to Coparelli regular wavelength. And this one wanders. Look.'

He showed her a dial whose pointer moved around slowly. 'It seek a transmitter, stop when it find one,' Aleksandr said.

'That's incredible,' Suza marvelled. 'Did you invent that?'

'Oh, no,' Aleksandr smiled. 'I am operator, not inventor, sadly.'

'And you can broadcast on any of the sets, just by switching to Transmit?'

'Yes, Morse code or speech. But of course, on this operation nobody use speech.'

'Did you have to go through long training to become a radio operator?'

'Not long. Learn Morse, is quick. But to be ship's radio operator, you must know to repair the set.' He lowered his voice. 'And to be KGB operator, you must go to spy school.' He laughed,

and Suza laughed with him, and then a signal began to come through.

'Tyrin,' Aleksandr said. 'Get Rostov, please.'

Suza left the bridge and went down to the mess. She expected to find Rostov there, drinking strong black coffee and eating the Soviet equivalent of cornflakes; but the room was empty. She went down another deck and made her way to his cabin. She knocked on the door.

His voice said something in Russian that might have been: 'Come in.'

She opened the door. Rostov stood there in his underwear. Suza said: 'Tyrin's coming through.' She went out.

'Suza.'

She looked in.

Rostov said: 'What would you say if I surprised you in your underwear?'

She knew she should say something ambiguous, to play him along, but she suddenly thought of Nat Dickstein and felt instantly angry. 'I'd say "Piss off," ' she said. She slammed the door.

She waited for him outside. When he came out, fully dressed, she said: 'I'm sorry.'

He gave a tight smile. 'I should not have been so unprofessional,' he said. 'Let's go.'

She followed him up to the radio room. It was immediately below the bridge, in what should have been the captain's cabin. Because of the mass of extra equipment it was not possible to put the radio operator adjacent to the bridge as was most usual. The Karla's layout had the advantage, however, of secluding the radio from the crew when the ship ^{carried} ~~had~~ a mixture of ordinary seamen and KGB agents.

Aleksandr had written out Tyrin's first signal, and Rostov

read it aloud. 'Israelis took control of Coparelli at sunrise.'
He spoke to Aleksandr. 'Make: Are they transferring cargo?'

The reply came back: No. Stromberg is alongside but no sign of intention to transfer.

'I see,' Rostov muttered. 'It looks as if Dickstein will take the Coparelli to Israel. Very well. Make: Inform me immediately you sail. We will hit you at six a.m. tomorrow.'

What do I do then?

'He's a fool,' Rostov remarked. 'This is the first time it's occurred to him that he can't get off the Israeli ship. Make: Jump ship in the confusion. We will pick you up.'

Aleksandr sent the signal. Tyrin's rejoinder was one enigmatic word: Thanks.

*

Nat Dickstein stood in silence, wearing a borrowed seaman's cap, as the captain of the Stromberg read the words of the service for the dead, raising his voice against the noise of wind, rain and sea. One by one the canvas-wrapped bodies were tipped over the rail and into the black water: Abbas, Sharrett, Porush, Gibli, Dovrat, Bader and Remez. Seven out of the thirteen, more than half. ^{And Koch, too.} Uranium was the most ^{costly} ~~expensive~~ metal in the world.

There had been another funeral, earlier on. After the surrendering Arabs had been disarmed, Dickstein had permitted them to bury their dead. That had been the bigger of the two ~~■~~ funerals, for they had had twenty-five to drop into the sea. They had hurried through their ceremony under the watchful eyes - and guns - of three of the surviving Israelis, who knew that this courtesy had to be extended to the enemy, but did not like it. Dickstein would have liked to photograph the bodies for identification. He suspected that one of them was the Fedayeen leader Mahmoud. But there was no camera. After

they had buried their dead the Arabs were herded below decks and locked in a cabin.

Meanwhile, a great deal else was going on all around them. The captain of the Stromberg came aboard, bringing with him all her papers. The small team of fitters and joiners, who had been brought along in case it was necessary to alter the Coparelli to match the Stromberg, were set to work repairing the battle damage. Dickstein told them to concentrate on what was visible from the deck: the rest of the mayhem would have to wait until the Coparelli reached port. They set about filling holes, repairing furniture, and replacing panes of glass and metal fittings with spares cannibalised from the doomed Stromberg. A painter went down a ladder to remove the name Coparelli from the hull and replace it with the stencilled letters S-T-R-O-M-B-E-R-G. For safety, he had a rope around his waist tied to a capstan on deck. When he had finished he set about painting over the repaired bulkheads and woodwork on deck. All the Coparelli's lifeboats were damaged beyond repair. They were chopped up and thrown over the side, and the Stromberg's boats were brought over to replace them. The new oil pump which the Stromberg had carried on Koch's instructions was installed in Coparelli's engine by the Stromberg's engineer.

Work had stopped for the burial. Now, as soon as the captain uttered the final words, it began again. Toward the end of the afternoon the engine rumbled to life. Dickstein stood on the bridge with the captain while the anchor was raised. The crew of the Stromberg quickly found their way around their new ship, which was identical with their old one. The captain set a course, and ordered full speed ahead.

The repair work would continue while they headed for Haifa. But there was one more job to be done before the old Stromberg was out of sight.

'We're clear,' the captain said.

The explosives expert in the chartroom pulled a lever on his radio detonator, then they all watched the Stromberg.

There was a loud, dull thud, like thunder, and the Stromberg seemed to sag in the middle. Then her fuel tanks caught fire and the stormy evening was lit up by a gout of flame reaching for the sky. She sank into the waves, slowly at ~~first~~ ^{the beginning} and then faster, her stern going under first, then, seconds later, her bows; and then she was gone.

The Stromberg had been sunk: but, as far as the rest of the world was to know, it was the Coparelli which had disappeared, along with her cargo, never to be seen again; and it was the Stromberg which now sailed at full speed for the safe port of Haifa.

*

Franz Albrecht Pedler sat in his office on the outskirts of Wiesbaden and scratched his snowy-white head. The telegram from Angeluzzi e Bianco in Genoa, translated from the Italian by Pedler's multilingual secretary, was perfectly plain yet totally incomprehensible. It said: PLEASE ADVISE SOONEST OF NEW EXPECTED DELIVERY DATE OF YELLOWCAKE.

As far as Herr Pedler knew, there was nothing wrong with the old expected delivery date, which was a couple of days away. Obviously Angeluzzi e Bianco knew something he did not. He had already sent a cable to the shippers saying: IS YELLOWCAKE DELAYED? He felt a little annoyed with them, for surely they should have informed him as well as the receiving company if there was a delay. But maybe the Italians had their wires crossed. Pedler had formed the opinion, during the war, that you could never trust Italians to do what they were told. He had thought they might be different nowadays, but perhaps they were the same.

He stood at his window, watching the evening gather over his little cluster of factory buildings. He could almost wish he had not bought the uranium, now. The deal with the Israeli army would keep his company in profit for the rest of his life, and he no longer needed to speculate.

His secretary came in with the reply from the shippers, already translated. He read: COPARELLI SOLD TO SAVILE SHIPPING OF ZURICH WHO NOW HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CARGO. WE ASSURE YOU OF COMPLETE RELIABILITY OF PURCHASERS. There followed the phone number of Savile Shipping, and the words SPEAK TO PAPAGOPOLOS.

Pedler gave the telegram back to the secretary and said: 'Would you call that number in Zurich and get hold of this Papagopolos, please.'

She came back in a few minutes later and said: 'Papagopolos will call you back.'

Pedler looked at his watch. 'I suppose I'd better wait for his call,' he said. 'I might as well get to the bottom of this now I've started.'

The call came through ten minutes later. Pedler said: 'I'm told you are now responsible for my cargo on board the Coparelli. I've had a cable from the Italians asking for the new delivery date - is there some delay?'

'Yes, there is,' Papagopolos said. 'You should have been informed - I'm terribly sorry.' The man spoke excellent German, but he obviously was not a German. 'The Coparelli's oil pump broke down at sea and she is becalmed. We're making arrangements to have your cargo delivered as early as possible.'

'Well, what am I to say to Ageluzzi e Bianco?'

'I have told them that I will let them know the new date just as soon as I know it myself,' Papagopolos said. 'Please leave it to me.'

I will keep you both informed.'

'Very well,' Pedler said. 'Goodbye.'

'Goodbye.'

It was a little odd, Pedler thought as he hung up the phone. Looking out of the window, he saw that all the workers had left: the staff car park was empty except for his Mercedes and his secretary's Volkswagen. What the hell, it was time to go home. He put on his coat. The uranium was insured. If it was lost he would get his money back, and that was all he needed. He turned out the office lights and helped his secretary with her coat, and then he got into his car and drove home to his wife.

*

At four a.m. Suza Ashford got out of her bunk and began to dress. She put on jeans, a sweater, boots and an oilskin. The full bottle of vodka she had taken from the mess went in the inside pocket of the oilskin. She went up on to the bridge.

The first officer smiled at her. 'Can't sleep?' he said in English.

'The suspense is killing me,' she told him. 'Where are we?'

He showed her their position on the map, and the estimated position of the Coparelli.

'What's that in numbers?' she said.

He told her the co-ordinates, and the course and speed of the Karla. She said: 'Everyone you meet on a ship has a special skill. It's fascinating. Will we reach the Coparelli on time?'

'Oh, yes,' he said. 'Then I can go to bed.'

She looked outside. It was completely black: there were no stars and no ~~ships~~ ships' lights in sight. The weather was getting worse.

'You're shivering,' the first officer said. 'Are you cold?'

'Yes,' she said, although it was not the weather that was making her shiver, it was the thought of what she had to do now. 'When is Colonel Rostov getting up?'

'He is to be called at five.'

'I think I'll try to get another hour's sleep,' she said.

'Sleep well,' the first officer called as she went out.

She went down to the radio room. Aleksandr was there. 'Couldn't you sleep?' she asked him.

'No. I've sent my number two to bed.'

She looked over the radio equipment. 'Aren't you listening to the Stromberg any more?'

'The signal stopped. Either they found the beacon, or they sank the ship. We think they sank her.'

Suza sat down and took out the vodka bottle. She unscrewed the cap. 'Have a drink.' ~~Then~~ She handed him the bottle.

'Are you cold?'

'A little.'

'Your hand is shaking.' He took the bottle and put it to his lips, taking a long swallow. 'Ah. Thankyou. That was good.' He gave it back to her.

Suza drank a mouthful of the fiery spirit to give her courage. It was rough Russian vodka, Stolichnaya brand, and it burned her throat, but it had the desired effect. She screwed the top on and waited for Aleksandr to turn his back on her.

'Tell me about life in England,' he said to her. 'Is it true that the poor starve while the rich get fat?'

'Not many people starve,' she said, thinking: Turn around! For God's sake, turn around! 'But there is great inequality.'

'Are there different laws for rich and poor?'

'There's a saying: "The law forbids rich and poor alike to

steal bread and sleep under bridges."

Aleksandr laughed. 'In the Soviet Union, people are equal. But some have privileges. Are you now going to live in Russia?'

'I don't know.' Suza opened the bottle and passed it to him again.

He took a long swallow and gave it back. 'In Russia you won't have such beautiful clothes.'

The time was passing too quickly: she had to do it now. She stood up to take the bottle. Her oilskin was open down the front. Standing in front of him, she tilted her head back to drink from the bottle, knowing that he would stare at her jutting breasts. She let him have a good look, then she shifted her grip on the bottle and brought it down with all her might on the top of his head.

There was a sickening thud as it hit him. He stared at her dazedly. She thought: You're supposed to be knocked out! But his eyes would not shut. She hesitated in an agony of indecision; then she gritted her teeth and hit him again.

This time his eyes closed and he slumped in his chair. Suza got hold of his feet and pulled. As he came off the chair his head hid the deck hard, making Suza wince, but then she thought: It's just as well.

She dragged him to a cupboard. From her jeans pocket she took a long piece of baling twine she had picked up in the stern. She tied Aleksandr's feet, then turned him over and tied his hands behind his back.

She had to get him into the cupboard. She glanced at the cabin door. Oh, please, don't let anyone come in now! she prayed. She put his feet in, then straddled his unconscious body and tried to lift him. He was a heavy man. She got him half-upright, but when she tried to shift him into the cupboard he slipped from her grasp.

She got behind him to try again. She grasped him beneath the armpits and lifted. This way was better: she could lean his weight against her chest while she shifted her grip. She got him half-upright again, then wrapped her arms around his chest and inched sideways. She had to step into the cupboard with him, let him go, and then wriggle out from under him.

He was in a sitting position now, with his feet against one side of the cupboard, his knees bent, and his back against the opposite side. She checked his bonds: they were still tight. But he could shout! She looked around for something to stuff in his mouth to gag him. She could see nothing. She could not leave the room to find something because he might wake up in the meantime. The only piece of cloth of the right size she could think of was her tights.

It seemed to take her a year and a half to ^{do it.} ~~get them off~~ She had to pull off her borrowed sea-boots, then take off her jeans, pull her tights off, put her jeans on, get into her boots, then crumple the nylon tights into a ball and stuff them ^{between} ~~in~~ his slack jaws.

Then she could not close the cupboard door.

'Oh, please!' she said out loud. It was Aleksandr. His bound hands rested on the floor of the cupboard, and because of his slumped position his arms were bent outward at the elbow. No matter how she pushed and shoved the door, that elbow stopped it closing. Finally she had to get back into the cupboard and turn him slightly sideways, so that he leaned into the corner. Now his elbow was out of the way.

She looked at him a moment longer. How long did people stay knocked out? She knew she should hit him again. But she was afraid of killing him. She went and got the bottle, and even lifted it over her head; but at the last minute she lost her nerve, put the bottle down, and slammed the cupboard door.

She looked at her wristwatch, and gave a cry of dismay. It

was ten minutes to five. Soon the Coparelli would be visible from the bridge of the Karla, and Rostov would be here, and she would have lost her chance.

She sat down at the radio desk, switched the lever to Transmit, selected the set that was already tuned to the Coparelli's wavelength, and leaned over the microphone.

'Calling Coparelli, come in please.'

She waited.

Nothing.

'Calling Coparelli, come in please.'

Nothing.

'Damn you to hell Nat Dickstein, speak to me! For God's sake, speak to me! Nathaniel!'

*

Nat Dickstein stood in the amidships hold of the Coparelli, staring at the drums of sandy metallic ore that had cost him so much. They looked nothing special: just big black oil-drums with the word PLUMBAT stencilled on the side. He would have liked to open one and feel the stuff, just to know what it was like, but the lids were heavily sealed.

Nat Dickstein felt suicidal. Instead of the elation of victory, he had only bereavement. He could not rejoice over the terrorists he had killed, he could only mourn for his own dead. He went over the battle again, as he had been doing throughout a sleepless night. If he had told Abbas' team to open fire as soon as they got on board, that might have distracted the Arabs long enough for Gibli to get over the rail without being shot. If he had made the bridge the first target instead of the last, Bader and Dovrat might not have given their lives trying to take it. If ... But there were a hundred things he would have done differently if he

had been able to see into the future, or if he had just been a wiser man.

Well, Israel would now have the atom bombs to protect her forever.

Even that thought gave him no joy. A year ago it would have made him jump around with delight. But a year ago his horizons had been closer. A year ago he had not met Suza Ashford.

He heard a noise and looked up. It sounded as if people were running around on deck. Some nautical crisis, no doubt.

Suza had changed him. She had taught him to expect more from life than victory in battle. When he had anticipated this day, when he had thought about what it would feel like to have pulled off this tremendous coup, she had always been in the daydream, waiting for him somewhere, ready to share in his triumph. But she would not be there. Nobody else would do. And there was no joy in a solitary celebration.

He had stared long enough at the drums. He climbed the ladder out of the hold, wondering what the hell he was going to do with the rest of his life.

When he emerged on deck a rating peered at him. 'Mr Dickstein?'

'Yes. What's up?'

'We've been searching the ship for you, sir.'

'I was in the hold, looking at our booty. What do you want me for?'

'It's the radio, sir. A woman is calling the Coparelli. We haven't answered, sir, because we're not supposed to be the Coparelli any more, are we? We're - '

'A woman? What the hell - '

'Yes, sir. She's coming over au clair - speech, not Morse

code. She sounds quite close. And she's upset. "Speak to me, Nathaniel," she says, and stuff like that.'

Dickstein grabbed the rating by his pea-jacket. 'Nathaniel?' he shouted.

The rating was terrified. 'Yes, sir, I'm sorry, sir, if - '

But Dickstein was heading for the bridge at a run.

*

The voice came over the radio: 'Who is calling Coparelli?'

Suddenly Suza could not speak. Hearing his voice, after all she had been through, made her feel weak and helpless.

'Who is calling Coparelli?'

She found her voice. 'Oh, Nat, at last.'

'Suza! Is that Suza?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Where are you?'

She gathered her thoughts. 'I'm with David Rostov on a Russian ship called Karla. Make a note of this.' She gave him the course, position and speed just as the first officer had told it to her. 'That was at four-ten this morning. Nat, this ship is going to ram yours at six a.m.'

'Ram? Why? Oh, I see ... '

'Nat, they'll catch me at the radio any minute, what are we going to do, quickly, quickly - '

'Can you create a diversion of some kind at precisely five-thirty?'

'Diversion?'

'Start a fire, shout "Man overboard", release the anchor, anything.'

'Well - I'll try - '

'Do your best. Anything to get them all running around - are

they all KGB?'

'Yes.'

'Okay.'

The door of the radio room opened, and David Rostov walked in. Suza switched to ^{Transmit} ~~Receive~~ so that Nat's voice would not come over the speakers.

Rostov said: 'Where's Aleksandr?'

Suza tried to smile. 'He went for coffee. I'm minding the shop.'

'The bloody fool!' Rostov -burst out. 'Who the hell does he think he is? When I get hold of him - ' He stormed out.

Suza switched to Receive.

Nat said: 'I heard that. You'd better make yourself scarce until five-thirty.'

'What are you going to do?' she said.

'Do?' he said. 'I'm coming to get ~~g~~⁷ you, of course.'

'Thankyou.'

'I love you.'

As she switched off, Morse began coming through on another set. It was Tyrin. Suddenly she realised that she had not told Dickstein about the spy in the bows of the Coparelli; and that Tyrin must have heard every word of her conversation with Nat. If Tyrin spoke to Rostov they would know Nat was coming.

She had to get away, but she had to wreck the radio first. How? All the wiring must be behind the panels. She would have to take a panel off. She needed a screwdriver. Aleksandr's kit was in a corner. She found a screwdriver and undid the screws on two corners of the panel. Impatient, panicky, she dropped the screwdriver and forced the panel out with her hands. Inside it was a mass of wires like spaghetti. She grabbed a fistful and heaved. Nothing happened:

she had pulled too many at once. She selected one, and tugged: it came out. Furiously, she pulled wires until fifteen or twenty were hanging loose. Then, with a brainwave, she poured the remains of the vodka into the innards of the radio.

She heard a thump from inside the cupboard. Aleksandr must be coming round. Well, they would know the score as soon as Rostov came back into the radio room.

She went out, closing the door behind her.

She went down the ladder and out on to the deck, trying to figure out where she could hide and what kind of diversion she could create. There was no point now in shouting Man Overboard - they certainly would not believe her after what she had done to their radio and their radio operator. Let down the anchor? That would mean hiding on deck, and soon they would be looking for her.

She tried to anticipate what Rostov would do now. He would look for Aleksandr in the galley, the mess, and his cabin. Not finding him in any of those places, he would assume that the radio operator had gone back up to the radio room while Rostov had been searching; so he would return the radio room, and all would become clear. Then Rostov would search the ship for Suza.

He was a methodical man. He would start at the prow and work backwards along the main deck; then he would send one party to search the upperworks and another party to sweep the ship, deck by deck. What was the lowest part of the ship? The engine room. That would have to be her hiding place.

She went inside and found her way to a downward companion. She had her foot on the top rung when she saw Rostov.

And he saw her.

She had no idea where the words came from. 'Aleksandr's back in the radio room,' she said brightly. 'I'm going to lie down.'

'Right,' said Rostov, and he marched off in the direction of the radio room.

Suza scampered down the ladder. Would Rostov still sweep the ship? Well, he would look for her in her cabin at first. What would he think when he found the cabin empty? He would conclude that she was hiding, and therefore she could be anywhere; and he would probably sweep the ship according to Suza's expectation.

And if he didn't, there was nothing she could do about it.

She went straight down through two decks and emerged in the engine-room.

The second engineer was on duty at night. He stared at her as she came in and went up to him.

'This is the only warm place on the ship,' she said cheerfully. 'Can I keep you company?'

He gave her a mystified look, and said slowly: 'I can not ... speak English ... please.'

'You don't speak English?'

'No.'

'I'm cold,' she said, and mimed a shiver. She held her hands out toward the throbbing engine, and mimed pleasure. 'Okay?'

The second engineer's greasy face broke into a smile of delight. 'Okay,' he said, nodding furiously.

He continued to stare at her with a pleased look on his face. Then it occurred to him that he should show hospitality. He looked around, a picture of confusion, then he had an inspiration, and pulled from his pocket a pack of cigarettes and offered her one.

'I don't usually, but I think I will,' Suza said. She took a cigarette. It had a small cardboard tube for a filter. The engineer lit it for her, and she puffed.

She looked at her watch. No! It could not be five-twenty-five

already! She had had no time to think. Diversion, start a diversion. Shout Man Overboard, drop the anchor, start a fire -

Start a fire.

What with?

Petrol, there was petrol, or diesel fuel, or something, right here in the engine-room.

She looked over the engine. Where did the petrol come in? The thing was a mass of tubes and pipes. Concentrate, concentrate! She wished she had learned more about the engine of her car. Were boat engines the same? No, sometimes they used lorry fuel. Which kind was this? It was a fast ship, so perhaps it would use petrol, she remembered vaguely that petrol engines were faster. If it was a petrol engine it must be similar to ~~a~~ the motor of her car. Were there cables leading to spark plugs? She had changed a spark plug once.

She stared at the engine. Yes, it was like a car engine. There were six plugs, with leads from them to a round cap like a distributor. Somewhere there had to be a carburettor. The petrol went through the carburettor. It was a little thing that sometimes got blocked.

The voice-pipe barked something in Russian, and the engineer walked toward it to answer. His back was to Suza. She had to do it now.

There was a thing about the size of a tin of coffee with a lid held on by a central nut. That could be the carburettor. She stretched across the engine and tried to undo the nut with her fingers. It would not budge. A heavy plastic pipe led into the thing. She grabbed it and tugged, but she could not pull it out. She remembered she had put Aleksandr's screwdriver into her oilskin pocket. She took it out and jabbed at the pipe with the sharp end. It was very

tough, thick plastic. She stabbed the screwdriver into it with all her might. It made a small cut in the surface of the pipe. She stuck the point of the screwdriver into the cut and worked it.

The engineer reached the voice pipe and spoke into it in Russian.

Suza felt the screwdriver break through the plastic. She tugged it out. A spray of clear liquid jetted out of the little hole and the air was filled with the smell of petrol. Suza dropped the screwdriver and ran toward the ladder.

She heard the engineer answer 'Yes' in Russian to a question from the voice pipe, then there was a barked order. As she reached the foot of the ladder she looked back, and saw that the engineer's smiling face had been transformed into a mask of malice as he looked at her. She went up the ladder. He ran across the engine-room deck to chase her.

She got to the top of the ladder and turned around. A pool of petrol was spreading over the deck. The enineer was stepping on to the bottom rung of the ladder. Suza still had in her hand the cigarette he had given her. She flung it away from her, toward the engine, aiming at the place where the petrol was squirting out of the pipe.

She did not wait to see it land. She carried on up the ladder. Her head and shoulders were emerging on to the next deck when there was a loud whooosh, a bright red light from below, and a wave of scorching heat. Suza screamed as her trousers caught fire and the skin of her legs burned. She jumped the last few inches of the ladder and rolled on the deck. She was in agony. She managed to get her oilskin off and wrap it around her flaming legs. The fire was killed, but now the pain got worse.

She wanted to collapse. She knew if she lay down she would

pass out and the pain would go, but she had to get away from the fire, and she ~~ahad~~ had to be somewhere where Nat could find her.

She staggered along the gangway. Her legs felt as if they were still burning. The fire alarm began to sound all over the ship as she reached the end of the gangway and leaned on the ladder.

Up, she had to go up.

She raised one foot, placed it on the bottom rung, and began the longest climb of her life.

Twenty

For the second time in twenty-four hours, Nat Dickstein was crossing a mountainous seas in a small boat in order to board a ship held by the enemy. He was dressed as before, with life-jacket, oilskin, and sea-boots; and armed as before with submachine-gun, pistol, and grenades; but this time he was alone.

Aboard the Coparelli there had been an argument - indeed, it had been a row - about what to do after Suza's radio message. The conversation had been listened to by the captain, Feinberg, and Jabotinsky. They had seen the jubilation in Dickstein's face, and had felt entitled to argue that his judgement was now distorted by personal involvement.

'It's a trap,' Feinberg argued. 'They can't catch us, so they want us to turn and fight.'

'I know Rostov,' Dickstein said hotly. 'This is exactly how his mind works: he waits for you to make your break, then pounces.'

Feinberg got angry. 'This isn't a game, Dickstein.'

'Listen, Nat,' Jabotinsky said reasonably, 'let's just carry on, and be ready to fight if and when they catch us. What have we got to gain by sending a boarding party?'

'I'm not proposing a boarding party,' Dickstein said. 'I'm going alone.'

Jabotinsky, too, got angry at that. 'Don't be a prick,' he said. 'If you go, we're with you. But you can't take the ship alone.'

'This way we get the best of both worlds,' Dickstein said. 'If I'm successful, the Karla will never catch this ship. If I fail, the rest of you can still fight when the Karla gets to you. And if the Karla really can't catch you, and it's a trap, then I'm the only one who falls into it. It's the best way.'

'I don't think it's the best way,' Feinberg said.

'Nor do I,' said Jabotinsky.

Dickstein smiled. 'Well, I do, and it's only my life that's at risk, and besides, I'm the senior officer here, and it's my decision, so fuck the lot of you.'

So he had got dressed and armed himself, and the captain had shown him how to maintain an interception course with the Karla, and they had lowered the launch, and he had climbed down into it and pulled away.

~~He had one extra item of equipment this time: an explosive device, similar to the one which had sunk the Stromberg, with a radio detonator.~~

Finding the Karla at night was not easy. Dickstein could keep a steady course, but he had to estimate how much the wind and the waves were carrying him sideways, and make an allowance for that. After fifteen minutes he knew he should have reached her, but she was nowhere to be seen. He began to zig-zag in a search pattern, wondering if perhaps he was miles off course.

He was contemplating returning to Haifa in the launch, when suddenly a ship appeared alongside him out of the night. She was moving fast~~er~~, faster than his launch could go, and he had to reach the ladder at her bows before she past him while at the same time avoiding a collision. He gunned the launch forward, swerved away as the Karla rolled toward him, and turned back, homing in, while she rolled the other way.

He had the rope tied around his waist ready. The ladder came within reach. He flipped the engine of the launch into idle, stepped on the gunwale, and jumped.

The Karla began to pitch forward as he landed on the ladder. He clung on while her prow went down, down into the waves. The sea

came up to his waist, up to his shoulders. He took a deep breath and his head went under. He seemed to be underwater for ever. The Karla just kept on going down. When he felt his lungs would burst, she hesitated then began to come up; and that seemed to take even longer.

At last he broke surface and gulped a lungful of air. He went up the ladder a few steps, untied the rope around his waist, and made it fast to the ladder. Then he went on up, shedding his oilskin as he climbed.

The sound of the launch engine was inaudible in the noise of the wind, the sea, and the Karla's engine; but something must have attracted the attention of the man who looked over the rail just as Dickstein came up level with the deck.

For a moment the man stared at Dickstein, his face a picture of amazement. Then Dickstein reached out his hand for a pull as he climbed over the rail. Automatically, the other man grabbed his arm. Dickstein got one leg over the rail, took the man's outstretched arm with both hands, and threw him overboard and into the sea. His cry was lost in the wind. Dickstein brought the other leg over the rail and crouched down on deck.

It seemed nobody had seen the incident. The Karla was a small ship, much smaller than the Coparelli. There was only one ~~superstructure~~ superstructure, located amidships, two decks high. There were no cranes. The foredeck had a big hatch over the for'ard hold, but there was no aft hold: the crew accomodation and the engine room must occupy all the below-decks space aft, Dickstein concluded.

He looked at his watch. It was five-twenty-five: Suza's diversion should begin ~~xxx~~ any moment, if she could do it.

He began to walk along the deck. There was some light from the ship's lamps, but one of the crew would have to look twice at

him before being sure he was not one of them. He took his knife out of the sheath at his belt: he did not want to begin using a gun before he had to, for the noise would start a hue and cry.

As he drew level with the superstructure a door opened, throwing a wedge of yellow light on to the rain-spattered deck. Dickstein dodged around the corner, flattening himself against the for'ard bulkhead. He heard two voices speaking Russian. The door slammed, and the voices receded as the men walked aft.

In the lee of the superstructure Dickstein crossed to the port side and continued toward the stern. He stopped at the corner, flattening himself against the bulkhead. He saw the two men cross the afterdeck and speak to a third man in the stern. He considered whether to take them all out with a burst from his submachine-gun, but decided not to: it was too early, Suza's diversion had not yet started and he had no idea where she was.

The two men came back along the starboard deck and went inside. Dickstein walked up to the man in the stern, who seemed to be on guard. The man spoke to him in Russian. Dickstein grunted something unintelligible, the man replied with a question, and Dickstein jumped forward and cut his throat.

He threw the body overboard and retraced his steps. Two dead, and still they did not know he was on board. But now he had to go inside.

He opened a door. He saw an empty gangway and a companion leading up, presumably to the bridge. His luck held as he walked the length of the gangway: he saw nobody. He climbed the ladder.

Loud voices came from the bridge. As he emerged through the companionhead, he saw three men: the captain, the first officer and the second sub-lieutenant, he guessed. The first officer was shouting into the voice-pipe. A strange noise was coming back. As

Dickstein brought his gun to bear, the captain pulled a lever and an alarm began to sound all over the ship. Dickstein pulled the trigger and mowed down the three men.

He hurried back down the ladder. The alarm meant that Suza's diversion had started. Perhaps it was a fire. Now all Dickstein had to do was stay alive until he found her. When he reached the foot of the ladder he tossed a grenade up into the bridge. Now, even if he was killed, they would have trouble steering the Karla on a straight course, never mind ramming Coparelli.

The companionway from the bridge met the deck at a junction of two gangways: a lateral one, which Dickstein had used, and another running the length of the superstructure. In response to the alarm, doors were opening and men emerging all down both gangways. Dickstein decided to run a bluff. He marched along the central gangway, pushing his way through the milling men. They stared at him, not knowing who he was or what he was doing. One or two of them spoke, but he ignored them. There was a barked order from somewhere and the men began to move purposefully, perhaps to action stations. Dickstein reached the end of the gangway and took the ladder down.

Before he disappeared below, the officer who had given the order came down the gangway toward him, barking a question. Dickstein shot him.

Looking into the lower deck Dickstein saw that things were better organised here. The men were running in one direction, toward the stern, and a group of three hands under the supervision of an officer were breaking out firefighting gear. Then, in a place where the gangway widened for access to hoses, he saw something that made him literally insane with anger and brought a red mist of hatred to his eyes.

Suza was on the floor, he back to the bulkhead. Her legs were

stretched flat in front of her, her trousers torn and crumbling; and he could see her scorched and blackened skin through the tatters. As he looked he heard Rostov's voice over the sound of the alarm: 'What did you tell Dickstein?' Then he kicked her in the stomach. It was a powerful, vicious kick, and it knocked the breath out of Suza and brought fresh tears to her eyes.

Dickstein jumped from the ladder and landed two-footed on the deck. One of the hands stepped in front of him, pushing past: Dickstein floored him with an elbow-blow to his face and jumped on Rostov. He knew, even in his rage, that he could not use the gun in this confined space while Rostov was so close to Suza; and besides, he wanted to kill the Russian with his bare hands.

He grabbed Rostov's shoulder and spun him around. Rostov saw him and gasped: 'You!' Dickstein hit him in the stomach first, a pile-driving blow more powerful than any kick Rostov could land on Suza. The Russian buckled at the waist, gasping helplessly for air, his face white with pain. As his ^{head} ~~chin~~ came down Dickstein brought his knee up fast and hard, snapping Rostov's chin up and breaking his jaw; then, continuing the same motion, he put all his force into a massive kick in the throat which smashed Rostov's neck and threw him backwards into the bulkhead.

Before the Russian completed his fall Dickstein spun around, going down on one knee and bringing his machine-gun off his shoulder. The other Russians were just reacting to the fight, which had lasted only seconds. With Suza behind him and to one side, Dickstein opened fire, felling five or six men with one burst.

He turned again, picking Suza up in a fireman's lift, trying not to touch her charred flesh. He carried her up the ladder, pausing at the top to drop a grenade down behind him. He ran the length of the gangway, spraying bullets ahead of him; turned the corner, ran to

the door, and emerged on deck.

Here all was confusion, for there was nobody on the bridge to give orders.

Dickstein headed for the bows at a run, still with Suza over his ~~arm~~ left shoulder and his gun in his right hand. There were several other men running one way and another across the deck, and more standing ~~around~~ still, looking around, waiting for someone to tell them what to do.

Dickstein reached the prow without hindrance. He located the ladder and stepped over the rail. He eased the gun on to his shoulder, shifted Suza a little on the other shoulder, stepped on to the ladder and began to descend.

He was half way down when they started shooting at him.

A bullet pinged off the hull beside his head and he looked up to see three men leaning over the rail, two of them with pistols. Holding on to the ladder with his left hand, he put his right hand to his gun, pointed it up, and fired, spraying the general area of the gunwale. The men ducked back, but Dickstein had lost his balance. He swayed to the left as the prow of the ship pitched up. He dropped his gun into the sea and grabbed hold of the ladder with his right hand. His right foot slipped off the rung - and then, to his horror, Suza began to slip from his left shoulder.

'Hold on to me!' he yelled at her, not knowing whether she was conscious or not. He felt her hands clutch at his sweater, but she slipped farther; and now her unbalanced weight was pulling him more to the left.

'No!' he screamed, and she slipped off his shoulder and fell plunging into the sea.

Dickstein turned, saw the launch, and jumped, landing with a jarring shock in the well of the boat.

He peered at the black sea all around him. 'Suza!' he shouted. 'Suza!' He swung from one side of the boat to the other, his desperation increasing every second she failed to surface. Then he heard a scream. Turning toward the source of the sound, he saw her head just above the surface between the boat and the side of the Karla. She was out of his reach. She screamed again.

The launch was tied to the Karla by a long rope, most of which was piled on the deck of the boat. With his knife Dickstein cut the rope, letting go of the end that was tied to the Karla's ladder and throwing the other end toward Suza.

She reached for the rope, then the sea rose again and engulfed her.

Up on the deck of the Karla, they started shooting over the rail again.

Dickstein's eyes swept the sea. He ignored the gunfire. After a few seconds that seemed to last hours, Suza surfaced again. Dickstein threw her the rope. This time she was able to grab it. Swiftly, he pulled it in, bringing her closer and closer until he was able to lean perilously over the gunwale of the launch and take hold of her wrists.

As he pulled her into the well of the launch there was a fusillade of shots from the deck of the Karla. Dickstein threw the launch into gear then tumbled on top of Suza, covering her body with his own. The launch moved away from the Karla, riding the huge waves like a surfboard.

Dickstein looked back. The Karla was out of sight.

He turned Suza over, fearing for her life. Her eyes were closed. Dickstein took the wheel of the launch, looked at the compass, and set an approximate course. He turned on the boat's radio and called the Coparelli. Waiting for them to reply, he lifted Suza toward him and

cradled her in his arms.

The Coparelli came in. Dickstein said: 'The Karla is on fire. Turn back and pick me up. Have the sick bay ready for the girl - she's badly burned.'

He waited for their acknowledgement, then switched off. He stared at Suza's expressionless face. 'Don't die,' he said. 'Please don't die.'

She opened her eyes and looked up at him. She opened her mouth and struggled to speak. He bent his head to hear her. She said: 'Is it really you?'

'It's me,' he said.

The corners of her mouth lifted in a faint smile. 'I'll make it,' she whispered.

There was the sound of a terrific explosion. Dickstein thought: the fire has reached the fuel tanks of the Karla. Then the whole of the sky was lit up for several seconds by a sheet of flame, the air was filled with a roaring noise, and the rain stopped. The noise and the light died, and so did the Karla.

'She's gone down,' Dickstein said to Suza. He looked at her. Her eyes were closed and she was unconscious again, but she was still smiling.

Epilogue

Nat Dickstein resigned from the Mossad, and his name passed into legend among the small group of people who knew the story of his life. He married Suza and returned with her to the kibbutz, where they tended grapes all day and made love all night. In his remaining spare time, Nat Dickstein organised a political campaign to have the race laws changed so that his children could be classified Jewish or, better still, to abolish the classification altogether.

They did not have children for a while, though. They were prepared to wait: Suza was young, and Dickstein was in no hurry. Her burns never healed completely. Sometimes, in bed, she would say: 'My legs are horrible.' Dickstein would kiss her knees and say: 'They're beautiful to me.'

When the opening of the Yom Kippur War took the Israeli armed forces by surprise, Pierre Borg was blamed for the lack of advance intelligence, and he resigned. The truth was that a Russian intelligence officer called David Rostov - an elderly-looking man who had to wear a neck brace every second of his life - had gone to Cairo and flushed out the double agent Mahommed; but, instead of having Mahommed tried for espionage and hanged, Rostov had fed him duff information, and Mohammed, in all innocence, had passed the stuff on.

Anyway, the upshot was that Nat Dickstein came out of retirement to take over the post of head of Mossad for the duration of the war. On Monday 8 October 1973 he attended a crisis meeting of the Cabinet. After three days of war the Israelis were in deep trouble. The Egyptians had crossed the Suez Canal and pushed the Israelis back into Sinai with heavy casualties. On the other front, the Golan Heights, the Syrians were pushing forward, again with heavy losses on

the Israeli side. The proposal before the Cabinet was to drop atom bombs on Cairo and Damascus. Not even the most hawkish Cabinet members actually relished the idea; but the situation was desperate, and the Americans were dragging their heels over the arms airlift.

The meeting was coming round to ~~the~~ accepting the idea of nuclear war when Nat Dickstein said: 'Of course, we could tell the Americans that we plan to drop these bombs ... on Wednesday, say ... unless they start the airlift immediately.'

And that is exactly what they did.

*

The airlift turned the tide of the war, and later a similar crisis meeting took place in Cairo. Once again, nobody was in favour of nuclear war in the Middle East; once again, the politicians gathered there began to persuade each other that there was no alternative; and once again, the proposal was stopped by an unexpected contribution from a non-politician.

This time it was the military who stepped in. Knowing of the proposal that would be before the Cabinet, they had run checks on their nuclear strike force in readiness for a positive decision; and they had found that every atom of plutonium in the bombs had been taken out and replaced with iron. It was assumed that the Russians had done this before being expelled from Egypt in 1972.

That night, one of those present talked to his wife for five minutes before falling asleep in a chair. 'It's all over,' he told her. 'Israel has won - permanently. They have the Bomb, and we don't, and that single fact will determine the course of history in our region for the rest of the century.'

'What about the Palestine refugees?' his wife said.

The man shrugged. 'Nothing,' he said. He lit his pipe, the last of the day. 'I remember reading a story in the London Times ... this must be five years ago, I suppose. It said that the Free Wales Army had put a bomb in the police station in Cardiff.'

'Wales?' his wife said. 'Where is Wales?'

'It's part of England, sort of.'

'I remeber,' she said. 'They have coal mines and choirs.'

'That's right. Have you any idea how long ago the English conquered the Welsh?'

'None at all.'

'Nor have I, but it must be more than a thousand years, because the French conquered the English nine hundred years ago. You see? A thousand years, and they're still bombing police stations! Well, the Palestinians will be like the Welsh: they can bomb Israel for a thousand years, but they'll always be the losers.'

His wife looked up at him. All these years, and still he was capable of surprising ~~him~~ her. She had thought she would never hear words like this from him.

'I'll tell you something else,' he went on. 'There will have to be peace. We can't possibly win any more, so we'll have to make peace. Not now, perhaps not for five or ten years; but the time will come, and then I will have to go to Jerusalem and say "No more war." I may even get some credit for it, when the dust settles. It's not how I planned to go down in history, but it's not a bad way for all that. "The man who brought peace to the Middle East" - what would you say to that?'

His wife got up from her chair and came across to hold his hands. There were tears in her eyes. 'I would give thanks to God,' she said.

*

Franz Albrecht Pedler died in 1974. He died content. His life had

seen some ups and downs - he had, after all, lived through the most ignominious period in the history of his nation - but he had survived and ended his days happily.

He had guessed what happened to his uranium. One day early in 1969 his company had received a cheque for two million dollars, signed by A. Papagopolos, with a statement from Savile Shipping which read: 'To lost cargo.' The next day a representative of the Israeli Army had called, bringing the down payment on their deal. As he left, the man had said: 'On the matter of your lost cargo, we would be happy if you were not to pursue any further inquiries.'

Pedler began to understand then. 'But what if Euratom ask me questions?' he said.

'Tell them the truth,' the man said. 'The cargo was lost, and when you tried to discover what had happened to it, you found that Savile Shipping had gone out of business.'

'They have?'

'They have.'

So that was what Pedler told Euratom. They sent an investigator to see him, and he repeated his story, which was completely true, if not quite complete. He said to the investigator: 'I suppose there will be a lot of publicity about all this soon.'

'I doubt it,' the investigator told him. 'It reflects very badly on us. I don't suppose we'll broadcast the story unless we get more information.'

They did not get more information, of course; at least, not in Pedler's lifetime.

*

On Yom Kippur in 1974 Suza Dickstein went into labour.

In accordance with the custom of the kibbutz, the baby was delivered by the husband, with a midwife standing by to give advice

and encouragement.

The baby was small, like both parents. As soon as its head emerged it opened its mouth and cried. Dickstein's vision became blurred, and he had to wipe the tears from his eyes. He held the baby's head, checked that the cord was not around its neck, and said: 'Almost there, Suza.'

Suza gave one more heave, and the baby's shoulders were born, and after that it was all downhill. Dickstein tied the cord in two places and cut it, then - again in accordance with the local custom - he put the baby in the mother's arms.

~~What is it?~~ 'Is it all right?' she said.

'Perfect,' the midwife said.

'What is it?'

Dickstein said: 'Oh, God, I didn't even look. Um ... it's a boy.'

A little later, Suza said: 'What shall we call him? Nathaniel?'

'I'd like to call him Towfik,' Dickstein said.

'Towfik? Isn't that an Arab name?'

'Yes.'

'Why? Why Towfik?'

'Well,' said Nat Dickstein, 'that's a long story.'

Postscript

From the London 'Daily Telegraph' of 7 May 1977:

ISRAEL SUSPECTED OF HIJACKING SHIP WITH URANIUM

by Henry Miller in New York

Israel is believed to have been behind the disappearance from the high seas nine years ago of a uranium shipment large enough to build 30 nuclear weapons, it was disclosed yesterday.

Officials say that the incident was 'a real James Bond affair' and that although intelligence agencies in four countries investigated the mystery, it was never determined what had actually happened to the 200 tons of uranium ore that vanished ...

The end.