

## One: Patton Must Die

### *The High Atlas of French Morocco, December 14, 1942*

**T**he wild boar stumbled sideways, plowed through brush, rolled in the dust and lay still. A perfect head shot—and the Axis agent code-named Sirocco was just warming up. Ignoring the other charging tuskers, he swung his carbine and took dead aim at the man leaning out of the neighboring shooting stand, blasting away with an M-1.

The man was General George S. Patton, Jr.

If Sirocco hesitated ever so slightly, it was not out of any want of resolve. It was out of deference to the moment. The Allies' greatest fighting general was about to be removed from the global chessboard—with a twitch of Sirocco's finger. The moment after, Sirocco would swallow a cyanide capsule—to escape the prolonged Allied interrogation that would precede his execution.

Sweat was breaking all over his body—stinging his eyes, bathing his sides, slicking his palms and wrist and forearm. He had come to the defining moment of an incredible life. He let go and wiped his trigger hand down his white tunic, brushing over the Iron Cross concealed underneath, then carefully regripped. The target was still there. Sirocco focused on the chestful of gleaming medals, held his breath, tightened his forefinger ever so slowly...

Someone clapped him on the shoulder. Sirocco exhaled explosively, let go the trigger, twisted around.

A tall native in a twisted indigo turban now stood immediately behind him, having come silently up the ladder into the elevated blind of woven brush. Everything about the young man was stained indigo—his garments, his dagger-goateed face, his spatulate-fingered hands. The tuareg betrayed no expression, but those desert-keen eyes had missed nothing, Sirocco knew.

What was Khalid doing here, in the Pasha of Marrakesh's mountain game preserve?

Sirocco pulled cotton stuffing out of his ears. The Blue Man bent near: "A message from Cousin Jules."

*Berlin!* "What is it, Khalid?"

“We must return to Casa, *mon colonel*. I will tell you why in the car.”

“Tell me here. No one can possibly hear us.”

Down the line of shooting stands men were blazing away. Over this barrage came the shouts of Berber beaters and the death squeals of wild pigs.

“Jadot!” Patton’s bellow was louder yet. “You’re missing some damn fine shooting!”

“An urgent matter, *général*.” It was as Colonel Achille Jadot of the French Forces of North Africa that Sirocco shouted back. Then, in a fierce whisper to Khalid: “It had better be urgent.”

“I drove all night, *mon colonel*.” Again Khalid put his lips to Sirocco’s ear: “It concerns the Allied conference—”

“In Washington? Is that all? I saw that intercept two days ago.”

“No, *mon colonel*. The conference will be here in Morocco.” The tuareg quickly explained there had been an error in translation, rendering Casa Blanca literally as White House instead of leaving it in the original Spanish.

“You are certain of this, Khalid?”

“Yes.”

The gunfire seemed suddenly to recede. *An Allied summit in Casa meant Churchill, Roosevelt, and a flock of enemy commanders, all gathered in Sirocco’s own back yard.* If Berlin was right, with one glorious stroke Sirocco could turn the tide of war back in favor of the Reich!

The noise of the fusillade roared back around him. Wild boars poured down the hillside in a bristling, black tide. Out of the corner of his eye Sirocco saw Patton back in business, working the bolt action of his M-1, the twin stars on his overseas cap flashing back the early sun.

But even *le grand Patton* was small game now. Sirocco handed his carbine to Khalid, then removed the poison capsule from a cavity in a false tooth.



## Two: Return to Casa

**A**chille Jadot urged Khalid to push the Delage touring car to its limits. Marrakesh lay a hundred twenty-five kilometers below, at the foot of the High Atlas. That meant two and a half hours careening down the Tiz 'n' Tichka Pass, an old camel caravan route paved by the Foreign Legion. To reach Casablanca would take an additional three hours—a straight shot across two hundred forty kilometers of lunar landscape.

“Calm yourself, *mon colonel*.” The Blue Man sounded his horn at a pack-saddled donkey that had swayed into the road ahead. “The message from Jules is not due until nine-thirty. You will arrive with time to spare.”

“I’m not worried, Khalid. I have full confidence in you.”

“I thought so—until today.”

Jadot realized at once his mistake. He had inadvertently hurt his most loyal friend. It was so easy to forget the vulnerable nature that lay hidden beneath those fierce, ascetic features and hooded blue headcloth. For just an instant Jadot glimpsed Khalid as he had first appeared all those years ago, an emaciated child wandering helplessly in the desert...

Jadot had been twenty-six, two years out of St. Cyr and already a full lieutenant. He had been on special assignment, inspecting a line of Foreign Legion outposts on the edge of the Western Sahara.

On that particular day, following an unpaved track toward the little market town of Goulimine, Jadot had driven past a naked teenage boy staggering across the flanking dunes. Jadot had stopped and backed his Hotchkiss patrol car, then climbed out into the furnace heat. The youth seemed to be staring wide-eyed—at a mirage, perhaps; or at evil spirits, the omnipresent *jnoun*; or perhaps at nothing at all.

When his greeting got no response, Jadot moved closer. The boy lurched toward him, then past, all without a glance. With his indigo-stained skin, the youth was of the local tuareg tribe known as the Blue Men. Jadot turned to follow. The naked youth began shuffling in circles and kept doing so until Jadot wrestled him to the sands.

As strange as such behavior might be, it was not unfamiliar to Lieutenant Jadot. During his years in the Legion he'd witnessed many episodes of derangement. He had seen a veteran trade his rifle for a liter of red wine; a rookie drain his water bottle into the sands, then bayonet a vein and drink his own blood. Barrack suicides and murders were common; in penal battalions they were epidemic. Men had been known to strip and march naked toward the burning horizon, never to be seen again.

Among Legionnaires, all these dementia were blamed on *le cafard*, a black desert beetle believed to crawl into one's ears and burrow into one's brains. Doctors tended to diagnose advanced syphilis, tropical madness, tortured nerves or emotional trauma. Whatever the cause, only alcohol and malaria killed more of the Legion's soldiers; enemy bullets were far down the list. Yet never before had Jadot seen such disorientation in a desert-dweller like this handsome young nomad writhing beneath him.

It took a quarter-hour of exhausting physical restraint and all the soothing words Jadot could summon in three languages to calm the boy enough to take water from a canteen. Finally Jadot had him wrapped loosely in a ground sheet and seated quietly in the patrol car. Inquiries led to the local tuareg chief. On sight of this imposing figure striding toward them in the indigo-dyed robes and burnoose of his tribe, the youth became extremely agitated and had to subdued all over again.

Jadot could learn nothing from the tuareg chieftain beyond the boy's name, Khalid Yassat, his age, fifteen, that he had been orphaned at an early age and looked after subsequently by various uncles. As to what had caused the derangement, the chieftain showed no concern.

"He ran away," was the offhand explanation, "and the desert made him crazy. He has done this before."

Jadot suspected that the elder knew more than he was telling, and that young Khalid had been abused in some way. On impulse, Jadot had asked to take the boy back to Agadir for medical attention. He had expected to argue his case, but the chieftain, after a bit of beard-stroking and a hasty consult with one of the uncles standing nearby, gestured acquiescence.

On the journey to Agadir, Khalid had been at first unresponsive. But when they transitioned to a good macadam road, and Jadot had stepped suddenly on the gas, the youth began grinning from ear to ear, his lean face ecstatic in the windrush from the open window.

In all the years since, Jadot had never been able to learn what demons haunted the boy that day, but he suspected they had never really gone away. Khalid did not wish to return to the desert, yet he had retained his tribal identity. And, like many city-dwelling tuaregs with whom Khalid consorted in his free time, the youth kept a kif pipe handy and would brood over it for hours on end. Coming upon Khalid at such times, Jadot would sometimes see the same limitless stare as on their first encounter on the road to Goulimine.

“Why didn't you trust me with your plans, Achille?” Khalid asked now without taking his eyes off the sharply winding road.

“I was afraid you would try and stop me. And you did, Khalid.” Jadot paused. “And I thank you for it, as it turns out.”

Khalid said nothing more all the way down the mountain. *I must not hurt him in this way again*, thought Jadot.

But this stab of regret could not dispel Jadot's pervading sense of euphoria—and unreality. Here he was, against all odds, still among the living, breathing the onrushing air, his heart pounding, his brain thinking wild thoughts. It was incredible! The killshot had been right there, his for the taking. Khalid had not only saved his life—and Patton's, of course—but given Jadot something more to live for. The “Great Game” would go on—greater than before. If the intercept was correct, Sirocco was about to be handed the espionage assignment of his life—perhaps of the entire war.

Having just dived with death, Jadot was unafraid, despite the vastness of the undertaking. As Sirocco, the colonel had been

involved in major undercover operations; his part in *l'affaire Béthouart* on the eve of the Allied invasion had earned commendation from Berlin. Yet even that could not compare with spying on an Allied summit. And never had Jadot felt so naked to his enemies as now, with American forces all over Morocco.

How deceptive appearances were. The Vichy colonel had his villa on Casablanca's fashionable Corniche, rode about in his chauffeured touring car, served Morocco's French Resident General, Albert Noguès.

But as Axis agent Sirocco, Achille Jadot operated alone—except for Khalid and a handful of others.

For the last five weeks, ever since the German Armistice Commission had packed and fled as Patton's Western Task Force hit the beaches, Jadot had been a lone wolf, knowing himself intensely hunted.

Especially by one man, a young American named Paradine.

If Berlin ordered a full-scale operation against the secret Allied summit, thought Jadot, as the Delage barreled down the mountain, Patton could live yet awhile. But Martin Paradine would have to die.

