

A real World War II operation that went wrong is made into a fiction story. Part of the book is from real events, the rest is fiction.

HIGH TIDE

by G.R. Ordning

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High Tide



G. R. Ordning

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He was lifted on the crest of a wave; he saw what was left of the LST, her bow already under water. There were bodies all around, clear in the early morning light. Far beyond, the sea was on fire with burning oil, then there was an explosion, the stern of the LST lifted and then was gone.

He skidded down the other side of the wave, buoyant in his lifejacket, and then another wave washed over him and he choked as he struggled for breath, aware of the intense pain from a wound to the right side of his head and an equal amount of pain in his left foot.

The sea was running very fast, it seemed to take hold of him, carrying him along at an incredible rate, the cries of men faded into the mist and fog. Again he was lifted high on a wave, paused for a moment, then swept down very fast and crashed into a large rubber life-raft, the kind found on most ships. He grabbed one of the rope handles and hauled himself into the raft landing on his face. He sat up and looked around for

any men in the water, but there were none. The cries were no more, long gone in the early morning light.

He found the first aid kit stored in an inner compartment. There is an open wound to the right side of his head. Blood moved down his face in a steady flow. He took several flat dressing materials and placed it to his wound with one hand and wrapped gauze dressing around with the other hand the best he could. He reached down to check his ankle, it hurt to touch. He felt dizzy and sick, threw up what was most likely seawater. He took to a corner of the raft and darkness came over him suddenly.

In late 1943, as part of the build-up to D-Day, the British government set up a training ground at Slapton Sands, Devon, to be used by Force 'U', the American forces tasked with landing on Omaha and Utah Beach. Slapton Beach was selected for its similarity to both of these beaches.

Four sites were considered for the landings: Brittany, the Cortentin Peninsula, Normandy, and the Pas de Calais. As Brittany and Cotentin are peninsulas, it would have been possible for the Germans to cut off Allied advance at a relatively narrow isthmus, so these sites were rejected.

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With the Pas de Calais being the closest point in continental Europe to Britain, the Germans considered it to be the most likely initial landing zone, so it was the most heavily fortified region. But it offered few opportunities for expansion, as the area is bounded by numerous rivers and canals, whereas landings on a broad front in Normandy was hence chosen as the landing site. This led to the exercises because of the similarity of the sites.

Landing exercises started in December 1943. Exercise Tiger was one of the larger exercises that took place in April 1944. The exercise was to last from 22 April until 30 April 1944, and covered all aspects of the invasion, culminating in a beach landing at Slapton Sands. On board nine large tank landing ships (LSTs), the 30,000 troops prepared for their mock landing, which also included a live-firing exercise.

Protection for the exercise area came from the Royal Navy. Two destroyers, three Motor Torpedo Boats and two Motor Gun Boats patrolled the entrance to Lyme Bay.

The first phase of the exercise focused on marshalling and embarkation drills, and lasted from 22 to 25 April. On the evening of 26 April the first wave of assault troops boarded their transports and set off,

the plan being to simulate the Channel crossing by taking a roundabout route through Lyme Bay, in order to arrive off Slapton at first light on 27 April.

The first practice assault took place on the morning of 27 April and was marred by an incident involving friendly fire. H-hour was set for 06:30, and was to include live ammunition to acclimatize the troops to the sights, sounds and even smells of a naval bombardment. During the landing itself, live rounds were to be fired over the heads of the incoming troops by forces on land, for the same reason. This followed an order made by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, who felt that the men must be hardened by exposure to real battle conditions. The exercise was to include naval bombardment by ships fifty minutes prior to the landing.

Several of the landing ships for that morning were delayed and the officer in charge, American Admiral Don P. Moon, decided to delay H-hour for 60 minutes, until 07:30. Some of the landing craft did not receive word of the change. Landing on the beach at their original scheduled time with the high tide, the second wave came under fire suffering an unknown number of casualties.

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On the day after the first practice assaults, early on the morning of 28 April, the exercise was blighted when Convoy T-4, consisting of eight LSTs carrying vehicles and combat engineers of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Walker, was attacked by nine German E-boats under the command of Korvettenkapitan Bernd Klug, in Lyme Bay.

Of the two ships assigned to protect the convoy, only one was present. HMS Azalea, a corvette was leading the LSTs in a straight line, a formation that later drew criticism since it presented an easy target to the E-boats. The second ship that was supposed to be present, HMS Scimitar, a World War I destroyer, had been in collision with an LST, suffered structural damage and left the convoy to be repaired at Plymouth. Because the LSTs and British naval headquarters were operating on different frequencies, the American forces did not know this.

HMS Saladin was dispatched as a replacement, but did not arrive in time to help protect the convoy.

The E-boats had left Cherbourg on patrol the previous evening and spotted the convoy early in the morning and attacked.

The ships and their escorts fired back and the E-boats made no more attacks after their initial run. In total 749 servicemen were killed during operation Tiger. Many drowned or died of hypothermia in the cold sea while waiting to be rescued. Many were not shown how to put on their lifebelt correctly, and placed it around their waist, the only available spot because of their large backpacks. In some cases this meant that when they jumped into the water the weight of their combat packs flipped them upside down, dragging their heads underwater and drowning them.

As a result of official embarrassment and concerns over possible leaks just prior to the real invasion, all survivors were sworn to secrecy by their superiors. Ten missing officers involved in the exercise had BIGOT-level clearance for D-day, meaning that they knew the invasion plans and could have compromised the invasion should they have been captured alive. Nine of the men had been found, all dead, except for one unaccounted for, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Walker who had been aboard LST-507, the one he watched sink, and was now adrift in the Channel, but this was unknown to his superiors who believed him to be dead, his body not found.

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At Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme allied commander, was pacing back and forth smoking a cigarette when Captain John Abe came in with a worried look on his face. Eisenhower turned to face Abe, “What’s the damage captain?”

Abe had been the first to report to Eisenhower about the Operation Tiger disaster but did not have all the details. Eisenhower put him in charge to review what had happened and also to recover the dead and wounded.

“I’m afraid it’s bad General. We have recovered most of all the dead, 749 total and only a few wounded. A total disaster sir.”

“What about the BIGOT’s? Where do we stand with them?”

“There were a total of ten BIGOT’s in the exercise sir, we have recovered nine.”

“Then there is one still missing? Any chance that he is still alive?” Eisenhower asked, lighting another cigarette.

“No sir, we don’t believe he survived. We may find his body but more than likely he will never be found.”

“I see, and who is it that is missing?”

A Lieutenant Colonel Henry Walker commanding the 1st Engineer Special Brigade. He was aboard LST 507 which is believed to have sunk with all hands.”

“Then we can assume that he went down with the vessel?”

“Yes sir, we believe that to be true. We have classified him as deceased, body not recovered. We have searched for two days now and will continue for another two days before we make it official. Searching the area has become difficult because of increased German naval activity, especially the E-boats.”

Eisenhower lights a cigarette, “I can see how that would be a problem. Let us hope he went down with the ship. I would hate to think one of our BIGOT’s survived and is captured by the enemy since he knows the plans for Operation Overlord and true landing site for the invasion. That would present a big problem. I never did agree with having that many officers who knew of the landing plans and location but I suppose it was necessary.”

“I don’t believe we have anything to worry about general.”

“I hope you are right captain. How did they ever come up with the code name BIGOT anyway?”

“From what I understand it’s an acronym for British Invasion of German Occupied Territory.

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Someone on General Montgomery's staff came up with it. There is a story that some junior officer would not let King George VI into an intelligence meeting. When asked to explain himself by a superior officer, he said he did not know the King was a BIGOT."

Eisenhower smiled his famous smile. "That sounds like typical British bullcrap."

"Yes sir, as you say."

"Well keep me informed captain of any new events. As for now I have a meeting to attend."

"Yes sir," said Abe as he saluted. He reached the door. Eisenhower said, "Oh captain, I am not convinced that our colonel is dead; keep searching."

"Yes sir."

Eisenhower lights a cigarette and pours a cup of coffee from the sidebar. He speaks into the intercom, "Sergeant Miller bring me the file on a Lieutenant Colonel Henry Walker."

"Yes sir, right away," a voice said on the intercom.

A few minutes later the door opened, and in walked Sergeant Miller with a folder in hand. He placed it on the desk, "Anything else sir?"

"Have my car brought around sergeant, that will be all."

"Yes sir."

Eisenhower opens the file and begins to read. Lieutenant Colonel Henry Walker, age 26. Born in Austin, Texas 1918. “Young to be a Lieutenant Colonel, made rank fast, I was in my thirty’s before I made that rank,” said Eisenhower as he continued to read. Grew up on his parents farm outside of Austin, raised cattle and grew a variety of crops. They had a hard time during the depression, but not as hard as some others. They managed to keep the farm and with the crops they sold, they scraped by. He and his brother helped out with the chores. Between work on the farm and school there was not much time for anything else. The older brother who served in the navy that was killed at Pearl Harbor. Henry graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in structural engineering. He married his high school sweetheart by the name of Alice and joined the Army in 1937, became commissioned through the OCS program. The marriage did not last; Alice could not become accustomed to military life. A major by 1942 and recently promoted to his present rank, he had decided to make the military his career. Decorated with a Bronze Star at Anzio while leading a team of engineers clearing the beach prior to the invasion. His father was a veteran of World War I, served with the

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Big Red One in France as a Captain of an Infantry battalion.

Eisenhower laid the folder down. “Interesting fellow, good soldier,” he said.

A voice came on the intercom, “Your car is here general.”

“Thank you sergeant, I’ll be right there.”

David Dwight Eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas and was raised in Kansas. He graduated from West Point in 1915, in the class of the stars, so called because of the many classmates became generals later in their military service, including General Omar Bradley and General George Patton.

Second Lieutenant Eisenhower upon graduation requested an assignment in the Philippines, which was denied. He was instead posted in Texas.

When the US entered World War I, he immediately requested an overseas assignment but was denied and then assigned to Fort Leavenworth.

After the war, Eisenhower was promoted to major and assumed duties at Camp Meade, Maryland, commanding a battalion of tanks. His new expertise in tank warfare was strengthened by a close collaboration with George S. Patton and other senior tank leaders.

After completing that assignment he graduated from the Army War College in 1928 followed by a one-year assignment in France.

In 1932 Eisenhower was posted as chief military aid to General Douglas MacArthur. In 1935, he accompanied MacArthur to the Philippines, where he served as assistant military advisor to the Philippine government in developing their army.

Eisenhower was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1936. He also learned to fly, making a solo flight over the Philippines in 1937 and obtained his private pilot's license in 1939.

Eisenhower returned the United States in December 1939 and was assigned as commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment at Fort Lewis, Washington, later becoming the regimental executive officer.

In March 1941 he was promoted to colonel and assigned as chief of staff of the newly activated IX Corps, followed by promotion to brigadier general in October 1941.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Eisenhower was assigned to the General Staff in Washington, D.C., where he served until June 1942 with the responsibility for creating the major war plans to defeat Japan and Germany.

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In November 1942, he was appointed Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force of the North African Theater of Operations and was thereby promoted to major general. After that operation was completed, he was again promoted to lieutenant general.

In December 1943, President Roosevelt decided that Eisenhower would be the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and that he would plan the invasion of France, which is his present role. Along with this reasonability came his fourth star.

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The following day, Captain Abe reported to General Eisenhower.

“What have you got for me captain?”

“Not much new, general. We have swept the area several times, no other bodies found. The German E-boats run us out of there a few times.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Search one more day captain. Then if we don’t find our missing colonel I’ll declare him dead, body not recovered.

“Yes sir, we’ll do our best.”

“I would hate to think he is still alive out there, and we just have not found him, or worse yet the Germans captured him. With the deception plans in progress that would be very damaging. Operation Bodyguard has been in effect for several months now, I would hate to see all the effort we put into the plan destroyed.”

“I don’t think we need to worry about it, general.”

“Easy for you to say captain, I’m the Supreme Commanding General, its my responsibility.”

“I would hate to be in your shoes general.”

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Eisenhower smiles, lights a cigarette, “Well captain, that’s part of the job. Sometimes I wonder if I am in the right job. But I do know if Operation Bodyguard fails, we are in deep trouble.”

“Yes sir, I see what you mean.”

“Report to me in the next 24 hours,” Eisenhower said taking a seat behind his desk.

“Yes sir, will do.”

The captain saluted and disappeared out the door.

Eisenhower poured himself a cup of coffee and lit a cigarette. He blows out a long stream of smoke and said to himself, “Yes, it is my responsibility.”

The deception strategy code name Bodyguard, consisted of two parts; Operation Fortitude North and Fortitude South, with the aim of misleading the German high command as to the location of the imminent invasion.

Both Fortitude plans involved the creation of phantom field armies based in Edinburgh and the south of England, which threatened Norway with Fortitude

North and Pas de Calais with Fortitude South. The operation was intended to divert Axis attention away from Normandy.

Operation Bodyguard’s principle objective was to ensure the Germans would not increase troop presence

in Normandy by promoting the appearance that the Allied forces would attack in other locations.

The planning of Operation Fortitude came under the auspices of the London Controlling Section (LCS), a secret body set up to manage Allied deception strategy during the war. However, the execution of each plan fell to the various theatre commanders, in this case this was the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) under General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The LCS retained responsibility for what was called ‘Special Means’, the use of diplomatic channels and double agents.

The Fortitude South plan was produced in early January 1943 and aimed to counter the likelihood that the Germans would notice invasion preparations in the South of England. The intention was to create the impression that an invasion was aimed at the Pas de Calais. Once the real invasion had landed, six fictional divisions would keep this threat to Calais alive. The Fortitude South plan would be implemented, at an operational level, by the invasion force of the 21st Army Group under the command of General Bernard Montgomery.

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Fortitude South invented an entire new field army. The First United States Army Group (FUSAG) commanded by General George Patton was a skeleton formation formed for administrative purposes, but never used. However, the Germans had discovered its existence through radio intercepts, which convinced them that the invasion would come in the Pas de Calais area.

Fortitude South main aim was to present a threatening appearance of an invasion at Pas de Calais by the fictional 1st U.S. Army Group. France was the crux of the Bodyguard plan, as the most logical choice for an invasion, the Allied high command had to mislead the German defenses in a very small geographical area. The Pas de Calais offered a number of advantages over the chosen invasion site, such as the shortest crossing of the English Channel and the quickest route into Germany. As a result, German command took steps to heavily fortify that area of coastline. The Allies decided to amplify this belief of a Calais landing.

General Montgomery, commanding the Allied landing forces, knew that the crucial aspect of any invasion was the ability to enlarge a beachhead into a full front. He also had only limited divisions at his

command, 37 compared to around 60 German formations.

Another aim of Fortitude South was to give the impression of a much larger invasion force, the FUSAG forming in South-East England, to achieve tactical surprise in the Normandy landings and, once the invasion had occurred, to mislead the Germans into thinking it a diversionary tactic with Calais the real objective.

The Germans were allowed to construct a misleading order of battle for Allied forces. To mount a massive invasion of Europe from England, military planners had little choice but to stage units around the country with those that would land first nearest to the embarkation point. As a result of FUSAG's having been placed in the south-east, German intelligence would deduce that the center of the invasion force was opposite Calais, the point of the French closest to England and therefore a likely landing point.

To facilitate this deception, additional buildings were constructed; dummy aircraft and landing craft were placed around possible embarkation points. Patton paid many of these a visit along with a

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photographer. The Army encouraged the idea that these dummies were used to draw attention away from some of the other means of deception. Many of the dummies were rubber blow up kits of tanks, trucks, and other vehicles.

Fortitude North was designed to mislead the Germans into expecting an invasion of Norway. By threatening any weakened Norwegian defense, the Allies hoped to prevent or delay reinforcement of France following the Normandy invasion. The plan involved simulating a buildup of forces in northern England and political contact with Sweden.

A fictional Army, British Fourth Army, was created, headquartered in Edinburgh Castle. Unlike its Southern counterpart the deception relied primarily on 'Special Means' and fake radio traffic, since it was judged unlikely that German reconnaissance planes could reach Scotland unintercepted. False information about the arrival of troops in the area was reported by double agent Garbo. By broadcasting fake information, such as football scores, wedding announcements and nonexistent troops, Fortitude North was so successful that by late spring 1944, Hitler had thirteen army divisions in Norway.

For deceptions, the Allies had developed a number of methodologies, referred to as ‘Special Means’. They included combinations of physical deceptions, fake wireless activity, leaks through diplomatic channels, and double agents. Fortitude used all of these techniques to various extents. For example, Fortitude North relied heavily on wireless transmissions while Fortitude South utilized the Allies network of double agents.

Physical deception was designed to mislead the enemy with nonexistent units through fake infrastructure and equipment, such as dummy landing craft, dummy airfields, and decoy lighting.

Controlled leaks of information through diplomatic channels, which might be passed on via neutral countries to the Germans was also helpful.

Wireless traffic was used to mislead the enemy where wireless traffic was created to simulate actual units.

Use of German agents controlled by the Allies through the Double Cross System were utilized to send false information to the German intelligence services.

One of these agents Juan Pujol Garcia was a Spanish citizen who deliberately became a double

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agent against Germany. He relocated to England to carry out fictional spying activities for the Nazis, and was known by the British codename Garbo and the German codename Alaric Arabel.

Garcia had the distinction of receiving military decorations from both sides during the war, gaining both the Iron Cross from Germany and a Member of the Order of the British Empire from Britain.

Garcia decided to become a spy for the Allies and contacted the British and American intelligence agencies, but each rejected his offer.

Undeterred, he created a false identity as a fanatically pro-Nazi Spanish government official and successfully became a German agent. He was instructed to travel to England and recruit additional agents; instead he moved to Lisbon and created bogus reports from a variety of public sources.

Although the information would not have withstood close examination, Garcia soon established himself as a trustworthy agent. He began inventing fictional sub-agents who could be blamed for false information and mistakes.

The Allies finally accepted Garcia when the Germans spent considerable resources attempting to hunt down a fictional convoy. He moved to England and spent the rest of the war expanding the fictional

work, communicating at first by letter to the German handlers and later by radio. Eventually the Germans were funding a network of twenty-seven fictional agents.

Garcia had a key role in the success of Operation Fortitude, the deception operation intended to mislead the Germans about the timing and location of the invasion of Normandy. The false information Garcia supplied helped persuade the Germans that the main attack would be in the Pas de Calais, so that they kept a large force there to meet that attack.

Henry Walker woke in an early morning mist with the sea calm, moving the raft in a slow gentle way. He looked around through bleary eyes but with the mist and fog he could only see a few feet in front of the raft. He looked at his watch, it had stopped working so he took it off, attempted to wind the stem but as he pulled it out, it broke off. He put it up to his ear, there is no ticking. He throws the watch into the sea in disgust. "Damn cheap watch."

He sits and wonders how long he has been adrift, maybe as long as two days, but there is no real way to know for sure. He props himself on his knees and urinates over the side. He feels sick to his stomach but

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has no feeling to have a bowel movement, that might come later.

He feels for his wound on the side of his head, the dressing is still there but is now soaked mostly by seawater. He removes the dressing and feels the wound; it has stopped bleeding, so he decides to leave it open. There is about two inches of water in the bottom of the raft. He cupped a hand full of water and washed away the blood from the side of his face.

In one corner, he finds the emergency pack that contains food, canned water and signal flares. In one pouch, he finds a dry biscuit, and in another some bully beef, a field ration found in the British Army and not very popular. He takes a bite of the meat. "Not steak but what the hell, I'm hungry," he said to himself. He chews on the biscuit and makes a face and continues to eat. After eating the rations he opens one of the cans of water, drinks it down and throws the empty can in the sea. He makes a quick check on the other rations stored in the container. He estimates there is enough food and water there for at least another week, maybe even longer if he had to spread it out.

He moves back into the corner of the raft and examines his left foot and found his ankle swollen. He attempts to move his foot back and forth but pain stopped that.

He believes that the ankle is not broken; at least he hoped not, but was only a sprain, however it is painful.

He noticed in the first aid pack there is a small tube marked morphine tablets.

He finds them, takes one without water and sits back thinking of what happened with the exercise. What went wrong? How did the German E-boats find them so quick, and why didn't they have more protection from the British Navy?

His mind wanders to all those men in the water and on the landing crafts, "Did any survive, am I the only one?" He lays his head back and drifts off to asleep.

"Captain Abe is here to see you general," a voice said in the intercom.

"Send him in," replied Eisenhower.

Captain Abe marched in to find Eisenhower behind his desk, cigarette in hand with a pile of papers to work through. The captain saluted, "Good morning general."

"Good morning captain, take a seat. If you want some coffee, help yourself at the side bar."

"No thank you sir, already had several cups. You asked me to report to you about our disaster.

"Yes I did, and what have you to report?"

"I'm afraid not anything new general. We have searched for three days now and have recovered most

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of the dead. Some will never be recovered, inside the ships, which makes recovery impossible. Also we have recovered nine of the BIGOTs but the tenth is still missing.”

“That bothers me captain. No knowing what happened to him is of great concern to me. What if he survived and the Germans have him? They’ll squeeze information out of him to be sure. There is only so much torture a man can take before he breaks.”

“I understand your concern general but I doubt he is still alive. He probably went down in one of the ships, we will never know.”

“Your probably right captain but I am still uneasy about it. At any rate I’ll cut orders to declare him dead, body not recoverable.”

“How do we handle the families of the ones that died? We need to notify the families of how they died, a lot of letters to write.”

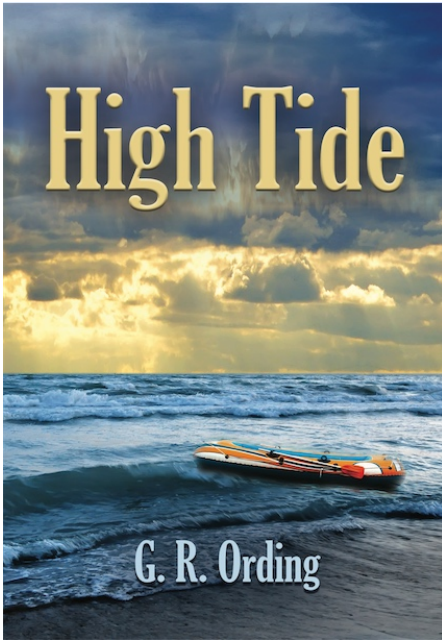
“This has been a top secret exercise captain. As you know, the survivors have been sworn to secrecy, we want to keep it that way. Letters will be sent out to the families after the invasion takes place. The families will be notified that their fathers and sons were killed during the invasion, fighting for their country. That’s how that will be handled. It is for the best interest of the Army to be handled in that manner.”

“Yes sir, I see.”

Eisenhower takes a sip of coffee, sits the cup down, “Any breach of the protocol by anyone will have serious consequences. I will court-marshal anyone who does not abide by my orders. Is that clear captain?”

“Yes sir, very clear.”

“Good then, return to your duties, you are dismissed.”



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