Chapter 21

Burning Up

My name is Oliver Morris. I have black hair and blue eyes. I was 26 in 1942.

Baking, almost blistering temperatures surrounded everything in this area, but it could have been worse if I was stationed on the actual equator. The weather in Africa, especially in the summer, was unbearable for someone like me and most of the other men around me. Back home at Leicester in central England, the weather is almost always somewhat cloudy and cold compared to here. I do enjoy the sun when it comes out back home but never for days on end, crippling the vegetation and any life to that of a desert. How I long to be back home and away from this desert heat and return to my family.

I leave back home my wife Katherine and our new baby girl of only about two months. I’m saddened every day that I could not return home to my wife when she had delivered that little one. All I have is a picture of when she was born, sent to me by my beloved Katherine. I feel she may be mad at me for missing this, but I could not leave the front lines or the battlefields to take a journey back north to England. The most leave I am awarded is a weekend pass away from the front lines but not out of North Africa. Even a Sergeant First Class in the infantry does not get special privileges during this time of war. Though I missed my family, I knew deep down that the only way to return to them was to defeat the Germans now rather than later.

It seemed like this might be the case the way the Germans kept attacking us and the way that they keep fighting. However, it also might have been that on August 7, British General Bernard Montgomery took command of the Eighth Army I am apart of here in North Africa. The battle came on the August 30, night of a bright, full moon. We started to call this the Battle of Alam el Halfa. The enemy's preparations could be easily seen for our troops and some of our specialists knew of what the German's plans were going to be. Rommel launched an offensive on the northern half our line right away, but they did not gain much too any ground because of the extra strengthening we put there. Rommel’s real object was a major attack on the southern half of the lines to circle our Allied forces. Instead, we set our own trap against the Axis powers to cut them off and destroy them.

For three days, the Germans and Italians put up quite a fight, trying to break our lines and overcome our military forces. Finally on September 2, Rommel’s forces were starting to be driven back by Montgomery’s. The desert was bloody with bodies from both sides, but advancing onward, we managed to circle around the divisions of soldiers and destroyed the Axis supply lines. On September 5, Rommel called off the whole offensive, and I could see this by the soldiers suddenly pulling back to their original positions. We may even have gained some ground in the Germans hasty retreat. The numbers came to as the Allies suffering a total of 1,750 casualties and the Axis suffering 2,930 casualties.

The Americans had joined this war back at the end of December of 1941 but they had done very little in the way of actual fighting of the Axis powers. As far as I know, they are only accompanying us on air raid missions over Germany, but this is quickly changing. I have no friends or family back in the United States, so I only have the reports issued to clue me into the other happening of the war in Africa. They finally are fighting with ground troops now. On November 8, The Americans launched their invasion of North Africa called Operation Torch. Right away, they attempted to gain support from the French occupying the area of the landing sites. Tensions are high between us and France since we had sunk many of their ships in order to prevent the Germans from using them. At first, they did not get the support they were looking for.

Of the invasion fleet and troops, the U.S. had 35,000 men divided into three divisions to use. At first, there was light resistance from the invading forces, but the French had many weapons to defend themselves with a large variety. The Americans did not initial shell their landing areas or the other ships in hope of maintaining peace and cooperation. Once the French started to fire upon them, however, they greatly returned this fire. Seeing that a fight with the Americans was pointless, the French signed an armistice with General Eisenhower the next day. This ended the fighting with the French, but the U.S. forces still had to fight with the German’s ships and submarines the occupied the area. On the 16th, they successfully managed to control the water and beat back any German resistance.

December and January battles went well with Rommel withdrawing from El Agheila on December 13. On January 23, General Montgomery’s Eighth Army had taken Tripoli. Also, because of my division’s heroism, we were granted a weekend pass further than just the local towns. Unfortunately, the plans for this were cut short when plans were intercepted of a possible attack.

Reports came in again of the Battle of Kasserine Pass between the United States 1st Armored Division and German Panzers. The raged on from February 14 to the 25th with a horrible turn out. There was heavy resistance on both sides, but the ending resulted in an ultimate defeat of the Americans because of their inexperience.

We, however, were having much better results from our efforts further in the east than our counterparts in the west. On March 2, we cause the retreat and withdrawal of German troops from Tunisia.

April was a good month for the both of our armies as on April 6/7, Axis forces in Tunisia begin another withdrawal. This time they began to withdraw to Enfidaville further west toward the Americans. Also, our two forces of the Allies finally linked up. On May 7, we had finally taken all of Tunisia. On May 13, German and Italian troops completely and unconditionally surrendered in North Africa. This was the end of this bloody desert war and its bloody heat. I was 26 years old. The Germans weren’t doing well here, and they weren’t doing well back east, either.