Chapter 15

On the Attack

My name is Steve Nelson. I have blond hair and blue eyes. I was 30 in 1942.

Dark, thunderous clouds blocked out all of the sun and sky overhead as I looked in all directions from the top deck of the carrier. They seemed almost like they were giving me an omen of something bad about to happen. The sun would be setting soon if only I could see it. I knew that even if the clouds did not give warning, the sights of a bloody sky would have greeted me as I stood by the railing. Even with the sky covered, I swear I could see bloody streaks peaking through the clouds. During skies like this, I wished nothing more than to be back home with my family.

I live back in the heart of the country of Liberty, Missouri with my wife, Elizabeth, and two children. The was no ocean by my home, so it was quite an adjustment to be on the steady rocking and rolling of this boat. I had met my future wife in my hometown when she moved there and joined my high school. I had joined the Marines when I was eighteen, and I had married my beautiful Elizabeth when I returned home to her on my leave. Before the war broke out, we had two children together and did not move very frequently. Unfortunately, war changes everything.

In early August, the weather always seems to mess with whatever plans you have in this part of the world. Being a Major in the Marines, I receive many of the intelligence reports and help coordinate the operations taking place around the Pacific. At the moment, a campaign of the Solomon Islands was planned and prepared with this as going to be our first attack on land.

On August 7, the first U.S. amphibious landings in the Pacific invaded Tulagi and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. The first Marine Division landed and fought their way up the beach heads and further inland. So far, all seemed to be going well from my vantage point back on the ship. I felt confidence in my plan and the ability of my men to carry out each objective.

Reports came in the next day that they men had quickly and easily gained 2,000 yards of the beach head before meeting harder resistance. By the 8th, they had captured the unfinished airfield and renamed it Henderson Field after Major Lofton Henderson who is a hero of the Battle of Midway. We seemed to be having great success on both fronts of the islands we were undertaking.

For two weeks, I roamed around the areas we had taken and inspected the conditions of weapons and supplies of the men dug in, waiting for another Japanese attack. And attack they did. On the 21st, the Japanese launch a large ground attack on the Guadalcanal front, but the Marines forced a major repulsion to any attack and killed every single attacker.

Before this attack took place, on August 17, I received a report of 222 Marine raiders had been transported by submarines to attack Makin Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. Unfortunately, the raid had not been entirely successful because most were evacuated off the island with only 19 dead and 9 remained. I mourned for those men because they had been executed.

More battles happened throughout the Pacific, but on August 24, our ships and the Japanese carriers met in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons resulting in their defeat. According to the reports, airplanes had fought bravely against the enemy and had to land on Henderson Field.

From September 12 through the 14, the omens of the sky seemed to right about this invasion turning bloody. The offensive the Japanese had started was named Battle of Bloody Ridge for all the death and destruction caused by it. For us, only 40 men were lost by this attack, but for the enemy, 800 troops were lost. Bodies had littered the battlefield and there may have been many more lost. We received backup a month later on October 13 with the arrival of the first U.S. Army troops landed on Guadalcanal. They were the 164th Infantry Regiment.

Finally after months of fighting, Emperor Hirohito of Japan gave permission to his troops to withdraw from Guadalcanal after five months of bloody fighting against our U.S. forces. He allowed them to pull out on December 31. By February 1, the Japanese began to evacuate from the island and by the 9th, all resistance ended from the enemy. I was 30 years old. Resistance may have ended here, but there was a lot more fighting going on in the rest of the world.