

Letters From Lillian

Book Chapter

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Summary:

Letters From Lillian is a Christian historical novel set in World War Two. The story revolves around young Lieutenant Commander Jeremy Wallace as he serves his country aboard the submarine *USS Gato* in the Pacific Theatre of the war. Not a believer when he went to sea, he quickly finds that there is much more to life when he is thrust into the brutal realities of war. Through the promptings in the countless letters from the woman he loves back in the States—and his own personal emptiness—Jeremy finally accepts Jesus into his heart. As the war carries on he continues to grow as a Christian and as a man; eventually being given command of his own vessel.

~Chapter One~

Off the Marshall Islands, South Pacific—May 3rd, 1942.

“Officer Wallace, message from the *Tambor*,” Dick Conrad said as he handed a piece of paper over to Lieutenant Commander Jeremy Wallace. Young Jeremy, who was reading the note as Dick scribbled it down, ducked out of the narrow radio room and headed down a hall, yelling, “Clear the deck!”

He was jogging when he reached the ladder that led up to the top of the sail. Not wasting a moment, he hurriedly climbed up behind Captain Eugene Myers. Jeremy handed the note to the captain, “We have confirmation from the *USS Tambor* that a Japanese light carrier is headed in our direction. It’s bearing 20 degrees off of a southerly course, already downrange of *Tambor*. An ETA of two hours is expected.”

The captain nodded in approval, “Prepare to submerge.” With that, he picked up a pair of binoculars and scanned the horizon.

“Yes sir!” Jeremy replied. Longing to linger in the sunlight for another moment, he climbed back down. Such was life on a submarine.

This was the *USS Gato*, the finest submarine in the world. She was a lean 311 feet from bow to stern, and her men were proud to call her home. She had a crew of 60, 54 men and six officers, who combined to be the heartbeat of the *Gato*. She was commissioned the previous December, shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and was now on her first war patrol into the Pacific Ocean. Fourteen days ago she left Hawaii, setting course for the Marshall Islands,

and was now preparing to meet the enemy for the first time. Under the guidance of Captain

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Myers the crew was well practiced in the launching of dummy torpedoes at practice targets—but this would be something entirely different for all of them. While they were eager to make their presence known to the enemy, apprehension lingered...

With all the poise expected from a second in command, Jeremy strolled into the bridge. Several sailors stood to their feet, “Officer on deck!”

“At ease,” Jeremy said as he waved his hand. Picking up the intercom microphone, he spoke to all aboard the vessel, “All hands at diving-stations; all officers report to bridge.”

A few men moved past him as he heard the clatter rising within the submarine. Just then, Chief Engineer Tony Scott ducked through the small doorway into the bridge, “We have a small problem, sir.”

“There are no small problems on a submarine, officer,” Jeremy replied as he glanced over the shoulder of the diving-planes operator, reading his gauges, “Only big ones. What is it?”

“I can only get Battery D to 95 percent charge. I suspect a cell is going bad, sir.”

“When there are 126 cells in a battery, that’s going to happen. What’s the estimated accelerated discharge?”

“No more than a few hours, sir.”

“Alright, give a report to the captain when he comes down,” Jeremy turned away to walk back to the radio room, “And keep me updated on any further cell-loss.”

“Aye sir.”

Upon arriving at the radio room, Jeremy was handed another note. It was from the *Tambor*,

wishing 'good-luck' and 'God's blessings'.

"Radio back," Jeremy said as he stuffed the paper into his pocket, "That there is no such

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thing as luck, but we'll take God's blessings any day."

Just then there was the distinct, metallic clap of the sail's main hatch being slammed shut as Captain Myers climbed down to the bridge.

"Ask the *Tambor* how many escorts she sighted with the carrier, and get the reply to bridge ASAP," Jeremy ordered as he stepped out of the radio room. When he got back to the bridge, Myers was being briefed by Scott about the battery problem. The *Gato*, like the majority of submarines, was powered by a combination of diesel and electricity. When she was surfaced, the submarine was powered by several V-16 diesel engines which were coupled to generators. The generators powered electric motors which drove the propellers, and also charged the submarine's four massive batteries. When the submarine was submerged, the diesels wouldn't have enough air to run, so they were shut off and the submarine was powered by the batteries. The batteries however, lacked the power of the diesels and didn't stay charged for long...

Captain Myers thought about the battery problem, "What would happen if we isolated Battery D? Do you think we could get a few more amps into it?"

Scott shrugged, "I could try it I suppose. A, B, and C batteries are all at full charge."

"Do that. I'll give you another half-hour before we dive."

"Yes sir!" Scott said as he turned to leave for the engineering spaces.

"And Scott," Myers added, "I will not be shortchanged on amps. When those depth-charges are raining down, we'll need everything we've got."

Scott nodded in silence, and then disappeared through the hatch for the rear of the submarine. They all knew the risks of being a submariner, and there were many. Diving in a submarine was risky enough on a good day. The sailor's lives were in the steel hands of machinery—which was

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still in its infancy—and anything could go wrong mechanically. The diving planes, which were to a submarine what wings were to an airplane, could jam—sending the vessel hurtling past its crush depth. The same would happen if an uncontrollable leak developed. The torpedoes and batteries used were dangerous, having unexpectedly exploded on several occasions in the past. All that, of course, was on a good day—and this was not one of those days. Today they would be engaging a very capable enemy; skillful in the art of destroying submarines. The carrier itself will have several planes flying about, searching for any signs of a submarine. Pending the report from the *Tambor*, there will also likely be several destroyers or cruisers sailing as escorts to the carrier. If a submarine is spotted, the escorts would quickly hasten to where it was last seen and begin dropping depth-charges—which were in essence underwater bombs that could destroy a submarine if they exploded close enough.

Vince Herald, the Torpedo Officer, stepped into the bridge. He wasn't yet aware of the carrier, and was guessing this would be just another drill.

“Herald,” Myers spoke, “I want all six bow torpedo tubes loaded. Set the torpedoes to run shallow, and open the shutters. I want all four stern torpedo tubes loaded, but keep the shutters closed for now.”

“Anything else captain?”

“I want torpedoes waiting in the harnesses for reloading as soon as possible after firing.”

Herald did a double take, “This isn’t a drill?”

“Lieutenant, you are on the *USS Gato*, and we’re in a war zone,” Myers responded, sounding rather disgusted, “Even if this was a drill, I would hope that you wouldn’t take it any less seriously.”

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“Yes sir!” Herald answered, already regretting his earlier choice of words...

“There is a carrier headed our way,” Jeremy informed him, just as another sailor stepped into the bridge and handed him a note. He quickly read through it, “*Tambor* reports she made two destroyer escorts through her periscope, though there may be more.”

“There will be more,” Myers mused as two more officers stepped in, “Lieutenant Parker, I want diving planes checked for all angles.”

“Aye, sir.”

Like all the men on the *Gato*, Myers was new to conflict. He had graduated from Annapolis in 1926 and trained to be a torpedo boat captain. When he was offered the chance to be the Torpedo Officer aboard the submarine *USS Barracuda*, he jumped at the opportunity and the rest was history.

“All engines full ahead, rudder twelve points to starboard,” Myers ordered, and accordingly felt the *Gato* swing beneath his feet to the right as the twin propellers churned faster behind him. Nodding approvingly, he turned to the doorway, “I’ll be in the engine room checking on the cells. Wallace, take over.”

“Aye, captain,” Jeremy replied as he leaned over to stare at a bank of gauges. ‘This is it,’ he thought to himself. As professional as he was, he was still scared. Nothing could’ve taken that

out of him as he stood in the bridge, with danger looming just ahead.

Moving away from the rest of the men in the bridge, his thoughts shifted to home. Home to him was a world away in Lower Peninsula Michigan; the town of Williamsburg to be exact. He had grown up on his father's cherry orchard; but decided that life wasn't for him. The Navy seemed more like it, so he enrolled at Annapolis. After graduating with the Class of 1941, he

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continued his education at an officer's school for submariners. He did remarkably well there, and was offered a position as Systems Officer aboard the *Thresher*. He declined the offer, as he was informed he may be promoted if he took an extra course in navigation. Jeremy did just that, and arrived at the rank of Lieutenant Commander, along with the offer to be second in command of the brand new *Gato*. That offer was quickly accepted, and he immediately began training aboard her before she was commissioned.

More than home, however, he thought of Lillian O'Reilly. He had known Lillian his whole life, as she was his neighbor and the reverend's daughter. They had spent much time together before he went to Annapolis—taking long walks through the blossoming orchard, just talking about the future. One evening Jeremy even worked up enough courage to ask the reverend for his permission to court Lillian. To his surprise the answer was yes, and they began courting. Perhaps the reverend consented as a test for his daughter, hoping that she would know enough not to court someone like Jeremy. Lillian 'failed' the 'test' of courting him, but when he proposed to her, she quickly declined. She loved him dearly and *wanted to marry him*, but there was one problem: Jeremy wasn't a Christian. He was a gentleman in every meaning of the word, but he wasn't a Christian. On his last day in Williamsburg, they exchanged a promise to

wait for each other. Jeremy had given her hand a kiss, and she gave him a Bible—which he halfheartedly said he would read. Now, he wished he had...

Myers stepped back into the bridge, “Batteries aren’t going to get any better,” and after picking up the microphone, he added, “All hands at battle stations! Shutdown diesels and engage motors—three knots—and bring us to periscope depth. This is not a drill!”