



very warm and dangerous and lovely, and you can expect hell to break loose. Another kite was warming up outside the hangar. We strolled over to her. The C.F.I. was going to take rations out to be dropped for the boys, and as we got close to her I felt suddenly that I had to go out again and see the raft and the one bloke on it who waved to us. There wasn't any fuss about getting on board; when the Huddy rolled up the runway I was on her, and I sat staring at the plains and then at the sea till the raft was sighted and we went over again.

The sea was running savagely. The raft came up on the crests and slid and went down into them and came up again and hurled on again and back and down and up. I sat and watched them. The rations were dropped, but there was no show of the boys getting them. The tide swept them away, and we watched them go. The bloke below waved wearily. He must have been very tired then and probably still hoping. It was very personal to him, where for me it had become almost a problem that had to be argued out and an answer found, just the way a theorem has to be proved. You take a statement or an axiom and there are certain conditions and you consider certain factors, and then at the end there is a new conclusion. In this case, certain lives or deaths that actually didn't mean much in the mass of strategy but did mean a hell of a lot to particular people.

And we are people, not mechanics and numbers.

So we couldn't do anything that mattered immediately. The kite went over them and we looked down at them, and maybe they looked up at us, and the distance between them and between us was greater than any distance had ever been. It was the distance of the sea, which is impersonal though moody and powerful. After a time we went away.

The sunset that night was nothing more than an angry flash on cloud. Going down to the mess in the last of the evening I saw the bare branches of the trees swirling

forward and striking back from the wind. The air was cold then and much colder later. Rain fell, and close on midnight the gale slammed straight across the field to the barracks. The mess was quiet that night. The chaps went off to bed early. Few of them wanted to talk, and those who stayed sat quietly. Steve and I played a game of billiards and Lin stood round, and then we finished off for the night.

We were out again early the next morning. The wind had dropped, so the kite could be sent out. All the night I had dreamed of the running sea and the loneliness of that raft and the great curl of breakers that used to come in on the coast where I was a kid. After the gale no one expected to see those boys, but the plane went out to make sure that they had gone. But the raft was still floating and the boys were still on it.

The boats in the nearest port couldn't get out to them. The sea was sweeping straight into the bay and there was nothing at the wharf of any size big enough to risk the weather. The surf pounds heavily on some of those parts and the boats couldn't get to them. The only coastal ship was too far away to get near them. Those boys had everything stacked against them.

The only chance left was pretty thin, but arrangements were made during the night in case the raft was spotted in the morning. Five or six fellows with life-