

If you want to find yourself immersed in a WWII story that will capture your heart, you'll love *Strong Currents*.

— *USA Today* Bestselling Author Susan May  
Warren

In her WWII novel, *Strong Currents*—the follow-up to her novel, *Books Afloat*—Dee Topliff highlights themes of heroism and hope. I appreciated how she incorporated historical events with her various fictional characters, some of whom provide a light thread of humor. Topliff also weaves in a sweet romance against the backdrop of one of the most storied wars in history

— Beth K. Vogt, Christy-award winning author  
of the Thatcher Sisters Series

In *Strong Currents*, Delores Topliff drew me in on the first page when Josh Vengeance washed up on the shore of a small island after Midway during World War II and kept me turning pages until The End.

— Patricia Bradley, *USA Today* Bestselling  
Author

In *Strong Currents*, Delores Topliff has once again brought to life a fascinating slice of little-known history. Compelling characters walk hand-in-hand with a plot that captures your imagination and makes you want to know all you can about what was going on in the Pacific Northwest during World War II. I love books that entertain me as well as educate me, and this series fits the bill nicely!

— Carrie Schmidt, [ReadingIsMySuperPower.org](http://ReadingIsMySuperPower.org)  
and author of *Getting Past the Publishing Gatekeepers*

A vivid story of struggle, courage, acceptance, and new beginnings. Sometimes we have to let go of what we thought we wanted and allow God to show us our true path. Topliff's novel, *Strong Currents*, is an immersive story about the power of prayer, the endurance of the spirit, and the meaning of love and friendship wrapped around a slice of World War II that captures the traumas and the triumphs all at once. With characters to love and root for and a plot that puts you right in the thick of things, *Strong Currents* has all the history and heart that readers could want.

— Amy Willoughby-Burle, author of *The Other Side of Certain*

*Strong Currents*, a WWII historical novel by Delores Topliff, releases February 21, 2023, with Scrivenings Press. In the hands of this talented author, the deftly drawn characters leap off the page and into your heart. Privileged to read the ARC version, the dialogue is masterful, the wide-flung settings evocative. The polished prose leaves one wanting to read future works by this writer. Although the novel begins in the South Pacific and Europe, the plot unfolds primarily in San Diego and Washington state and draws upon historic wartime events that affected the region. It's a story to savor the masterful blend of warmth, courage, chuckles, and heart-wrenching moments. One that stays with you long after you've reached The End.

— Sara L. Jameson, author of *Cruise to Death* and  
*Death in High Places*



# STRONG CURRENTS

Columbia River Undercurrents ♦ Book Two

Delores Topliff



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*With every book I write I learn more completely that it is the Lord that gives us stories worth telling to target readers' hearts. I'm thankful for the journey and the amazing friends He gives along the way.*

*"Does not the ear test words as the tongue tastes food?"  
Job 12:11 NIV*





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# Chapter One

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*Mid-June 1942—An unnamed island near Midway, the Central Pacific*

**N**aval Seaman Apprentice Josh Vengeance drew a ragged breath. And another. Blackness ruled as the cosmic clock slowed. Time hung in the balance and almost ceased until Someone eased the ticking clock's hands forward.

His lips parted as his tongue sought moisture, but only sand grains entered his mouth. Josh moaned. His head throbbed when he turned to spit out sand. When one eyelid fluttered open, he glimpsed a single grass stem with three tiny dry leaves. Small bugs tunneled through his ragged clothes and even into his ears. Droning mosquitoes in precise formations attacked every inch of his body.

Josh scrunched his eyes shut so he wouldn't see. Rather than finding serenity, he relived the deafening roars and bright flashes of torpedoes that fatally attacked the *USS Yorktown*. Portions of the deck buckled and broke away. Massive equipment shifted and crushed. Flames seared flesh as the mighty aircraft carrier

## Delores Topliff

went down. Bodies flailed and survivors swam through burning oily patches to get away.

Josh had expected to sink with it, but powerful waves carried him. He grabbed crewmate after crewmate, attaching them to debris, until the torn sheet metal slashed his hands. His aching eyes fluttered again. He remembered a monstrous piece of wreckage smacking his head but nothing more.

Unknown time passed and light returned, spilling down the sky like boiling water. And then he stopped moving. How did he get here? No waves rocked him now. Sand scorched his skin everywhere it touched. Scoured him and ebbed as water lapped his body and retreated—then lapped and ebbed again. He changed position enough to taste water and spit, its salt closing his throat and burning external raw places.

The empty ocean tossed—no land in sight. More water washed in. He must move or drown. Summoning every muscle's last reserve he rolled face up, legs and back screaming.

But water reclaimed him, tunneled the sand away underneath. He wasn't getting anywhere on his own. More droning mosquitoes in whining formation drilled his flesh before louder buzzing filled the sky.

Battered and dazed, Josh tried sitting up, but his world lost its axis, and he fell back. A Japanese Zero swooped low. His elbows scabbled to dig beneath the hot sand to escape, but it was futile. Strafing bullets kicked up lines of grit as perfectly spaced as his mom's sewing machine stitches. Bullets cross-stitched his legs, making blood spurt as he jerked and stilled.

Was this it? Tears came now from inner pain. Annie. Why hadn't he told her she mattered instead of leaving things vague? It was complicated. But she knew, didn't she?

*Lord, no. Not like this. Let me live to tell her.*

The Zero swung back in a slow circle—dropped lower still. The pilot's dark eyes peered at Josh.

*Our Father, who art in heaven ...*

Mom's voice echoed in his addled mind, "Whom have I in

## *Strong Currents*

heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee ...”

The Zero sprayed more bullets, zigzagging the sand, spitting grit into Josh’s wounds. After one last pass, its air whooshing like a charging lion’s near miss, it pulled up its wings and grew smaller.

“... The Lord bless and keep thee, the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” Dad’s voice—his favorite closing scripture...

*Peace.*

After a shuddering overhead boom, a fireball lit the sky as the Zero broke and tumbled, its crash scattering debris and sending shock waves through the ground beneath him.

He must roll or crawl to safety. First he closed his eyes against the brightness.

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Something poked Josh. Then nudged harder. He yelped and his eyes snapped open. A brown foot rested at eye level. The butt of a spear poked his ruined shoulder. When he grunted, a little man jumped back but his spear aimed at Josh’s heart.

*“Kshama tanga!”*

The half-dressed man locked eyes with Josh. Two other small, tanned men stood a step back, faces fierce, eyes white and menacing.

“I’m no threat.” Josh’s voice creaked like a rusty hinge.

The first man lowered his spear.

Relief mixed with fear. Josh dared to ask. “Where am I?”

*“Shama bataru!”*

More excited voices chattered words he couldn’t understand. Not Japanese, but what? Some kind of natives. The men wore brief loin clothes over glowing skin. They clucked their tongues as gentle hands slid him across the sand like a loaded picnic tablecloth without spilling a dish. That

Delores Topliff

movement scraped away additional skin. Relief and exhaustion claimed him.

He roused but couldn't gauge time. The hungry bugs near shore had abandoned him for better hunting. Someone had brushed sand and dry grass blades over him to partially block the blazing sun. A small man tipped Josh's head back enough to dribble fresh water into his mouth and onto his swollen tongue. An old woman pushed bits of mashed banana into his mouth. Arguing voices rose and fell and then slid him inside a small rocky cave. Cooler. An older man stayed, dribbled more water into Josh's mouth, massaged his throat so he could swallow. It hurt. So thirsty.

Soon, the burning breeze carried shrill approaching Japanese voices. The native people scurried out of sight. Only the gentle knobby man stayed and kicked more sand over Josh. He gasped for air. Was the man burying him alive? No, building a sand dune high enough to hide this small cave.

Boots marched by.

*Dear God, I stink. Don't let them smell me. If they're going to capture me, let me die now. "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me ..."*

Harsh voices barked and moved on. The sand dune worked.

Things quieted.

Several natives returned. Fed him more bits of soft, ripe fruits or fish. He slept.

New voices startled him awake. Americans?

"Peeyouu," one said. "What's that awful smell?"

"Smells like death. Look here."

"Is he alive?"

"Not sure. He's American, like us. Injured, almost dead and buried here."

The unknown speakers kicked more sand aside and swept Josh's body clear with their hands. Josh groaned at the rough treatment and opened his eyes.

"Hi, buddy," one said. "You're in rough shape."

*Strong Currents*

“Yup.” Josh’s voice rasped as he focused on the two men and then tried to speak. He recognized their US Marine uniforms and shook with dry sobs.

“It’s all right, fella. We’ve got you. Are those shreds of a Navy uniform?”

Josh nodded.

“Which ship?”

His vocal cords screeched from disuse. “*USS Yorkton*.”

“Gosh, she went down a while back. How long have you been here? How’d you even get here?”

“Dunno. Drifted I guess?”

“That’s nuts.” He pointed to the water. “There are sharks out there. And only small debris bits on the beach.” One Marine lifted his hat to finger-comb his crew cut. “I guess miracles still happen.”

“The natives—hid me from Japs.”

“No kidding? And risked getting payback? Decent!”

The other soldier slipped outside. Hand to his forehead, he surveyed to his right and left before scrambling higher up. “Come look, Tex, he’s right. The boot prints up here are Japanese tread, not ours. And no bare feet or sandals.”

“Wow, close call.” The first man raised Josh’s head to dribble in more water from a canteen. “Look at you, you’ve had it super rough. Even got shot up.”

His hand groped around Josh’s neck. “Where are your dog tags?”

Josh tried to move but his arms wouldn’t work. “Dunno. Gone?”

“Do the natives have them?” They called the knobby man over. He mumbled and held out empty hands.

“He doesn’t understand or doesn’t want to.”

Josh tried to answer, his words slurring, “Josh Vejenje, appren seaman, 128727.”

“Good. I got that. Your uniform’s burned but looks like US

Delores Topliff

Navy. If you're from the *Yorktown*, you've been missing since Midway."

"How long?"

"Around June seventh. At least a week and a half. You're skin and bones." The Marine pulled a chocolate bar from his shirt pocket, unwrapped the foil, and fed Josh a crumb. "You shouldn't have much at first."

Milk chocolate melted on his tongue. "Heaven!"

The other asked, "Where can we take him?"

"Not sure. Midway's closest, but their hospital got bombed. Have the lieutenant radio them and ask if they're operational."

"Will do. Hawaii's best," the other man said, "but their beds are full, and they're over a thousand miles away."

"He's not safe here. We have to move him." Strong hands slid Josh into a canvas sling and then into a mechanized, amphibious craft. Waves lapped and splashed as the vehicle sliced through the booming surf to a ship.

*Lord, You're answering Mom and Dad's prayers. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow ...'*

He choked down the lump in his throat that nearly strangled him.