



ON *Distant* SHORES

A Novel

SARAH SUNDIN



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Sarah Sundin, *On Distant Shores*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

© 2013 by Sarah Sundin

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sundin, Sarah.

On distant shores : a novel / Sarah Sundin.

pages cm. — (Wings of the nightingale ; #2)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8007-2082-7 (pbk.)

1. Letter writing—Fiction. 2. Friendship—Fiction. 3. World War, 1939–

1945—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3619.U5626O5 2013

813'.6—dc23

2013007405

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

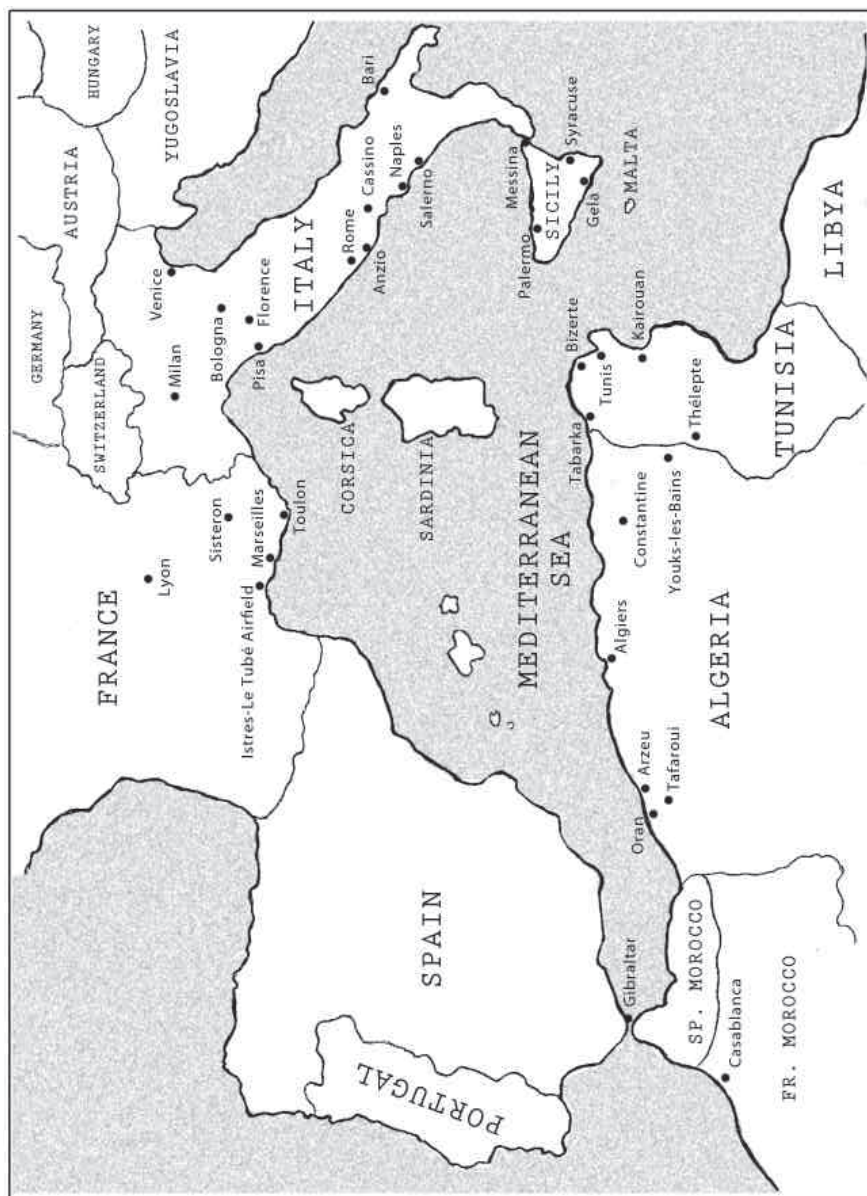
Map design: Stuart and Tiffany Stockton, Eagle Designs

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



For my husband, David Sundin, Pharm.D., my own pharmacist hero. Your outrage over the plight of our profession in the wartime military showed me I had a story. Your discovery of an outstanding research book aided that story. And your love and support steadied me through the writing of this story.



Over French Morocco
July 7, 1943

If only the plane would keep flying over the Atlantic and straight back to Virginia where Georgie belonged.

Flight nurse Lt. Georgiana Taylor spun her gaze from the khaki landscape below to the interior of the C-47 cargo plane. More khaki. And olive drab. And aluminum.

Six canvas litters suspended on aluminum racks. Twelve canvas seats. Eighteen patients in khaki and olive drab. This plane needed a little magenta or tangerine or violet.

Georgie strolled to the front of the plane. She might be the only color in the lives of these poor wounded soldiers, so she'd shine as brightly as possible.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. I hope you're enjoying your flight." She looked into each patient's face long enough to make him feel cared for, but not long enough to give him the wrong idea about her. "We'll land in Casablanca in an hour. Sergeant Jacoby and I will make one last round. If y'all need anything, please let us know."

A corporal raised his hand and a mischievous smile. "I need Ingrid Bergman to meet me at the airport in Casablanca and kiss me hello like she kissed Bogart good-bye."

The men hooted and hollered.

Georgie cocked her head. "Sorry, honey. She's off fighting Nazis with her *husband*, remember?"

The corporal flapped a hand at her. "Ah, you're spoiling my fun."

"All in a day's work." Georgie knelt in front of the first patient on the left and perused the flight manifest to refresh herself on his condition. Private Joe Carney lost a foot to a land mine in Bizerte, Tunisia, a week after the Germans and Italians surrendered in North Africa. His wound had earned him a plane ride to Casablanca and a cruise home on a hospital ship. A twinge of envy, but Georgie certainly didn't want to pay the same price.

"How are you feeling, Private?"

"Fine, ma'am." The stiffness of his voice contradicted his words.

"Would you like some codeine for pain? You haven't had any today."

His expression turned steely. "Lost my foot almost two months ago. If I don't get off these drugs, what good will I be to my wife and kids?"

She settled her hand on his rigid forearm. "I understand, but I don't want you miserable either. Let me know if you need some."

After she took his temperature, pulse, and respiration, she moved to the next patient, Sgt. Harold Myers. An artillery shell had hit his tank, killed all his crewmates, and left him with horrible burns. Bandages swathed his trunk, one arm, and one side of his face.

His good eye shifted to Sergeant Jacoby. "Say, nurse, is he your brother?"

"You'd think so, wouldn't you?" Like Georgie, the surgical technician had blue eyes and curly brown hair. He hailed

from North Carolina rather than Virginia, but she could hardly expect a man with Myers's flat Yankee voice to tell the difference in accents.

"Is he your boyfriend?" Myers's eye twinkled.

Flirting was the favorite sport of most soldiers, but Georgie knew how to end the game. A sweet smile. A dreamy sigh. "My boyfriend's back home. We'll get married after the war."

The twinkle turned to a snap. "Why ain't he fighting like the rest of us?"

Georgie wrapped her fingers around his wrist. If only she'd taken his pulse before it galloped out of control. "Ward *is* fighting. He's raising apples and tomatoes for your rations and to feed the Allies. He wanted to enlist, but the draft board wouldn't let him."

"Sorry, ma'am. Just assumed."

"That's perfectly all right."

"What's he think about his girl wearing a uniform when he can't?"

Georgie froze at the memory of Ward's handsome face in an atypical scowl, but she couldn't blame him. He wanted Georgie at his side, and that's exactly where she wanted to be. In the sweet little farmhouse she hadn't even seen yet, baking ham, sewing curtains, and rocking babies. She winked at the sergeant. "He couldn't be prouder."

Next came Private Bill Holloway. Multiple bouts with dysentery and malaria had reduced him to almost nothing, and the dust of the Tunisian summer had aggravated the asthma he'd concealed from the Army recruiter.

His respiration ran at a steady trot. Two spots of red illuminated his thin, pale cheeks.

Georgie wanted color on the flight, but not this kind. Her own respiration accelerated. "Private Holloway, are you all right?"

“Don’t think I . . . got my . . . asthma pills . . . this morning.”

She glanced at his orders on her clipboard. “The doctor sent you with a bottle of aminophylline. I’ll fetch it.” And a syringe of epinephrine to be safe.

She headed for the back of the plane. The engines vibrated through her legs and rattled her heart. The other nurses in her squadron loved the danger and excitement of emergencies, but not Georgie. What if she let her patients down? What if her incompetence harmed one of these sweet boys?

Georgie opened the medical chest and pulled out supplies. After she swabbed the glass ampule with rubbing alcohol, she snapped the thin neck and laid the ampule on its side on a gauze pad. She angled the syringe through the neck and drew up the contents, three two-hundredths of a grain of epinephrine.

Private Holloway had an order for two hundred milligrams of aminophylline. The bottle contained aminophylline tablets, one and one-half grains each.

Georgie groaned. She hated math. Without the help of her best friend, Rose Danilovich, she never would have made it through nursing school.

She pulled a notepad from the pocket of her dark blue uniform trousers. Sixty-five milligrams per grain. One and one-half grains. Two hundred milligrams. She wrote down the numbers and set up the problem. Rose and Mellie and all the other nurses in the 802nd Medical Air Evacuation Transport Squadron could do this in their heads.

Two tablets? Was that right? Georgie chewed on the end of the pencil. Aminophylline was a dangerous drug. What if she had it wrong? She couldn’t take that chance.

Georgie leaned down the aisle and beckoned to Sergeant

Jacoby, who collected empty ration tins from the patients' lunches.

He ambled back to her, dumped the tins, and flashed a grin. "What's up, Lieutenant?"

"Private Holloway's asthma flared up. I'm giving him epi and his aminophylline. Looks like his morning dose was forgotten in the preflight excitement. Would you please check my calculations?"

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "It's one ampule."

"No, the aminophylline. The order's in milligrams, but the tablets are in grains."

He took the notepad from her. "That's why I like working with you. You ask my opinion. None of the other gals do."

"Thank you." But was that a compliment? The other gals could figure it out themselves.

"Looks great." He winked. "Let's hope you always have someone to consult in a crisis."

Georgie's smile faltered. What if she didn't? What if she faced a true crisis that required her to make her own decisions? She wanted to go home, but not due to failure, not if someone got hurt.

Daddy and Mama and Ward were right. Georgie was in over her head.

USAT *Mexico*, Gela, Sicily
July 13, 1943

Technical Sergeant John Hutchinson coiled his fingers around the rope net, climbed over the side of the troop transport, and anchored his feet in the net.

American naval guns boomed, and shells whizzed overhead to explode behind the town of Gela. The Americans had landed on the southwestern side of Sicily's triangle on

July 10 in Operation Husky, and now the 93rd Evacuation Hospital headed to shore, where Hutch planned to set up the finest pharmacy ever seen in a mobile hospital.

Two and a half years in the Army, but Hutch had yet to serve in a combat zone. He glanced over his shoulder. The Gulf of Gela held the bluest water he had seen in his life below an equally blue sky. Sicily's hills seemed more colorful than Algeria's, more gold than tan, but maybe that was his imagination. After all, this landing put him one step closer to war's end, one step closer to home and his own drugstore and Phyllis Chilton.

Someone whacked his helmet. "Get moving, boy."

Over the rail of the ship, Capt. Al Chadwick glared at him. "We're not sightseeing. Move."

"Yes, sir." That was all he was allowed to say to the surgeon. Hutch gritted his teeth and worked his way down the net. He had the second highest number of stripes the Army could award, but without an officer's commission, he'd never get respect.

A bachelor's degree. A valuable profession. But in the Army he was "boy."

Thank goodness, that was about to change. Back in Philadelphia, Dad worked hard with the American Pharmaceutical Association. Legislation to create a Pharmacy Corps sat before Congress, bolstered by Hutch's testimony about his Army experiences. When that went through, Hutch would become a pharmacy officer.

He grinned. Knowing the disrespect wouldn't last much longer, he could handle it.

Loaded with all his gear on his back, Hutch followed the sailor's instructions, stepped down into the landing craft, and made his way toward the bow. Debris floated past. Was that—his stomach wrenched—it was indeed. A body.

He dropped to his backside along the port side of the boat and closed his eyes. To ease suffering, to heal, to prevent death—that's why he took this position in the first place. With his college degree, he could have applied for Officer Candidate School, gotten a commission, and served in supply, or the infantry, or wherever the Army placed him. But he wanted to use his skills to help people and boost his profession at the same time.

He sat wedged among a couple dozen other hospital personnel—nurses, medics, and doctors. Including Capt. Nels Bergstrom.

Hutch caught Bergie's eye across the crowded boat, made a stern face, and lifted a salute.

Bergie smiled and returned it.

Hutch owed the physician for his nickname, for every fun thing he ever did as a boy, and for introducing him to Phyllis. He even owed him for the transfer to the 93rd. Since Bergie was an officer and Hutch enlisted, they couldn't fraternize, but he still liked having him near.

Next to his friend, a nurse drew her knees to her chest and squeezed her eyes shut. Lt. Lillian Farley, if Hutch remembered correctly.

Poor thing. Had she seen the body too? Even if she hadn't, the roar of artillery, naval guns, and planes overhead would be fearsome enough.

"Berg." He tipped his head toward the nurse. If anyone would know how to distract her, Bergie would.

The physician studied the blonde, gave Hutch a nod of thanks, then peered up as if the blue sky held the solution.

Bergie covered his mouth, puffed up his cheeks, and patted Lillian's shoulder with a wild look in his eyes.

She screeched, yanked him to his feet, and pressed his shoulders over the edge of the boat. But Bergie didn't vomit. He just broke down in laughter.

“Oh, you.” The nurse gave him a playful slap on the back. “Should have known.”

“Yeah, you should have.” Bergie returned to sitting, shot Hutch a grin, and chatted with Lillian.

Hutch settled in for the ride to shore, shifting his gear on his back. Once again his friend’s odd sense of humor had saved the day.

The motor on the landing craft revved, and the boat pulled away from the troop transport.

He gazed up as if he could see the truck parked on the transport’s deck, packed with half the pharmacy supplies. The personnel and equipment of the 93rd were divided among thirteen cargo and transport ships to minimize the impact on the hospital if one ship sank. Hutch and his truck came on the USAT *Mexico*, while his two technicians rode on another transport.

He tried not to think of the dozens of fragile medication bottles, his scales, his glassware. *Please, Lord, let it all survive.*

Across from him, Bergie’s conversation with Lillian verged on flirtation. Why not? He was single and she was cute, even blonder than Bergie.

Hutch pulled out the most recent letter from his own cute little blonde. Well, at five foot eight, she wasn’t little, but compared to his six foot two, she was just right.

He unfolded the well-worn piece of paper, addressed to “my darling John.” She could never bring herself to write “Dear John,” which was fine by him.

Oh, John, how I miss you. New York City should be exciting, but every sight only reminds me of your kiss before you boarded that ship and the love in your brown eyes. Do you still love me, darling? You’re so far away, surrounded by exotic sights and beautiful nurses.

My job keeps me occupied. I tell myself that my work at the shipyard will bring you back to me soon. Edwina and Betty Jo say hello—I'm blessed to have such wonderful roommates. They listen to me and keep me busy and amused.

If only we'd married before you shipped out. Then my mind would be at ease.

Hutch puffed out a breath. Yep. If only he'd given in to her pleading and married her. He kept telling her that even if he wanted to date a nurse—which he didn't—he couldn't, because the nurses outranked him. Nothing reassured her.

At the time, a year and a half ago, it seemed practical to wait, kind to wait. Now he regretted it. Marrying her would have been so simple. So pleasurable. And a passionate night or two before his departure would have proved his love and faithfulness.

A trio of fighter planes droned overhead.

A couple of the nurses screamed. Hutch slapped his hand on his helmet and glanced up, heart pounding.

"Ours, ladies," a sailor shouted. "P-38 Lightnings. No need to fuss."

Even Hutch could identify a P-38 with its unusual twin-boomed silhouette.

The landing craft's hull crunched over sand. The bow ramp flopped open and sent up a wall of water. The boat's occupants laughed or cursed or gasped. Hutch laughed. The splash felt great under the growing heat of the day.

"Everyone out." The boat lay a good fifty feet from shore. They'd have to wade.

Bergie slung Lillian over his shoulder and carried her shrieking to land. No doubt Lieutenant Farley would join Bergie's long line of girlfriends. None lasted longer than three months.

Hutch shrugged off his pack, held it over his head, and sloshed through the warm turquoise water. Once on shore, soaked to the waist, he pulled a one-ounce glass medication bottle from his trouser pocket and filled it with Sicilian sand. He'd label it later and add it to his collection—Oahu, Northern Ireland, England, Algeria, now Gela, Sicily.

How many more vials would he fill?