

Dispatches.

Her red cap bobbed from side to side as Hironnelle's fingers desperately twiddled the radio dial.

The signal faded out then in. "Ici Londres – some personal messages."

Salutations and felicitations followed till one in particular chilled to the quick. "Les Hironnelle volent vers le sud."

Hironnelle crimped the fuse and set it into the explosives. She scrapped the ballast back to conceal the bomb and retreated from the exposed embankment. First job of the night completed; now came the second and most dangerous, evasion and escape.

The lagoon below was suffused in moonlight. Hironnelle cupped her hands and blew. An owl hoot glided across the river and was answered immediately by another. She crept down and waded through the water, waterlilies snatching at her ankles. The dingy was there sure enough and lying inside was Chadonnerete (Goldfinch). He quickly embraced Hironnelle passed her a leather satchel then slid out of the dingy holding it for her as she clambered aboard; patting the dinghy's name plate as she did so. Chadonnerete pushed the dingy out into midstream; saluted and the vanished back into the bocage.

Hironnelle was now completely on her own and flying North as fast as her beloved Amazon could take her. She kept the white sail from flapping an alarm on the wind and coveted the dark red sail of Amazon's partner in crime. All those years learning her trade; back home on the lake playing pirates and her apprenticeship with a real South China Seas Pirate were now paying dividend. The estuary fanned out in front of her, so she picked the deepest channel and ran. Behind her, a soft crump meandered down the river and joined her race for the sea

A klaxon reverberated through HMS Eskdale as it crashed through the heavy swell. "This is the Captain. Enemy coast ahead. Action Stations."

John Walker sat in his Captains chair fighting the urge to grab his binoculars and join in the search.

"Sir, it's like looking for a fart in a hurricane."

"Easy Number Two; assume a holding pattern and tell the engine room to be ready to give us everything they can."

"Aye-aye sir!"

"Sir, time is against us. We don't want to get caught by Jerry at sunrise."

“Easy Number Two. We dropped off the asset – we’ll be the ones to pick them up again. The asset and I share blood, besides this mission came straight from the top.” The Captain mimed smoking a cigar between Victory V fingers. Double the lookout.”

Hirondelle pulled her red cap down over her ears and tucked the satchel tighter under her coat. By dead-reckoning she should be exactly at the rendezvous. If only she could get a bearing on the lighthouse.

“The lighthouse tree; galoot.” A flash of inspiration arrowed into her mind as she scrambled under the thwarts searching for the Very Pistol. She aimed high and pulled the trigger - a parrot-green flare shot into the darkness before crabbing away on the wind – a leading light on a prayer – and unlikely to be seen from shore in this squall.

This Captain was good. He’d seen her signal and had come around so that the Frigate was now running parallel, making just enough headway to match hers. She was going to get one chance. Hirondelle swung the tiller setting the mismatched dinghy on a collision course.

She was just about to jump and cling to the scramble nets, when the Frigate dropped from the swell - cresting the dingy. Hirondelle yanked over the tiller and jibbed straight over the frigate’ scuppers to land The Amazon, kipperesque on the deck. Sailors snatched her and bundled her through a hatch and onto the bridge where she stood, feathers drowned in front of the Captain.

He smiled and lifted the red cap. “Captain Nancy Blackett – Terror of the seas. Welcome aboard. Night-sailing, who’d have thought it!”

“Captain Walker. Wasn’t it your Mother that banned you from night-sailing?”

“Better drowned than duffers hey.”

Hirondelle handed over the satchel – Dispatches.”

“Well Nancy, we’d better get back to Falmouth then; hadn’t we. Engine room, everything you have.” John turned to Nancy and with the biggest smile offered, “a tot of Grog?”

Two days later the greatest seaborne invasion Operation Overlord hit the Normandy coast

“Swallows and Amazons forever.”



