

PPG553

Think,

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*"We were only following orders."*

Browning stood leaning on the railing of the ship deck. He absentmindedly tapped his fingers along the railing, noticing that the wrinkles in his hands made him seem a lot older than he was.

*Where did all that time go?*

Browning brushed away that question; it didn't matter. But it irked him that lately he found himself questioning a lot of things he had never bothered to before.

He thought about an old conversation with another officer. He'd recalled it so often that remembering it was like slipping his arms into his favorite leather jacket.

*"How do you choose?"*

*"Choose what?"*

*"Between orders and conscience."*

*"I choose orders, and then hope they line up with my conscience."*

And Browning did his job, made his living, and went to sleep at night.

So a part of him was angry. *That kid*, he thought and shook his head. *He chooses now to decide that he doesn't want to do his job? This is not the time.*

*But when is it ever the time? When is it the right time to stop and think about what you're doing?* another voice responded in his head. Browning thought he must be getting old. He never used to worry about time this much.

Still, Browning was not going to order Parks. Browning knew what kind of atrocities people could commit simply because "they were orders." But he was going to make sure that Parks knew the all of the consequences that came with this decision.

He went back to the stateroom and called Parks in. They sat across from each other, Parks sitting up rigidly and Browning feeling more tired than he had in years.

Browning began.

"Parks. I concede that you are entitled to you own views, but you are not entitled to your own facts. Here are the facts: You are the only qualified missile firing petty officer on this ship. Johnson resigned from the Navy before deployment, and the only other qualified officer flew back to the U.S. for major knee surgery and will not be returning. I will have to wait another three months for the Bureau to send me someone else. We are in a dangerous area. The ship

can't be nonfunctional for that long. Every part of the ship is ready for an attack. If you won't fire the missiles, then the ship wouldn't be able to complete its mission."

Browning looked straight at Parks and said, "We need you; you have a responsibility. A responsibility to every man on this boat. A responsibility to the U.S. military. A responsibility to the Americans you swore to protect. You also have a responsibility to your conscience, but your conscience must take into account the commitments you have already made. You chose to go on this mission when you had the chance to resign like Johnson did, and now you reverse that decision at a crucial time. Your decision will say something about your character. What do you want it to say?"

There are dangers in interpreting everything in the Bible literally as black and white rules. The black and white rules won't account for the complex questions that life will throw your way. I agree with you that killing is terrible. But if Hitler had not been defeated by World War II, how many more millions would have been killed? If the American Civil War had not been fought, how much longer would African-Americans have had to suffer as slaves?

Ultimately this is your choice. And I appreciate that you are questioning, and that you have the resolve to act on your beliefs. But you must understand the consequences that come with your decision. I want you to consider the complex relationship between war and peace. Peace comes at a price. I want you to think about that price. Most things that are worth it in this life aren't easy to keep.

Think about what I've said. Bring me your answer in the morning."

Browning left the room and returned to the railing. The wind had turned chilly but he didn't mind it. He felt strangely enlightened. He was hopeful, because someone was questioning, someone was thinking, and someone was acting.

Now it was his turn.