Damn the Jerries! Those 88's are comin' too close.

The two soldiers lying on their bellies in the slit trench tried desperately to burrow their bodies deeper in the slime. Bits of wet grass and broken twigs were imbedded in the oozing mire which covered their helmets, raincoats, leggings and clodhoppers, giving them the protective coloring of their muddy surroundings.

It was 0600 hours. The rain came down in a dreary drizzle, coating the green of June with gray. The fields of Normandy were blocked off in large rectangles formed by thick, straight rows of hedges mounted on four foot walls of earth with an occasional tree towering over the line. In peace time these were the hedge rows that separated les petites pois from les haricots verdes, and distinguished one peasant’s land from the other’s. In war time the same hedge rows were used to conceal German men and guns from American men and guns.

All along the hedge row on the American side slit trenches, just deep enough and wide enough to cradle the bodies of two men, lay about five yards apart. Each hole was like a freshly dug grave with the dirt stacked up around it ready to cover the coffin. The soldiers had propped their guns against the section of hedge nearest their trench, and covered them with their field jackets to keep them dry. They had been there all night trying to sleep when the 88's began to scorch the air over their heads at 0600 hours.

Two days before, Germans had occupied some of these same trenches. When they fled before the pursuing Americans, they left a few bloated dead bodies behind. The stench from these now clung to everything with nauseating tenacity.

Lieutenant Wagger walked from hole to hole, stepping over cadavers without a trace of fear in his bearing. A short, stocky officer from Florida, he was unperturbed in the face of danger and impervious to the vicious 88's. Behind his two-weeks old beard his face still wore that "Southern Comfort" look which always reassured his men. His raincoat was torn and muddy. The rain formed little rivulets on the rubber surface, washing away the dirt and leaving shiny streaks in its place. He squatted by each trench for a few seconds and whispered, "Get ready for the attack. We jump off in ten minutes."

Out of the muddy earth, dozens of grotesque figures rose slowly from their holes to a kneeling position, ears alert for the deadly whistle of the 88. Sluggishly they brushed themselves off and rearranged their equipment, running a rain-soaked sleeve across the bandoliers of ammunition, removing the protective tape from their hand-grenades, and fixing dull bayonets to their M-1 rifles.

The day's supply of C rations had not been brought up to the front and the hungry men fumbled in their pockets for chocolate D-bars. A few lit cigarettes that had been protected from the rain by water-proof sacks. They sat down, waiting tensely for the signal, calling upon God to damn the weather. In the middle of the hedge row Wagger crouched, serene as Buddha, giving last minute instructions to the N. C. O's.

The whistle!!! An 88 tore into the ground just thirty feet from the group.
Every man flattened himself but the Lieutenant who sat immobile and immune until the blast faded away. Then he completed his instructions with nerveless calm.

The N. C. O's got to their feet and the squads lined up five yards apart. A hand signal passed from man to man. At the front end of the line a few men jumped through the hedge row and ran crouching along the other side. Each squad leader was followed by what was left of his men.

The peace of Normandy was blasted by a heavy volley of rifle fire. The staccato notes of machine guns added to the awful din. Shells from the 88's crashed all around, throwing dirt and jagged fragments of steel in all directions. The running men heard the muffled pop of mortar shells set off in the distance. Two dropped to the ground and lay lifeless, but no one stopped. Mortar shells came down with the rain, shattering helmets and flesh and strewing pieces of things over the soggy ground. Medics followed in the rear of the attackers. They paused to lean down and turn over certain muddy heaps and then shoved on.

Now the 88's and mortars which were bursting in back of the men ceased abruptly. The Americans were so close to the Jerries that long range fire from the Germans would have hit their own men. Fierce firing from the small arms mounted steadily. The Americans piled into the opposite hedge row, firing wildly through it at the retreating Jerries. Then all was quiet again except for the clicking of equipment and the gutteral groans of the wounded and dying. There was a final round of small arms fire. The Jerries had disappeared. The rain drizzled on.

The men sat down exhausted, wiping the sweat and rain from their dirty faces, and panting heavily for breath. Someone started to dig a fresh slit trench in the mud by the newly captured hedge row. One by one the others loosened their shovels from their water-soaked belts. After a few minutes the lull was broken by the deadly whistle.

"Here they come again. Dig faster."
"z-z-z-z-Z-Z-Z-Z-z-z-z-z-z-
"Oh, brother, this one's mine!"
"WHAM-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-

The Hand Of Fate

Muriel Holland

Anita Colby ripped open the yellow envelope in her hand and devoured its message in one hasty glance. "Jan!" she screamed. "Jan! You'll never guess what!"

Her roommate emerged from the depths of a wardrobe trunk long enough for a curious "What's up?"

A second time Anita scanned the words, then fell back on the bed with a groan. "What do I do now? Oh—wait till you hear."

"Your bank account's overdrawn again," Jan stated, and she leaned over the trunk once again.

"No, nothing so simple as that."
"Bill got shore-leave and married a geisha girl."

"I don't see how you can joke at a time like this. What'll I ever do?" and Anita rolled over and buried her head under a pillow.

The odor of moth balls filled the small