Chapter 1 of:
An Indestructible Mountie

Adventures of the First Woman Mountie

Book 3

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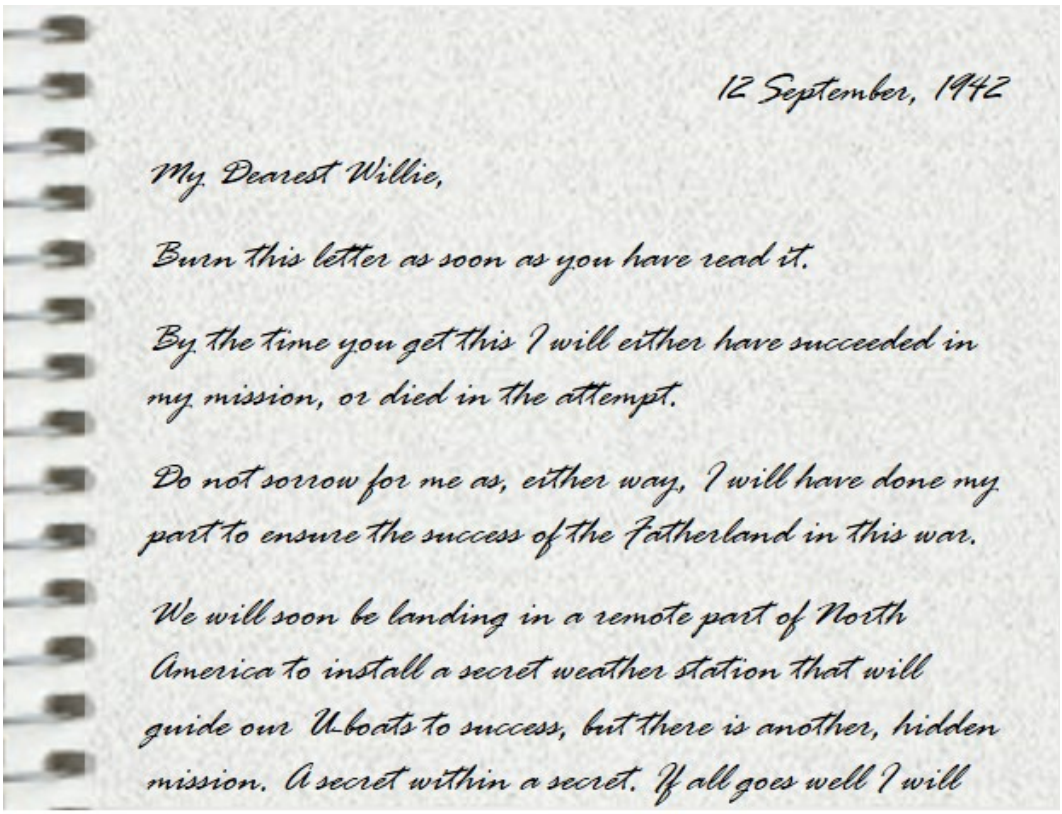
LAURIE SCHRAMM

This is a work of historical fiction, set in the mid-1970s. Although most of the historical references are accurate, a few are not, and names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.


12 September, 1942

My Dearest Willie,

Burn this letter as soon as you have read it.

By the time you get this I will either have succeeded in my mission, or died in the attempt.

Do not sorrow for me as, either way, I will have done my part to ensure the success of the Fatherland in this war.

We will soon be landing in a remote part of North America to install a secret weather station that will guide our U-boats to success, but there is another, hidden mission. A secret within a secret. If all goes well I will

CHAPTER 1. FIRST PRELUDE: 1942

October 25, 1942

Max Lichte (the Englishers always pronounced it, incorrectly, as 'Lite') was standing on the bridge, looking out at the rocky cliffs that could just barely be seen through the thick fog and low-hanging clouds. Everything looked cold, and grey, and barren. "What brought people to such a forbidding place?" he wondered. As a teenager, he had visited North American cities like New York and Montreal and had arrived by steamship in a civilized fashion. This was something completely different.

The first thing he'd noticed had been the fog and clouds, which blanketed the churning sea down below. The second thing was the rock. Now and then a bit of fog, or cloud, or both, cleared providing a glimpse of a wall of rock rising vertically up from the crashing waves on the shore. He knew from his briefing that there was a bit of beach there – somewhere - and a way to climb up the rocky cliff, but at the moment he could see neither, making the cliff appear forbidding and unassailable.

The third and fourth things he noticed simultaneously. One was the cold. It wasn't just the cold, or the wind, it was the dampness in the cold and the wind. Dampness that seemed to penetrate through his parka and uniform clothes. The other thing was the pitching and rolling. Although it was a great relief and privilege to be granted a few minutes on the bridge, breathing in the fresh air, the damp cold exacted a heavy price.

Unlike the relative luxury of his previous trips on ocean liners to this continent, this trip, which had been on a U-boat, had been miserable. U-687 was one of the newest submarines. Referred to as Type VIIC/41, it was based on the "workhorse" design that characterized most of the U-boats in the fleet but had a few significant improvements over earlier models, particularly its active sonar and stronger pressure hull, giving it a deeper crush depth of well over 300 metres. This latter feature was important for a U-boat that was to be used for secret missions and, to help maintain security, U-687 had been listed on the official register as never having been deployed[1].

Although it was the most modern submarine in the fleet, it was not built for comfort. They had left their base at Kiel in September of 1942, in high spirits, with everyone looking forward to the adventure, and to their chance to prove themselves against the Allies. Inside the pressure hull, the submarine's effective size was only 50 metres in length by less than 5 metres in width[2] – not a lot of space to share on a long-duration voyage with fifty-one officers and crew. After a week of life in the confinement of U-687, the adventure had been stripped of its glamour, and the journey had simply become a burden to be endured. By four such weeks, it had become unbearable.

Max had been plucked out of university, *Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg* (Heidelberg University), where he had been studying atmospheric physics. He had been attracted to the idea of becoming a scientist and learning to do scientific research, but it had been the development of applications of science that had interested him the most. Of the many applications of physics, it was the world of atmospheric physics and the relatively new field of radio-wave transmission that interested him the most. The former had become his scientific specialty, and the latter his hobby. In fact, he had just finished building his latest, and best, short-wave radio transmitting and receiving set when he'd been called into Herr Professor's office to meet with two strangers. The strangers were obviously military men, despite their civilian clothes.

[1] In fact, official records still list U-687 as never having been deployed.

[2] In exterior dimensions, the submarine was approximately 67 metres in length by just over 6 metres in width.

Herr Professor had a name, of course, but everyone in the university simply referred to him as "Herr Professor," and there was an uncharitable rumour going around that his wife referred to him as Herr Professor as well.

Herr Professor had originally built his reputation in meteorology, the physics of weather, and in recent years had shifted his focus to the development of weather-monitoring instruments. For some reason, this had brought him to the attention of the military, and Max knew that a secret project had been underway in a locked laboratory in the attic of their Physics Building. It appeared that Max was finally going to be brought into Herr Professor's confidence.

"You know my interest in weather and weather-monitoring stations?" This was a rhetorical question, of course. "Then you should also know that we have been working on ways to make automatic weather stations – stations that can monitor the weather and transmit the weather information by radio signal, all without the need for human hands!" Herr Professor had then sat back, complacently as if awaiting applause.

Max had tried not to disappoint him and launched a volley of questions about how it could be done, how to automate the data gathering, how to assemble it for transmission, and of course, how the radio transmission would be done and what transmission distance would be needed. Max's focus on the technical aspects had clearly pleased Herr Professor as they provided him with an opportunity to deliver a lengthy lecture on such aspects. It did not, at first, occur to Max to wonder why someone would actually want an automatic weather station.

The strangers answered this last question first. The military wanted automatic weather stations so that they could be placed in strategic locations around the world and used to deliver precise weather information for the air force and navy. Especially the navy. The military men explained that weather information was particularly difficult to obtain in remote locations that might be of interest for future invasion landings, ship movements, and … U-boats hunting convoys.

In the North-Atlantic Ocean, weather forecasts were important for both sides, as they had a profound influence on the planning of naval convoys and the U-boats that hunted them. For the Allies, bad weather meant opportunities to conceal convoys and hinder enemy aircraft. For the Germans, bad weather meant good hunting. Weather forecasting was straightforward for the Allies, who had a large network of ground-based weather stations that could take advantage of the general trend for weather fronts to move from west to east. In contrast, the Germans had to do what they could with specially equipped aircraft and ships, which was both inefficient and dangerous. A better option might be for Germany to have their own weather stations on the North American East Coast.

At the military's urging, Herr Professor had secretly developed a new kind of weather station, one that was quite small, self-contained in terms of power and processes, and automatic in function. If successful, such stations could be secretly set-up wherever they might be needed, from which point they could send coded weather information to offshore U-boats for as long as the batteries lasted, or until the batteries were replaced. Other than the battery replacement issue, the stations should not need human intervention once they'd been landed and set-up. It was at this point in the narrative that all three men looked straight at Max.

"What has all this to do with me?" Max had asked.

One of the military men said that Herr Professor had done the Fatherland a great service by developing the automatic weather station, which had been successfully tested, not only in our attic laboratory but also near one of our own naval bases on the coast. Now it was time to send one out into real service. What it had to do with Max, they explained, was that it would have to be shipped in pieces by U-boat, taken ashore at the right spot, re-assembled in place, and set into operation. For this, they needed a specialist, someone who could not only deliver and set-up the station but who could, if necessary, make any last-minute adjustments or repairs that might prove to be necessary. "With all respect to Herr Professor," they explained, "this is a job for a younger man." They all had

looked at Max again.

Max had agreed to do it, of course. It was his duty to the Fatherland, it sounded interesting, and it sounded like an adventure.

It had felt like an adventure too when they'd assembled the two large, inflatable rubber rafts on the forward deck of the U-boat, but an adventure of the terrifying kind. The Captain, an *Oberleutnant zur See* (Naval Lieutenant), was under orders to find a desolate place on Canada's East Coast, to conceal the weather station. Accordingly, the U-boat had anchored near Cape Breton Island, offshore the south end of Broad Cove, near Red Head. This was well north of Ingonish, the nearest town, and well away from the closest inhabitants.

The weather had not improved, the cold was damp and bitter at the same time, and the submarine was pitching and swaying. The two inflatable rubber boats were not very large, but they took up about half of the forward deck, with the boat crews and equipment taking up the rest. One had to move carefully to avoid being swept overboard!

Eventually, they had launched the two boats and their crews had paddled them to shore. Once there, everyone pitched in and helped to carry the components across the narrow beach, and all the way up about a hundred feet to the top of the rocky cliff. They carried everything on their backs, the ten cannisters, the masts, the instruments, and the stakes, wires, and cables. Fortunately, they had enough people to do it in one trip as each boat carried eight sailors, one with an officer, and the other with Max and a Coxswain.

In the forest fringe at the top of the cliff, Max assembled *Wetter-Funkgerät Land* (Weather Radio for Land) number one, or WFL-1. The primary canister contained the measuring instruments, a telemetry system, and a radio transmitter. There was also a ten-metre-high antenna mast and a shorter mast that held an anemometer and a wind vane. By placing WFL-1 well back from the cliff's edge, at the edge of the forest fringe, it was hoped that it would avoid detection. The rest of WFL-1 comprised nine more canisters, each of which was about 1.5 metres tall and about a half metre in diameter, and each of which housed sets of heavy nickel-cadmium batteries to power the station.

They'd waited for evening to surface and anchor the submarine, so by the time Max was able to begin assembly, it was in near darkness. When it was done, Max set the station to broadcast weather readings every six hours, using a two-minute transmission at 3940 kHz and made sure that it was

operating. The station was designed to operate for six months using three-hour intervals, but Max had reduced the frequency of transmissions in order to have enough power for the "secret within a secret" package in battery canister number nine. This was the special secret that he should not have referred to in his letter to his girlfriend Wilhelmina (Willie).

With their cargo disembarked, the submarine left for home. They had spent less than twelve hours near the Canadian coast and had carried out their mission undetected. They didn't have much opportunity to celebrate, however - U-687 never made it home. It was sunk by an RAF bomber in late November, near the Norwegian coast.

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RCMP Constable Alexandra Houston's adventures continue in: ***An Indestructible Mountie. Adventures of the First Woman Mountie Book 3***, by Laurie Schramm, 2019.

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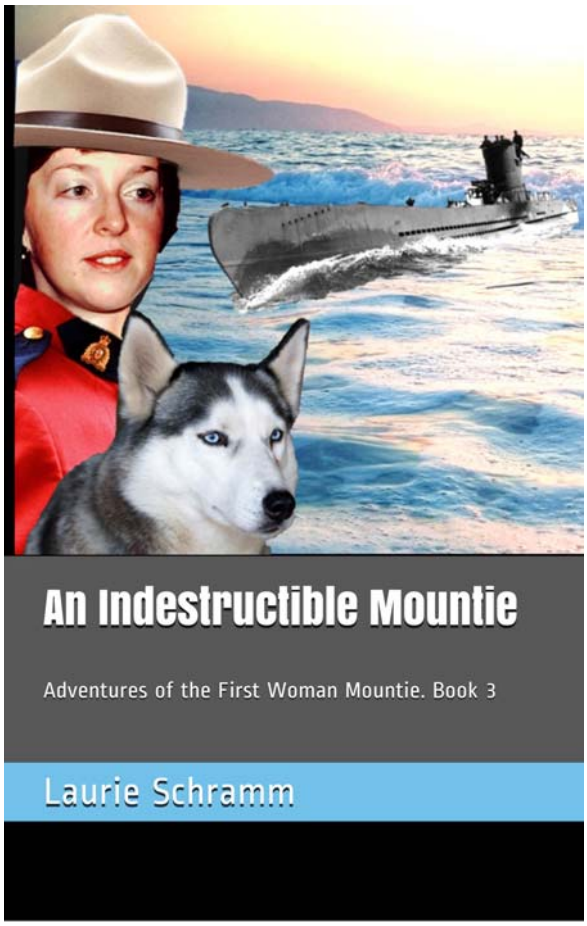

ADVENTURES OF THE FIRST WOMAN MOUNTIE

Book 1: An Inconvenient Mountie

Book 2: An Inconspicuous Mountie

Book 3: An Indestructible Mountie

Book 4: An International Mountie

Book 5: An Inseparable Mountie

Book 6: An Indispensable Mountie