

*A U.S. Navy submarine captain and his crew fight their way across the Pacific in World War II.*

# **RIG FOR SILENT RUNNING**

by Anthony Genualdi

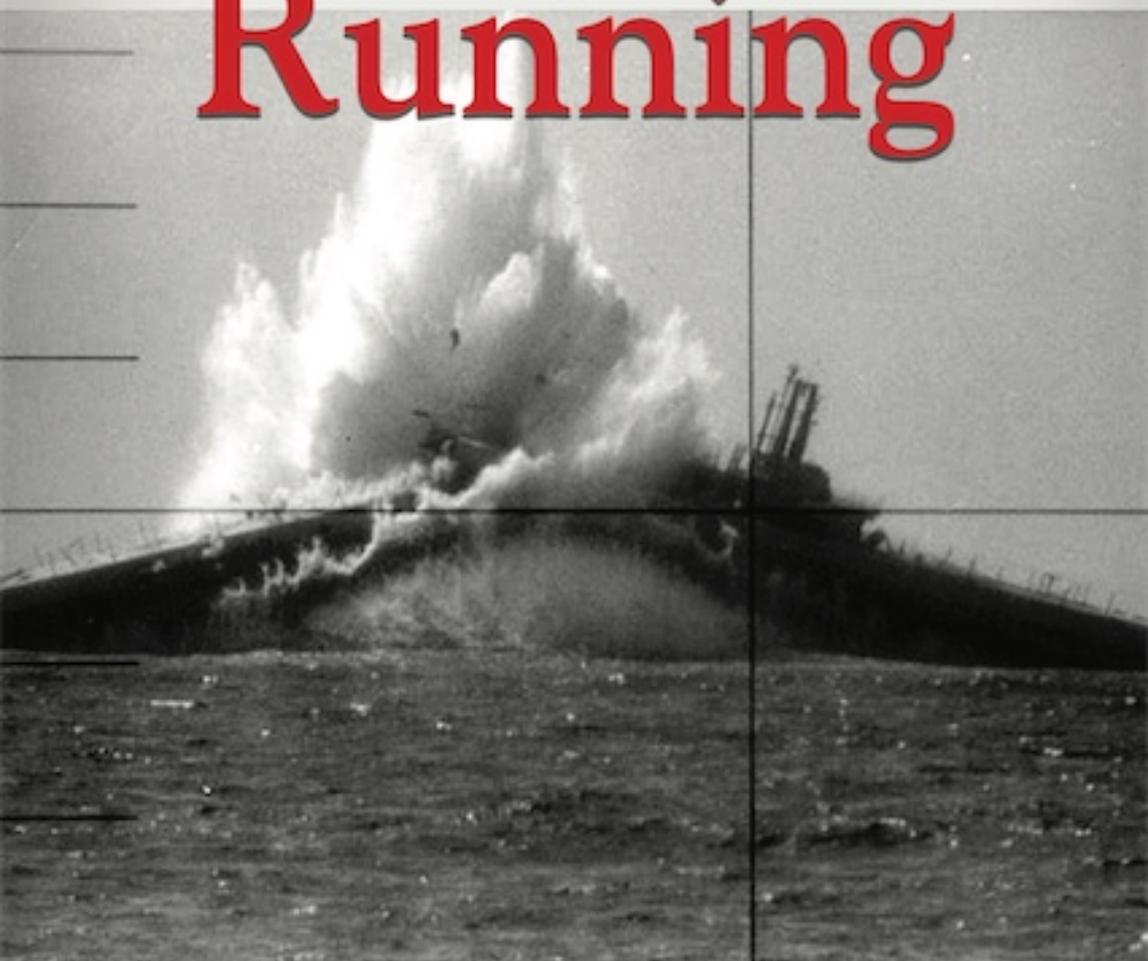
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SECOND EDITION

# Rig For Silent Running



Anthony Genualdi

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This book is a work of historical fiction. It mentions some incidents of World War II, and some real historical figures, but for the most part are changed to remove any resemblance to anyone living or dead.

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Second Edition

## CHAPTER ONE

### 15 AUGUST 1942

“Admiral, Commander Dominic Tomassi, commanding officer, U.S.S. *Eel*, reporting.”

Rear Admiral Lockhart nodded to Tomassi, and the sub commander lowered his hand. “At ease, Commander,” Lockhart said, “Have a seat.”

“Thank you, sir.” Tomassi removed his cap and sat down opposite his new commander, Commander, Submarines, Southwest Pacific (COMSUBSOWESPAC). The admiral’s office was in Perth, Australia, north of the American base at Fremantle, in the building of a life insurance company.

“Let’s hear about you, Tomassi. I mean, your record up to now with your boat.”

Tomassi took a breath, then proceeded. “Well, sir, the *Eel* was commissioned on December 1<sup>st</sup> of ‘41. We got underway the next day for Pearl. We were off of Florida when we heard about the attack on Pearl. Then we heard the following week about Germany going to war with us, and as we passed Cuba, one of our planes came after us, and we had to dive to avoid attack. We got to Panama about Christmas time, and after passing through the canal, went up to San Diego to fuel up. We got to Pearl a week after New Year’s.

“We went out on a patrol about a week later. We were sent to Hokkaido about mid-January, and we got there at the end of the month. We sighted a couple

of freighters and fired at them, with no hits, and we got depth charged a couple of times. Our luck finally was good when, at the end of February, just before leaving the area, we sank an oil tanker with our torpedoes. She looked kind of small, so I set the torpedoes for a shallow run, and that seemed to do it. We went back to Pearl and got there, oh, about the end of April.

“After we got back to Pearl, we were sent at the end of May to patrol near Midway. We were part of the line of subs that was southeast of the island, between there and Hawaii. We didn’t see a damn thing, of course. We heard about how our guys did on the radio, then we came home. We set out for here at the end of June. We were sent to patrol near Truk We spotted some merchant shipping and went after them, producing a hit on a freighter, but I only claim damage, since we had to go under right away to avoid attack. We later sank a sub chaser and shot down a Jap plane that was coming after us. I also managed to get a shot at *Luzon Maru #4*.”

“The ex-whaling ship?”

“Yes, sir. As you know, sir, she’s now a tanker. Some 15,500 tons. I know I got a good shot with two torpedoes, but our sound reported them hitting the target without exploding.”

“Damn,” Lockhart said.

Tomassi nodded, “I said something to that effect, sir.” Both men laughed.

“How much longer did you spend at Truk?”

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“We were on patrol there for some twenty-five days, sir. Then we made the run here and arrived this morning. I came over as soon as I was presentable. I know whiskers are against regulations.”

Lockhart nodded, “So they are. Well, what does that make altogether for your kills?”

Tomassi dropped his head for a moment, then said, “Well, sir, that would be two sunk and one damaged. The tanker off Japan was some 4,000 tons, and the sub chaser off Truk was some 300 tons, plus one patrol plane.”

Lockhart was silent for a moment. “I suppose you’re expecting a lecture now on fighting spirit and knowing how to handle your torpedoes.”

Tomassi nodded, “Yes, sir.”

“Well, put your mind at ease, Tomassi. While you were at Truk, we were conducting some experiments with the Mark 14 torpedo down at Albany. We find they’re running eleven feet deeper than set. Try to remember that when you go out. We have skippers also reporting about duds and premature explosions. We’re still working to correct all of that.

“Meanwhile, your boat is going to get a good going over here. She’ll be ready in two weeks to go out again. Your crew will have their liberty here in Fremantle. By the beginning of September, you’ll be back out at sea. Tell me about your exec.”

“That would be Lt. Commander Davis Van Wert. He’s a good man, and he’s helped me keep the *Eel* running smooth.”

“Would he be fit to take a command now?”

“No, sir, I don’t think he would be good now. We’ve only had three patrols. I think I would give him a little longer.”

“All right, Tomassi. You enjoy your leave. I have four hotels around town leased for our guys, including two on the ocean. I’ll send a runner with the name of the hotel you and your men will go to.”

“Thank you, sir. Um, also, I was wondering, and the men were too, about, um, female companionship. I mean, I’ve heard Aussie women are real friendly.”

“Oh, I’d ask the staff of the hotel if I were you. They could steer you to, um, *those* kind of girls.”

“Thank you, Admiral. The boys will be happy. They’ve only had each other to look at for months.”

“You’re welcome, Tomassi. Dismissed.”

Tomassi stood up, put his cap on, and saluted. He stepped aside, did an about face, and left the office.

The driver who had brought him to the office now took Tomassi back across Perth harbor into Fremantle. They passed along the south edge of the big harbor, through Alfred Cove and Palmyra, past the Royal Fremantle Golf Club, and on to the gate of the base. They passed up the other boats docked alongside and went down to the submarine tender U.S.S. *Pisces*. The *Eel* was alongside her, away from the dock.

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Tomassi got permission to come aboard the *Pisces*, crossed over the tender, then went down the gangway to the *Eel*.

As he went down, Tomassi looked over his boat. The *Eel* was one of the *Gato* class. She was a little over 300 feet long, some 27 feet wide at the conning tower, and had a draft of 15 feet. She had ten torpedo tubes, four at the stern and six at the bow. She also had two 20mm guns, fore and aft on the conning tower, and a 3 inch gun mounted forward. Tomassi smiled at this, since he'd seen boats with their deck gun mounted aft, and thought it silly, since it meant showing one's stern to the enemy to use the gun.

Her paint job could best be described as a sort of blackish gray. She had started out from New London painted black and got a gray paint job at Pearl before going on her third patrol. It didn't help with trying to hide in clear, shallow water.

As he got to the bottom of the gangway, a voice came from the bridge of the *Eel*. "Skipper?"

"Request permission to come aboard."

"Permission granted, sir." It was Van Wert, the exec. Tomassi snapped a salute toward the ensign, and turned to Van Wert.

"Well, Van," he said, "the admiral seems like an OK Joe."

"That's good."

As Tomassi climbed up the side of the conning tower to get to the bridge, he said, "Admiral Lockhart has four hotels locked up in town, and two along a

beach. He's sending a runner later to tell us where we can have our liberty."

"Great, skipper. The men should be happy with that. They've been asking me about liberty."

As they headed below, Van Wert said, "I should tell you, skipper that the tender said they don't have enough torpedoes for us, and we might have to go out with mines."

Tomassi shook his head, "Lovely. Not enough torpedoes, and what they do have run too deep."

"Where'd you hear that, sir?"

"From the admiral. He told me they were testing torpedoes down south, at Albany. They run eleven feet deeper than set."

"Oh. And what about the duds we got when we went after *Luzon Maru*?"

"They're still working on that." Presently, the two men got to Tomassi's cabin. "Well, Van, this would be the time to write your folks and let them know you're OK."

"Yes, sir."

"Is your dad still sore at you for actually going to sea?"

"A little, sir. He wanted me to stay home, at least at the Navy Department, instead of going into action."

"He figured your place was at the Waldorf?"

"Yes, sir." Van Wert grinned a little. "I guess he figured only the little people should fight. But I said I wanted to go to Annapolis. He knew he couldn't talk me out of it. He tried to pull some strings to keep

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me in Washington, but I got around it, and went to the subs.”

“Good for you.”

“Thanks, skipper.

“I’m going to turn in, Van. Let me know when that runner gets here.”

“Yes, skipper”

“Very well.” Tomassi went into his cabin and lay down for a rest.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 16 AUGUST 1942

Tomassi had gotten directions from the desk clerk at the hotel where the crew of the *Eel* was staying to Roe Street in Perth. This was the place with *those* girls. Not every house had a red light in the window, and the clerk had told Tomassi that some of the houses were home to various “reform” minded types who would probably tell him to not go into a “house of sin.” But, Tomassi hadn’t been with a woman since shoving off from New London, and that was more than nine months ago. He felt he needed this.

He walked up the steps of the third house from the corner. The man at the hotel told him this was a really good house, with many passionate women who would give him a great time. He knocked on the door. An older woman opened it.

“Yes.”

“Hello, madam. A fellow at the hotel told me about this place and said something about Fiona.”

She nodded, “Yes, Fiona always comes highly recommended. Tim rang me up about you. Come on in, Yank.”

Tomassi removed his cap as he entered the parlor. “Make yourself at home,” the madam said, “I’ll go get her.” Everything was done in red velvet. Even the walls were velvet. Tomassi sat down and noticed a young Chinese woman, about seventeen or

eighteen years old. She had long, shiny black hair, a red corset, and fishnet stockings, with black high heeled shoes. She looked at him, and after a moment, Tomassi smiled at her. She managed a weak smile in return. No use being quiet, he thought.

“Hello.”

She managed a nod and a soft “hello” in return.

“How are you?”

“All right, Yank. You here for good time, yes?”

“Yes. A fellow named Tim at the hotel told me about Fiona.”

“Oh, yes,” the Chinese girl nodded, “Everyone like Fiona. She is ...a real tomato. That what you Yanks say?”

“Yeah, that’s what we say.”

She smiled. “All right, Yank.”

Presently, the madam showed up with a stunning specimen of femininity. “Here’s Fiona, Yank.”

“Oh, my,” Tomassi said as he stood to shake Fiona’s hand. Fiona was about five-feet-eight, with long red hair, green eyes, and freckles. She had on a green bustier, green panties, black stockings, and a black feather boa.

“Pleased to meet you, Yank.”

“It’s Dom. Whaddaya say?”

“Dom?”

“Short for Dominic.”

“Are you Italian?”

“Italian from Chicago, that’s me.”

Fiona looked over to the Chinese girl. “So, you’ve met ‘Silly Lily?’”

Tomassi looked over. “Is that your name?”

Lily smiled and nodded.

The madam said, “OK, Yank, it’s thirty pounds.”

Tomassi looked at her. “I’m afraid I didn’t get a chance to change money. How much is that in greenbacks?”

“What?”

“In dollars, Ruthie,” Fiona said.

“Oh, well, you got thirty dollars?”

Tomassi looked in his wallet. “I sure do.” He handed the money over to Ruthie. “Have fun, you two.”

Fiona took Tomassi’s hand and said, “Come with me, love.” They went upstairs and went into the first room on the right.

As Tomassi undressed, Fiona asked, “So, Dom, what are you up to tonight?”

“It’s my birthday.”

“Oh, really, love? Well, many happy returns. How many is this?”

“I’m thirty-five today.”

Fiona smiled as she lay down on the bed, tossing off her shoes and dropping her boa on the floor. “You’ll want to unwrap your present, then?”

Tomassi smiled, “Nice pretty present. But like all presents, nicer when it’s unwrapped, and you play with it.”

Fiona laughed. "Good one, Dom."

Now that he had undressed, Tomassi got on the bed with Fiona and did the unwrapping. The zipper for the bustier ran down the back, so he reached around and slowly pulled it down, to reveal Fiona's full, creamy breasts. He planted a kiss in her cleavage, then pulled down her panties. He kissed her neck while he pumped her. For her part, Fiona wrapped her left leg around Tomassi's waist, and moaned with delight.

After the big moment, Tomassi kissed Fiona's cheek and said, "Thank you, doll."

"Oh, you're welcome love."

He kept his arms around her and asked, "Can we talk a minute?"

"Sure, love."

"The Chinese girl, Lily."

"Silly Lily?"

"Yeah."

"What about her?"

"What's her story?"

Fiona thought for a moment, "Well, Ruthie brought her from China in '39. She's been here ever since."

"Really?"

"Don't you trust her?"

"Well," Tomassi said, "if servicemen come in, and they go with her, how do we know she's not a Jap?"

"Oh, no, Dom. Ruthie brought her. We can trust her."

“How do I know Ruthie isn’t a German spy?”

“No, love, nothing like that. I mean, I see why you’d say that. But, no. Ruthie’s family is from England. All solid and loyal.”

“The cops have checked on this?”

“The closest the law has touched us, was, I guess, last year, when the Manpower Inquiry came to see if there was anyone who could be released for war work. They asked Ruthie what she did, and she told them, ‘Essential labor, madam of a brothel,’ and they left her, and us, alone since.”

Tomassi smiled at this. “All right! That’s what I love about you Aussies; you just come out and tell it like it is.

Fiona smiled, “We are a straightforward people.”

“Still, I’m not comfortable about Lily.”

“What would you do?”

“Promise not to tell Ruthie?”

“I promise.”

“I’ll tell my guys about this place, and I’ll tell them to give Lily a wide berth.”

Fiona nodded, “I understand, and I promise not to tell Ruthie.”

“That’s a good girl.” Tomassi kissed her cheek again and got up to get dressed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *30 AUGUST 1942*

Dominic Tomassi didn't like to sit in his cabin and have his division chiefs come tell him they were ready for sea. He always felt it was better to come and look for himself.

He started, logically enough, with the after torpedo room and worked his way forward. On this day, Tomassi would see the Mark 12, Model 3 naval mines that were in the stern of his boat. The Chief Torpedoman's Mate, Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Barker, was there to supervise the handling of these mines.

"Hello, sir," Barker said.

"Hello, Chief." Tomassi glared at the cylindrical mines. "Do you have some loaded already, Chief?"

"No, sir, we were about to, though."

Tomassi looked at the mines for a moment. He'd had to give up carrying six torpedoes aft to make room for twenty-two of these evil eggs. "So, Chief, this means we only have two torpedoes for loading once the mines are all deployed?"

"Aye, sir."

Tomassi shook his head. "Oh, well. Proceed, Chief."

"Aye, sir. All right, you guys, load 'em up." The torpedo men loaded four of the eight and one-half foot long mines into the tubes and sealed them.

“Very well, Chief. The quicker we get rid of these, the happier we all will be.”

“Except the Japs, right sir?”

Tomassi laughed, “Right, Chief. Carry on.”

“Aye, sir.”

Tomassi moved forward into the motor room, and then to the after engine room. Here was the Chief Engineman’s Mate, CPO Grace. The ribbing he took for having a girl’s name for a last name gave Chief Grace a quick tongue, but Tomassi never had to worry about it, for he knew Grace was the best at keeping the four diesels humming along.

“Hi, Chief.”

“Hello, captain.”

“Everything ready here for sea?”

“Aye, sir. Full allowance of fuel on board. Got all the spare parts we needed, too. We’re ready for sea, sir.”

“Very well, Chief. Carry on.”

“Aye, sir.”

Tomassi proceeded through the forward engine room, and into the crew quarters. Some of the men were relaxing with a poker game. One of them, Engineman Bellows, saw him and called, “Attention on deck.”

“As you were. Is ‘Doc’ here?”

“Aye, sir. He’s up there.” Bellows pointed to an upper bunk on the starboard side. Tomassi looked up. “Doc?”

Pharmacist’s Mate Matos, a Filipino, poked his head over the lip of his bunk. “Yes, sir?”

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“Just seeing where you were, Doc. Get all the supplies from the tender you needed?”

“Aye, sir,” Matos smiled. He had a great bedside manner, which made him perfect for his job. He may not have been a doctor, more like a medic, able to patch guys up without major work, but he’d make a great doctor one day.

“That’s all. Carry on, men.”

“Thank you, sir,” Bellows replied.

Next on the list was the galley. “Cookie?”

The cook, Daniels, answered, “Yes, sir?”

“All ready for sea?”

“Aye, sir. Got plenty of steaks, and chops, and veggies. We’ve got milk, too, whole and canned.”

“I look forward to the whole milk.”

“Enjoy it while it lasts, sir.”

“OK, Cookie, carry on.”

“Aye, sir.”

Forward of the galley was the radio room. “Sparks?”

The radio man, Boudreaux, answered with his Cajun drawl, “Aye, sir?”

“Ready for sea, Sparks?”

“Aye, sir. We got them new vacuum tubes in, and I can get any station you want. I guarantee.”

“OK, Sparks. Carry on.”

“Aye, sir.”

Tomassi now went into the control room, where the sub could be made to maneuver underwater. He found Lieutenant (j.g.) Beck, the diving officer. “Mister Beck?”

“Aye, sir.”

“Are you all squared away?”

“Yes, sir. The repair crew did a great job with fixing those stern plane controls. No problems getting her down now.”

“Great. Carry on.”

“Aye, sir.”

Tomassi now passed forward through officer’s country to get to the forward torpedo room. He entered the compartment just as the six tubes were being loaded. Torpedoman’s Mate Marino saw him.

“Marino.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Loading up, I see.”

“Aye, sir, just loading up.”

“Got all the fish we need?”

“Aye, sir. Full allowance.”

“OK, carry on.”

“Aye, sir.”

Tomassi turned back into the officer’s quarters section of the boat when he came across Van Wert. “Van?”

“Aye, sir?”

“Do you have anything to report?”

“Aye, sir. We have a full load of ammo for the three-inch gun, all of which is stowed under the deck plates near the gun. We have a full load of 20mm ammo in the magazine, as well as .50-caliber ammo, and pistol ammo for the .45's and the two Tommy Guns, plus a crate of ammo for the carbine.”

Tomassi shook his head. "That silly M1 Carbine. I don't know how they expect us to repel boarders with a carbine."

"Maybe we can throw it at them, skipper."

"That's the only way it could hurt them."

Van Wert smiled, "Yes, sir."

"Let's call the crew to quarters."

"Aye, sir." Both men proceeded to the conning tower. Van Wert got on the "squawk box," which was the PA system for the boat. One could address the whole crew, or only certain compartments, with a turn of the dial. Van Wert turned the dial to address all of the boat. "Crew, to your quarters. On the double."

Tomassi and Van Wert went out the hatch on the starboard side and went to the foredeck. The men and officers assembled as fast as they could. After a couple of minutes, the fifty-eight men and officers were on deck, and at attention. With the captain and exec standing in front of them, this made the whole ship's complement.

Van Wert turned to Tomassi and saluted. "Ship's company, U.S.S. *Eel*, all present and accounted for, sir."

Tomassi returned the salute. "Very well. When the men are dismissed, have the special sea section at their stations and prepare the ship to get underway."

"Aye, aye, sir." Van Wert saluted and Tomassi returned it. Van Wert did an about face and said, "Leave your quarters. Special sea section to your

stations on the double. All hands prepare to get underway.”

The men started below. Those who were to take in the lines went to their stations, and Tomassi and Van Wert went to the bridge.

Within half-an-hour, the *Eel* was ready to depart. Chief Barker informed the officers on the bridge, “All hands ready for departure. All connections with the tender are removed except mooring lines.”

“Very well, Chief,” Tomassi said. He turned to his exec, “Van, take her out.”

“Aye, skipper.” Van Wert cupped his hand to his mouth and yelled, first forward, then aft, “Take in two. Take in three.” The men at their lines obeyed him and took in their lines. Tomassi looked up to the tender and motioned for them to haul up the gangway, which they did. An ensign on the deck of the *Pisces* saluted and waved. Tomassi returned the salute and waved back.

“Take in four,” Van Wert yelled aft, whereupon the men on the stern mooring line took it in. He turned to the bow and yelled, “Take in one.” The men at the bow line took it in from the tender. Van Wert then turned to the squawk box and said, “Helm, left ten degrees rudder.”

“Helm, left ten degrees rudder, aye,” came the answer from the quartermaster.

“Very well. Engine room, starboard ahead one-third.”

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“Starboard ahead one-third, aye,” came the answer. The starboard engines came on and moved the boat away along with the turn of the rudder. After a moment, Van Wert said, “Engine room, port ahead one-third.”

“Port ahead one-third, aye.” Now the stern of the sub bubbled up fully as both screws turned to get the boat on her way.

“Helm, rudder amidships,” said Van Wert.

“Helm, rudder amidships, aye,” came the answer.

While this was happening, Lieutenant Odom, who was the Officer of the Deck (OOD), came up. Tomassi turned and acknowledged him, “Mr. Odom. Good to see you.”

“Aye, sir,” came the nervous reply.

“This is only your second patrol, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, this will get to be old hat soon enough.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You have the con, Mr. Odom.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Van, let’s get below. I have something to show you.”

“Aye, sir,” Van Wert replied. The two of them went down the conning tower hatch, then down to the control room, where the chart table was laid out.

“We’re going up the coast to top off our tanks,” Tomassi said. He bent over and pointed to a spot up the coast from Fremantle. “Two days up the coast, we’re going to reach Exmouth Gulf. Admiral

Lockhart told me before we shoved off about a new base we're establishing there. The code name of it is 'Potshot.'"

"OK, skipper."

"It'll be like Midway."

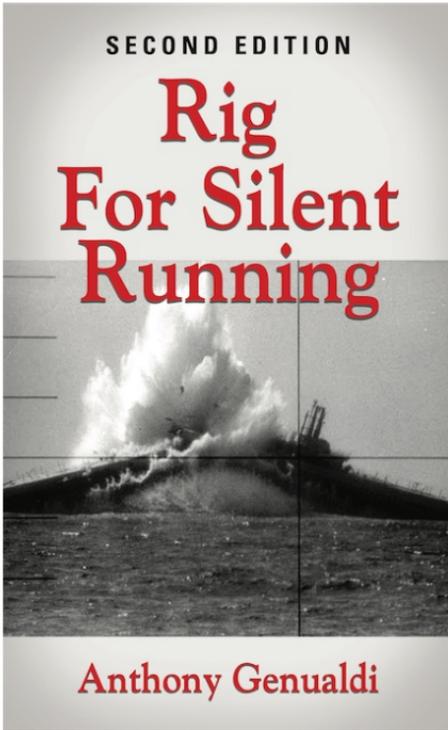
"Nice," Van Wert smiled.

"Well, not really. It'll be like Midway in that we'll be able to get fuel, and, the admiral hopes, one day we could have a tender there to give us torpedoes as well. Right now, there's only a dumb barge they towed up there with fuel in it."

"So, not really like Midway."

"Nope," Tomassi said. "Not like Midway. No bowling alley. No gooney birds. And –" he said as he straightened up, "– no beer."

Van Wert frowned at this.



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