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Collins English Library LEVEL 5

THE GUNS OF NAVARONE

One of Alistair MacLean's fastest-moving stories. Will Mallory and his team be able to climb the terrible South Cliffs of Navarone? Will they avoid capture on Mount Kostos and in the Devil's Playground? Will they get through the defences of the Fortress to the great guns? And will they be able to do all this in time?



Collins English Library Level 5

GUNS NAVARONE ALISTAIR MACLEAN

Abridged and Edited by Lewis Jones

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We are grateful to the Training Group of
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which appears on the cover.

Sunday

01.00-09.00

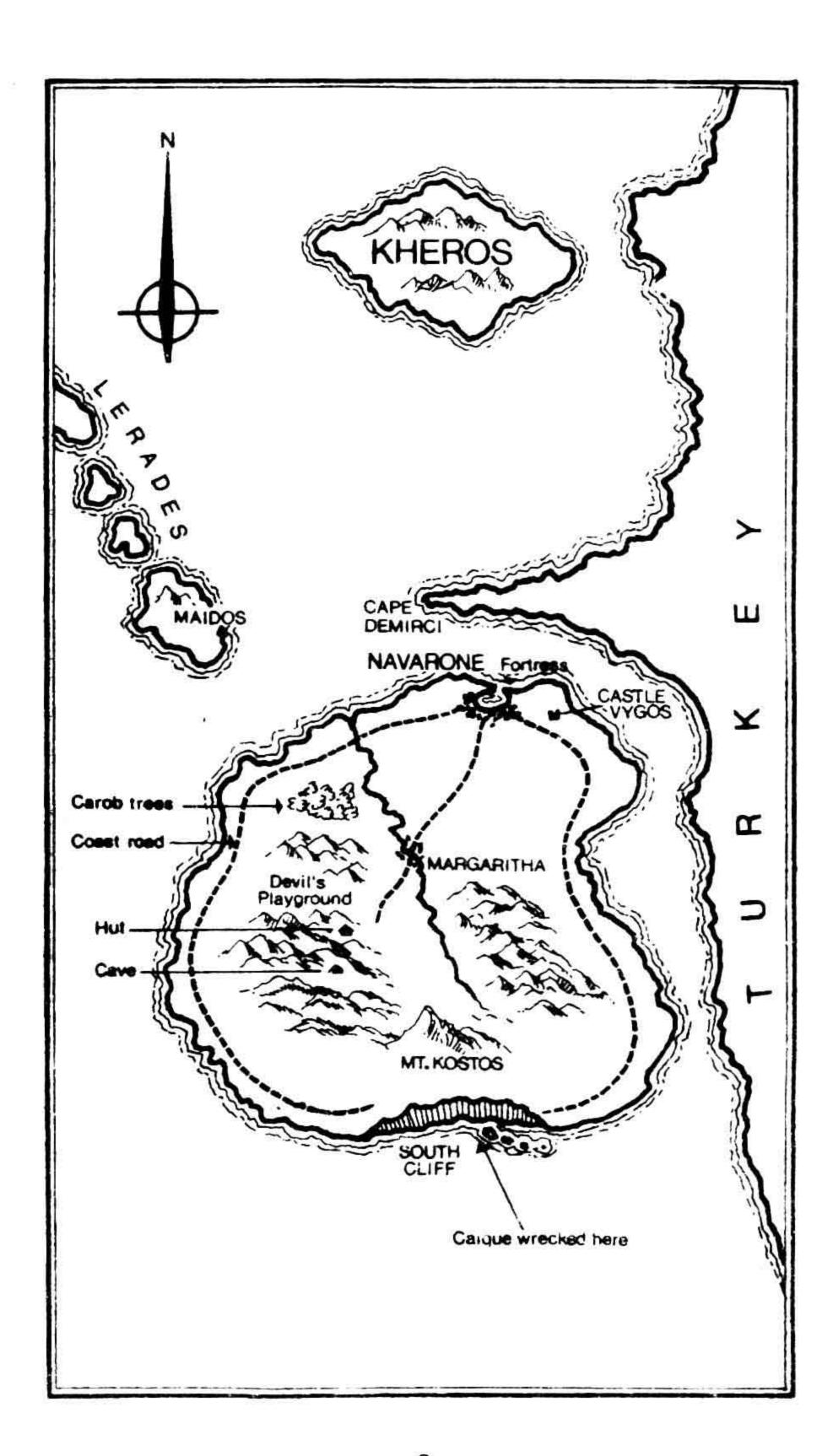
The match scratched noisily across the iron wall. A moment's pause, then it burst into a pool of light. The sharp sound and the sudden hard brightness were strangely foreign to the stillness of the desert night.

Mechanically, Mallory's eyes followed the hand-cupped curve of the burning match to the cigarette in the Group-Captain's mouth. He saw the sudden stillness of the face, and the empty eyes of a man who was lost in listening. Then the match was gone, pressed by a turning heel into the sand at the edge of the airfield.

"I can hear them," the Group-Captain said softly. "I can hear them coming in. Come on, let's meet them inside."

He turned quickly, and walked off towards the low buildings that broke the skyline in the pale darkness.

Mallory followed more slowly with the third mem' er of the group — a broad, solid figure with a rolling walk. Mallory wondered about that walk. Thirty years at sea of course could produce it — and Jensen had done exactly that. But as the incredibly successful chief of the Secret Operations Unit in Cairo, pretence was the breath of life to Captain James Jensen, of the British Royal Navy.



As a Levantine trouble-maker, he had won the praises of port-workers from Alexandretta to Alexandria. As a camel-driver, his command of bad language had defeated all Bedouin competition. And no beggar had ever shown such realistic sores in the market-places of the East.

But tonight he was just the honest and simple sailor. He was dressed in white from head to toe, and the starlight glowed softly on the gold at his shoulders and on his cap.

Mallory took a deep breath, and turned suddenly towards Jensen. "Look sir, just what is this? Why all the secrets? And why me? It was only yesterday that I was pulled out of Crete. Four hours sleep in three days — that's all I've had . . . Here they come!"

Both men half-closed their eyes as the fierce brightness of the planes' landing lights struck at them. In less than a minute the first bomber was down, heavily, awkwardly. The grey paint was peppered with bullet holes, and one engine was useless, covered in oil.

The room, lit by two powerful, unshaded lights, was uncomfortable and airless. The furniture consisted of some much-used wall-maps and charts, about twenty well-worn chairs, and a plain wooden table. Behind the table sat the Group-Captain, with Jensen and Mallory at each side. The Australian pilot of the first of the flying-crews scraped a match across the surface of the table, and the Group-Captain started to explain. "Bill here led tonight's attack on Navarone."

Navarone! So that's why I'm here tonight, Mallory thought. An unconquerable iron fortress off the coast of Turkey; strongly held by the Germans and Italians. He realized that the pilot was speaking: the slow voice was heavy with controlled anger.

"We hadn't a chance. It was just murder. They've got half the anti-aircraft guns in the south of Europe. Russ and Conroy were hit good and hard on the way in towards the harbour. They never had a chance. And McIlveen down in the sea. It's impossible, sir."

He moved a tired hand across his face. "That cliff. There's just no way to get at the gun-cave — the cliff top overhangs it. Maybe pack a fighter-plane with explosives, and order one of us to crash-dive it into the mouth of the cave. That's about the only way."

"Thank you," Jensen said. "I know you've

done your very best. And I'm sorry."

When the pilot had gone, the Group-Captain brought out a bottle and some glasses. "There's only the one way left now." The Group-Captain lifted his glass. "Here's luck to Kheros!"

"Look," Mallory begged, "I'm completely

lost. Would somebody please tell me -"

"Kheros," Jensen repeated. "This is where you join the story, young man. You're going to be the star."

Neither of them had spoken in the last ten minutes. Jensen drove the big Humber command-car with characteristic sureness and easy efficiency. Mallory sat with the map on his knees, and studied the islands off the coast of Turkey. There was only the whisper of the tyres, and the low note of the powerful engine.

Jensen spoke quietly. "You see the island of

Kheros?"

"About twenty-four kilometres north of Navarone."

"This is Saturday — rather, Sunday morning now. There are twelve hundred men on the island of Kheros — twelve hundred British soldiers. By next Saturday, they will be dead, wounded, or prisoners. Mostly they'll be dead. You hold a thousand lives in your hands, Captain Mallory. How does it feel?"

"Kheros will be taken?"

"Yes. Nothing we can do can save it. The Germans have air superiority in the Aegean."

"You're sure it's this week?"

"Sure. Greece is covered with our agents."

"But the navy. Why couldn't our ships -"

"It would have to be a night operation. That means fast ships — destroyers. And they'd have to sail up from the south, past Navarone. If they could."

"If? What's to stop them?"

"The guns of Navarone." Jensen paused for a long time, then repeated the words slowly, like the name of a feared and ancient enemy. "We could take those men off Kheros tonight — if we could silence the guns of Navarone."

Mallory sat silent, said nothing. Then he asked, "Why me, Captain Jensen?"

"You speak Greek like a Greek. You speak German like a German. First-class organiser. You survived eighteen months in enemy-held terri-



tory in the White Mountains of Crete." Jensen laughed. "Don't worry. I know all about you."

"There are other officers you could have

chosen."

"There are no other Keith Mallorys," Jensen said. "The finest mountaineer, the greatest rock-climber New Zealand has ever produced. The human fly. The climber of impossible cliffs. And the entire south coast of Navarone," Jensen said cheerfully, "is one huge impossible cliff."

"So I'm going in the hard way?"

"That's right. You and just four others. Every man a specialist."

They turned right, away from the port buildings of Alexandria, round into Mohammed Ali Square, and then right down the Sherif Pasha. Mallory looked at the man behind the wheel.

"Where to, sir?"

"To see the only man in the Middle East who can help you now. Eugene Vlachos of Navarone."

"You are a brave man, Captain Mallory." Nervously Eugene Vlachos drummed his fingers on the table. "And I am an old man now. A poor man and a sad one."

Jensen said, "The Vlachos family has owned Navarone for hundreds of years. We had to remove Mr Vlachos in a great hurry, eighteen months ago. He was not exactly being helpful to the Germans."

"They had reserved a special place for myself and my two sons in the prison of Navarone . . . But enough of the Vlachos family." He pointed to the table. "You can trust my information and that map completely. But please do not try to get help from the people of Navarone. If a man helps you, and is found out, the Germans will destroy not only that man but his entire village — men, women, and children."

"It happened in Crete," Mallory agreed

quietly. "I've seen it for myself."

"If your need is serious, really serious, there are two men you can turn to. Under the first plane-tree in the village square of Margaritha, you will find a man called Louki. He has been of help to the British before, and you can trust him with your life. He has a friend, Panayis. He too has been useful in the past."

"Thank you sir. I'll remember. Louki and Panayis. And Margaritha — the first plane-tree in

the square."

"Louki and Panayis — only those two."

"Nobody will see us, sir. We're going for only one thing — the guns. We will bring no harm to your people."

"God go with you tonight," the old man said

softly. "I only wish that I could go too."

Sunday Night 19.00-02.00

"Coffee, sir?"

Mallory groaned and fought his way up from the depths of exhausted sleep. The young airgunner was standing patiently by his side. "Just passing over Cyprus, sir."

"Thank you."

Painfully, Mallory eased himself back on the flying-boat's metal-framed seat. He put the coffee to his lips, then looked round at the others, and smiled in satisfaction. They were all good men. Captain Jensen had done well.

Or was there perhaps a small question mark against Stevens? Mallory looked across the passage at the fair-haired, boyish figure. Andy Stevens of the Royal Navy was a first-class mountaineer, and he spoke Greek perfectly. But he was very young — too young?

The fire of youth was not enough, This was a war of patience, acting quietly and secretly, and these things were not characteristic of youth. But perhaps Stevens would learn fast.

Mallory's eyes turned towards the sleeping Miller. Dusty Miller of the United States, and more recently of the Long Range Desert Force. In the last quarter of a century, Miller had lived and fought and adventured more than most men would in a dozen lifetimes.

Silver-miner in Nevada, tunneller in Canada, fighter of oil-fires all over the world. In the war he had crashed in planes and sunk in ships. He was exactly opposite to Stevens.

Stevens, young, fresh, keen, and smartly dressed. Miller, dried-up, thin, hard, with a hatred of smartness. The only Greek words he knew were not in the dictionaries. Miller had been chosen for one reason only. He was a marvel with explosives, clever and cool, and deadly in action. He was the finest explosives

expert in southern Europe.

Behind Miller sat Casey Brown. Short and dark and solid, in peacetime Brown had worked in a famous Scottish ship-builder's yard. And he was a first-class undercover fighter. Brown would be the engineer of their boat to Navarone.

The fifth and last man of the group sat directly behind Mallory. Andrea of the huge frame and the continual deep laughter. Mallory knew him better than anyone else in the world. Together they had eaten and lived and slept in caves, and rock-shelters, while the Germans hunted them on foot and in planes.

Andrea was a Greek himself. Endlessly patient, quiet and deadly, astonishingly fast in action. Andrea was the complete fighting machine.

Jensen could not have chosen a better team.

The sound of the flying-boat's engines was still echoing in their ears when the little motorboat nosed through the dark, and rubbed to a stop against the round stone landing-stage of Castelrosso. As Mallory reached the top of the iron ladder, a figure stepped forward.

"Captain Mallory?"

"Yes."

"Captain Briggs. Army."

The voice was sharp and unfriendly.-Perhaps this late visit was keeping him from his bed or his drink.

"Matthews here will take you to your room. And don't forget, Captain — you leave again in two hours."



"I know, I know," Mallory said wearily.

The room was small and cheerless, with a table and half-a-dozen chairs. Mallory dug into the inside pocket of his dark naval battledress, and pulled out a chart, and the map from Vlachos.

"Round the table, all of you — let me introduce you to Navarone."

It was eleven o'clock when Mallory at last sat back, and folded away the map and chart.

"About four hundred metres of cliff—straight up-and-down." Miller rolled a long, thin cigarette with one expert hand. "This is just crazy boss. I can't even climb a ladder without falling off. Or maybe Andrea would carry me up. He's big enough anyway."

He turned hopefully to Andrea. But Andrea had risen to his feet, and was moving like a cat towards the door. It was all over in two seconds. With magical ease, Andrea opened the door with one hand, pulled a wildly fighting figure through the doorway, set him on the ground again, and closed the door — all in one smooth movement.

The listener was a dark-skinned Levantine with a thin, sharp face. He wore a badly-fitting white shirt and blue trousers. For a moment he stood shocked and motionless in the unexpected brightness of the light. Then his hand dived in under his shirt.

"Look out!" Miller's voice was sharp.

The men at the table saw only a flash of blue steel as the knife arm rose and then struck with deadly speed. And then, incredibly, hand and