

Nixon's Darkest Secret

D. G. "Chip" Tatum

Operation Red Rock
A President's Darkest Secret
Published by D.G. "Chip" Tatum
P.O. Box 895082, Leesburg, Florida 34789

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For my soul
Friend Ted
Best wishes
Chip

OPERATION RED ROCK
A PRESIDENTS DARKEST SECRET

By

Gene "Chip" Tatum
P.O. Box 895-082
Leesburg, Fl 34789
(352) 330-1652

OPERATION RED ROCK

Introduction

"Hell no, we won't go!"

"Hell no, we won't go!"

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Chanted the crowds of anti-war demonstrators outside of the White House.

News cameras zoomed in on the windows which represented the location of the Oval office. The silhouette of a man stood at the window watching the activities outside the White House. The television announcer's voice replaced the chants of the crowd, "Week after week, the dead keep arriving home to their final resting place, victims of a war that won't go away. A war that won't disappear, despite promises from the White House that a plan is at hand to end this horrible conflict. It is the opinion of this correspondent that unless the President can make good on his campaign promise to end the war, his time in the oval office will be short. America is tired of burying their sons."

"Shit, Alex, why can't we just bomb the hell out of them, then sweep them on the ground and end this thing! It can't be that difficult for a powerful force such as we are to destroy a small country of savages." The President turned from the window to receive his answer from General Alexander Haig, Assistant to Doctor Henry Kissinger, the National Security Advisor.

"Mr. President," Haig began, "we can certainly put every American fighting man currently serving this wonderful country on Vietnam soil and sweep the enemy. Within three months we could disarm communist Vietnam of their weapons. Then we could withdraw totally, bringing every man home, as you promised. However, before we can leave that country, the communists will already have begun resupplying their soldiers. So, in answer, yes. If we escalate, we can win and withdraw." Then General Haig walked to the window and looked down at the crowds. "But how do you tell them that escalation of our war efforts, producing even more dead and wounded American Servicemen, will end the war. I don't believe that this is the answer."

Nixon stood next to Haig, looking at the protesters. "Something has to be done for us to survive this!" Nixon said, quietly sinking disparingly back into depression.

"And something will be done, Mr. President," Dr. Kissinger answered, "but it will require an aggressive campaign to involve the Southeast Asian countries. Those countries must be an active participant not only in their own defense, but in an offensive level. I will personally see that our promise to end this war is honored! I will be in Bangkok next week to prepare our allies for discussions concerning an allied plan to de-escalate our position in Vietnam."

In support of Dr. Kissinger's plan, a team of professionals from both the military and civilian sectors were assembled in Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand. If our allies in Southeast Asia would not align themselves with the United States plan, then it would be the task of Team Red Rock to realign the allies priorities. Thus, the beginning of operation "Red Rock".

The team was assembled in Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand, the home of Task Force Alpha (TF "Alpha"). TF "Alpha" was tasked with supplying intelligence for the mission. The original thirteen-man team consisted of:

- 8 U.S. Army Green Berets
- 3 Navy Seals
- 2 Civilians (CIA)

The training was performed over a four week period at NKP, Thailand.

CHAPTER ONE

I was an Air Force combat controller, assigned as a radio operator, on a forward air control (FAC) aircraft which was attached to Task Force Alpha (TF "Alpha"). I had been sent on a sixty-day temporary duty assignment (TDY) from the Third Mobile Communications Group based at Tinker, A.F.B., Oklahoma. Our communications team arrived at NKP just one week prior and was still getting acclimated to the Southeast Asian (SEA) environment. As an Airman First Class (A1C), I was the lowest ranking member of the unit, but I was the only Combat Controller (CCT). Master Sergeant Bobby Cox was our commander for the sixty day TDY, designed to set up a special communications center at the Task Force Alpha compound. Unfortunately, my equipment had yet to arrive and I was just "in the way", as Master Sergeant Cox put it. So the Colonel from TF "Alpha" assigned me elsewhere until my equipment arrived. I had always been fascinated by airplanes, from the small two-seater prop jobs all the way to the other end of the spectrum, the space program, and everything in between. As a matter of fact, the reason I joined the Air Force was in hopes that one day I would fly. Little did I know how soon that day would come.

As usual, I was late getting to the Communications Center. Having come from Oklahoma and being in the Air Force, we had a leg up on the grunts. While packing our gear in Oklahoma, Master Sergeant Cox was adamant about procuring a large two-door refrigeration unit. The sensitive communications gear required a cool environment for operations. And so did the pallet of Coors beer that we brought. Our reunion party with this equipment had been the previous night and the party had continued into the wee hours of the morning. MSgt. Cox had been hard at it the night before, so I knew that he would be late getting to work also. So, when I arrived, I wasn't surprised to find the guard waiting for someone from our team to show up. As I produced my security badge, he told me to stand fast. He made a call on the field phone and a Military Police (MP) jeep came out to get me - *now that's service*, I thought. The driver told me that we were going to the *Old Man's* office. As an Airman First Class (A1C), I was up on the military terms and knew he was talking about the Commander. However, I wasn't very pleased, due to my only previous experience with an *Old Man*. *Oh shit*, I thought, *I'm in for it now!*

The last time I had been called on the carpet was at Tinker Air Force Base, just outside of Oklahoma City. Several of the guys from our unit were having a chugging contest at the Blue Goose, a civilian bar in downtown Oklahoma City. Bob Burgess, Jimmy J., Lee Barner, and I was seeing who could get to the bottom of a pitcher of beer first. Bob was 5'9" and lean, a Rhode Island boy. Jimmy J. was a pot-bellied Tennessee boy, and Lee Barner was 5'10", 185 pounds. Jimmy J. won the chug. When I got to the bottom and put the pitcher on the bar, Jimmy J. was already smiling. Bob was almost done and Lee was putting his on the bar. We watched Bob chug to the bottom when all of a sudden I felt a tingling feeling in my throat. As I looked over toward Jimmy J., I was amazed to see that he was foaming at the mouth! Jimmy J. smiled at me and wiped the foam from his face but he kpt foaming, as did I. The band announced a dance contest

so we started asking the girls to dance, but, to our surprise, none of the girls would dance with us. Humph! Women! I had spent hours getting my laundry washed and ironing my duds for the evening activities. I was dressed to impress in my blue striped bell bottom jeans and brown square tipped Dingo boots. So, Bob and I said the hell with it. We entered the dance contest as partners, danced (a fast dance) and WON! The crowd went nuts, laughing and having a good time. But the manager and bouncer didn't care for our little show. You see, it was a college bar, and military personnel in '60's and '70's college America, were politically incorrect. Oklahoma State was just down the street and everyone in the club had hair - except for us!

When we went to collect the \$100 prize (in 1970 that was good!), the Manager said that we weren't eligible. But, he gave us a pitcher of beer instead, with four mugs. Jimmy J. didn't like that one bit! He started arguing with the manager and the manager told us to get out - he didn't want our kind in there. When Jimmy J. asked what he meant by "our kind", he said "little fagot military fairies". Well, we were small compared to the manager, a 6', 220 pound ex-college full-back type, and the bouncer was even bigger. Then there were the regulars who surrounded the four of us. I poured the four of us a beer and told the manager that we would drink one mug and leave. The guys looked at me and smiled, knowing what was to come. We toasted "Here's to it. If we never get to it, we'll never get to it again". So, we chugged the mug and got to it.

Now Jimmy J. is the champ chugger, so naturally he finished first and brought his empty mug down on the managers head. Almost simultaneously, Lee and I took out the bouncer and the biggest regular in the same manner. Prissy and proper Bobby was still drinking when the first three victims hit the floor. Everyone backed off and when Bobby finished, well, Bobby wanted to get to it, but there was no one in to it distance. Discouraged and drunk, he said, "Hey - No fair! I don't have any tough guys to go to it with!" Jimmy J. offered a solution, "Get the bartender!" With that, we all turned around and looked at the bartender. The bartender opened the cash register and snatched a \$100 bill out and said, "I told him (speaking of the manager of the establishment) you guys were the best dancers I've ever seen," and he handed Jimmy J. the prize, keeping the bar between Jimmy J. and himself. We gave him \$3.00 for the pitcher, got a free refill and new mugs, and left.

The following morning the Commanding Officer (CO), referred to as the Old Man, a Captain, called the four of us 'on the carpet'. I thought at the time the term 'on the carpet' to be strange. When we entered the orderly room and were ordered in to the Commanders office, I noticed that there was no carpet! Only the same old green linoleum tile found in all of the buildings on the base. The thorough reaming, accompanied by the possibility of a court-martial and civil suits which could be filed by the "victims", who happened to be sitting in the Old Man's office when we arrived, smacked us with the realization that we might have screwed up. The Old Man sent us to the JAG (Judge Advocates) office to speak with a Lieutenant assigned to review the complaint. Now the JAG office, as the rumor had it, was the place you go just before Leavenworth. And, believe me, as a new Air Force Airman, I believed that rumor! We sat in this office at attention, as instructed by a Master Sergeant working in the office, for three hours before a Lieutenant came out and introduced himself.

"Men," he started, "I'm in an impossible position," waiving a handful of papers he had in his hand. "Assault and battery, assault with a deadly weapon, robbery, and attempted murder. That's what the civilian authorities want to charge you with! I have no option but to confine you to quarters until this is resolved. You are to speak to no one - not even among yourselves - concerning these charges. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir," we all said quietly, in unison, nodding our heads. With that, the Lieutenant called in the Master Sergeant and told him we were confined to quarters. The Master Sergeant made a telephone call and ten minutes later, a contingency of security policemen arrived to escort us back to our barracks. We sat, incommunicado for three days, worrying, wondering where will we end up? Leavenworth? Attempted murder! Man, who did we try to kill? Man-o-man! The afternoon of the third day, our Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge (NCOIC), Staff Sergeant Hull, came over to the barracks.

"Well, boys. It's time to pay the piper." he said in his slow, southern drawl. "C'mon, lets get to it." Man, I didn't like that word! Gettin' to it's what got us to it to begin with! We reported to the Old Man in smart style. When he finished reading us the riot act, he pulled out an official looking letter "from the JAG office," as he put it.

"Apparently," he began, "the civilian authorities have dropped the charges that your victims filed against you. You're lucky, men. An undercover police officer was one of the patrons and in his report, he indicated that you men had no alternative other than to defend yourselves against the obvious attack about to take place upon you. The Blue Goose has been placed off limits to all military personnel. You are hereby remanded to two weeks extra duty. Report to your NCOIC and I never want to hear your names, for any reason, again!"

So, needless to say, I really wasn't ready for another session with any Old Man. Besides, I stayed in the hootch last night and didn't do anything out of the ordinary.

When I reported to the Old Man, I was really shocked to see a bird on his collar. WHOA! A Colonel! I'd heard of the rank - I'd even seen them from a distance, but WHOA, ten feet from one! I expected a Lieutenant or maybe even a Captain. But when the Sergeant opened the door and I saw a Colonel, my heart hurt - it felt like all that Coors formed a big bubble in my throat. I was afraid that if I opened my mouth, the biggest burp in the world would come out. Now, the proper procedure was to walk smartly to a position approximately three feet in front of his desk, snap a salute and say "Sir, Airman First Class Tatum reporting as ordered, Sir!" and hold the salute until he returned it. Then I was to snap to a parade rest. I got three feet inside the door and saw that bird on his shirt and froze. I was probably twelve feet from his desk. I snapped a salute but couldn't talk. Luckily, Master Sergeant Cox was sitting in an easy chair in the Colonel's office and said, "Sir, this is Airman Tatum." A booming voice gave me an order from somewhere in front of me.

The Colonel said, "At ease, Airman Tatum. Please, take a seat."

So, I attempted to sit where I was - then caught myself and walked to the chair the Colonel was pointing to. They were both smiling - I sure didn't see anything funny about it!

The Colonel explained a need for a radio operator (R/O) on a FAC and recon aircraft. He told me that, if I would accept the temporary position, there would be a little extra incentive - flight pay. I accepted. He told me to get my gear and a Huey (UH-1 helicopter) would be waiting on his helipad in twenty minutes. So, I hustled back to the hootch, gathered some of my gear and went to the pad. The pilot motioned me in and we were off. The pilot was an Army Chief Warrant Officer. The Air Force was phasing WO's out so I was introduced to another new rank.

The pilot's name was 'Dodger' - I deduced that because it was the name written on the back of his helmet. He introduced himself and was surprised to see an A1C as his passenger. He was the *Old Man's* pilot and expected a VIP on this "no notice" mission. I told him I was being assigned to the FAC unit as an R/O and photographer. When he saw my beret, he understood. Although to the Army, special forces guys wore green berets and were plentiful in country, there were very few Air Force Special Forces in country and our burgundy beret set us apart. He said something big was in the works - there were quite a few "berets" on NKP and some 'Cowboy's (CIA) also. The flight was uneventful except for the fact that I loved flying. When we landed, 'Dodger' offered to buy me a "cold one". He told me that ice cold beer was hard to find. (Little did he know about the Air Force way of life back at NKP) but the club here had a great fridge. He was on a run to pick up some supplies for the Colonel and was to return to NKP the following morning. Well, no one drinks just "a" cold one!!!

'Dodger' explained how he got his name. This was his second tour. On his first tour he would always come back with an aircraft full of holes. At the end of his tour, he had accumulated the record for the most aircraft damage with no Purple Heart. The Commanding Officer (CO) told him upon returning from his last flight that he figured out why he was always so shot up, "You're suppose to dodge the tracers!", but 'Dodger' flew straight as an arrow through all the flack. The CO gave him a 'Dodger' baseball hat and the name 'Dodger' had stuck since. The hat was his drinking hat and was always with him. We became good friends that night and the relationship grew over the next couple of weeks.

The following morning, I reported to a Captain Raines at 0600 hours as instructed. The Captain was a burley guy - kind of reminded me of a college football hero - but as it was, he never played football. Baseball was his game, but he didn't play it the last year of college, due to a shoulder injury he was nursing.

When I got to the flight line, he was at the aircraft, an OH-1 'Bird Dog'. It was a military equivalent of a Cessna with two seats, one in front, and one in the rear. Normally, he would fly from the front seat. But, due to the special photo equipment (which I had no idea how to use), I would sit up front. This flight, as he would explain, was a familiarization flight for me. He wanted me to have a little flight instruction *just in case something happened to him*. Well, that perked up my ears and I didn't like that one bit! I joined the Air Force to stay out of combat! And the recruiter promised me!!

I was a student at St. Petersburg Junior College in St. Petersburg, Florida with a twelve hour curriculum when I received my invitation. Unfortunately, chemistry and I didn't get along. I got an "F". Well, grades were reported to the Draft Board back

then and my lottery number was down around eleven. So when I got my congratulations letter, I wasn't surprised.

When the letter came, I decided to go shopping. I liked the Navy clothes - bell bottoms and chambray shirt. But I used to get sea sick on deep sea fishing trips we took in to the Gulf of Mexico, so that was out! I definitely wasn't Marine material. The Army was Vietnam bound - that was out. The Coast Guard, Reserves and National Guard had waiting lists and I only had two weeks to report, so I visited the Air Force recruiter. Now, this guy was okay. He told me about a guaranteed enlistment program, which, after testing, I would be put in the Air Traffic Control Program. Aware of my concerns about going to Vietnam, he promised that even if I did go to Vietnam, I would be in an air conditioned control tower, hundreds of miles from the hostile actions! Well then - that was for me! Besides, I really liked the blue uniforms!

So, I signed up and I was off to the Miami induction center. They drove us in a Greyhound bus from St. Petersburg to Miami. Mom and Dad had taken me to the bus station. It was an emotional morning. Mom cried and Dad shook my hand and gave me a hug. It's the only time I remember being hugged by Dad. So, for me anything that followed was worth it - just to know how he felt. At the Induction Center, it took two days to get processed. I recall the lines of teenagers, the "gobs" of paperwork, and the physicals! At one point, they had about twenty of us in a line, standing for short arms inspection. They told us all to take off our shirt, shoes and pants. So, there we were, standing in our skivvies. Three guys ahead of me, there was a guy wearing pink silk panties. We all thought that was funny. Hearing the laughing and remarks by us, one of the Sergeants went up to him, put his face in the inductees' face and asked if he was a man or a woman. The inductee answered that he was confused about his gender, but given time he could definitely figure it out. The Sergeant told him to take off his underwear. He did and the Sarge looked down, pointed to the guy's pecker and said, "What's that?" The kid said it was his penis. The Sergeant asked him how many girls he had met with a penis? 'The Kid' looked puzzled and said, "None". The Sergeant grabbed him by the arm and walked him through the door marked "Marines". About thirty seconds later, the Sgt came out and said, "We're gonna make a man out of that sweet thing. Anyone else got any wise ideas, you can join him". We all quit giggling and looked straight ahead. The next thing we knew we were sworn in and on a plane to San Antonio, Texas. Our basic training was at Lackland AFB, Texas.

'Rainbows' - That's what they called us. This was due to all the colorful civilian clothes, or "civvies" as the military called them, we were wearing when we arrived from the Miami induction center. We lined up outside our barracks in four rows. Two real mean looking guys with taps on their shoes clicked down the hallway and came out yelling. They were attempting to get us in line - a straight line - instead of a "gaggle" as they called it, as they began a roll-call. They introduced themselves as our Training Instructors (TIs) and we were "their's" for the next eight weeks. The first stop was the barber shop. Then clothing issue. We turned in our civvies for uniforms, then classes and physical training (PT). We were required to wear a weird looking hat called a pith helmet, due to the extreme heat. PT was nothing - I was an 880 runner on the track team so the little runs they did were a piece of cake.

Our Routine - Up at O-dark thirty for PT, a quick change, then breakfast. Classroom instruction was next, then different outside activities (i.e. obstacle course, firing range, etc.). But, due to the heat and "Red Flag" conditions (temperatures over 100 degrees) we were bussed most places. Contrary to what I had seen in the movies, we marched very little and for only short distances. Tech Sergeant Carson, our senior TI was reassigned to Vietnam in the middle of basic training and Sergeant Briggs was our only TI. Fortunately, Sergeant Briggs worked at the bowling alley after duty - so we weren't dogged like the other units. For example, we had found some baby jack rabbits and kept them in the TI's footlocker in his office. Since we all took turns on KP (Kitchen Patrol) we were able to get enough food to feed the little rascals. They were doing real well! During an inspection the CO found them and hit the ceiling - he made us let them go, and that was when we found out what marching was all about!

In the Air Force, we didn't qualify with weapons - we just had to be familiar with the weapon - you know, this is a trigger, this is a barrel, this is a bullet, and so on. They only allowed us to fire thirty rounds on the range. The weapon was an M-16. I thought it really looked hi-tech compared to the wooden stock rifles in the movies.

I was a hunter from an early age so I was a very good shot. So good that after we fired our thirty rounds in the target, I had fifty-two holes in mine! Boy, somebody was a terrible shot!

At the end of the fourth week, we won honor unit and got day passes for the weekend. We decided to go to the Alamo. I had been calling home every week and talking to my high school girlfriend. Debbie and I had been dating since tenth grade, but it was always an on and off relationship. When I left for basic and who knew what would happen, so it was understood that she should date. But she was my high school sweetheart and a friend, so I would call, give her updates, and just talk.

I recall on one occasion, I tried to get through but was unable. The operator told that me no one answered to accept the call. Here I stood for two-and-a-half hours in line to call and she wasn't home.

"You sound down," the operator said. She had a really great voice, so we planned to meet at the Alamo on my next pass. When I got there, I saw her - all of her - three times bigger than me! WHOA!!! I was glad that there was about two hundred other "Bluesuiters"! I just got lost in the crowd!

Next stop, the obstacle course. It was late August in Texas and hotter than blazes. They bussed us there due to another "Red Flag" day. As I stood watching, one of the other classes was ahead of us and one of the first obstacles was a water obstacle. You were supposed to walk across a rope, while hanging onto a rope over your head. Underneath was a cool blue pool full of water. I noticed that any one who fell in this cool, blue pool on this lousy, hot day didn't have to take most of the other obstacles. The TI's stationed at each obstacle on the course would wave you around if you were wet. So, being me, I jumped off of the first obstacle into that cool water! I guess I was too obvious. The TI snatched me out and every obstacle that they would allow others around, I had to do push-ups or sit-ups until everyone passed off!

Well, we graduated and I was bussed to Keesler AFB, Mississippi for Technical School. They weren't ready for us so they put us in a PATS unit (Personnel Awaiting

Tech School). Our duty in PATS included raking the pine needles up on the base. ALL OF THE PINE NEEDLES! (I've never seen so many pine needles in my life!)

I also pulled CQ runner. CQ is "charge of quarters". The military required manning of the orderly room twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Normal duty hours were 0700 to 1700 hours (7am to 5 pm) and CQ's were assigned during the non-normal hours. My first name is Dois, and somehow the military always added an "r" to it to make me a "Doris". So, as Doris Tatum, the military, in their wisdom, sent me to the WAC's CQ as a runner. Now, WAC's, in those days, were the Women's Air Corps. Segregation for billeting purposes was a military imperative. When I arrived, the Sergeant in charge (a female - something I hadn't seen for a while) smiled at the mistake and promised a long night of CQ on the job training (OJT). I really liked that CQ runner stuff!

Well, school finally started and it was impressive. There were two shifts. The morning shift would march en masse to the school area (the Triangle) and we would pass during the noon hour parade for afternoon classes. Our school was structured in modules. The first module was typing.

Keyboard familiarization was first. I had never really typed in high school or college other than single-finger style. So, learning the location of the keys was our first obstacle. In order to teach hand placement and the proper finger on the right letter, we practiced six hours a day of "ry ry ry ry cd cd cd cd um um um um". This continued for days! Then our instructor introduced us to text typing, you know, the old "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of our country...". But this was a self-paced module. So, at each typing station was a word speed selection dial. The same text would be read day after day. The only thing that was different was the student's speed selection. Well, a monkey could figure out that if you memorized the text, you could pass the 40 word per minute test. But I guess I was the only monkey in the place. It only took two days to memorize the text. So, on the third day I approached the instructor and asked to test out. He sat me at the 40 word per minute station. Their control was that this station had no selection switch, so if you typed a text and turned it in with only 10% errors, you passed. This monkey passed two weeks early!!

Weekends were free - we were only one hour from New Orleans and a classmate, we called Bunkie, had his own car. We would go to New Orleans to donate a pint of blood and get \$25.00! Now, that's good blood! (I thought a person could make a good living donating the stuff until one of the tech's told me that you could only donate every six weeks!) Then we replaced the lost blood with something red, Pat O'Brians Hurricane. Two of those babies and we were loaded! We would get a room and the five of us stayed overnight. But, as hard as we tried, no luck with the ladies!

Technical schools have a student cadre. Unfortunately, we had a student commander that was a real 'prick'. So one night, to get even for all of his little Napoleon antics, we took him to the club and got him real drunk. That same night, when he passed out in his bed, we took some "hundred mile an hour" tape and taped him in his bed. Then we took him to the basketball court in his bed and left him there for morning formation. The CO wondered where he was and when we opened ranks for inspection, he saw him. Well, that got rid of the prick!

Graduation - I was in the top ten percent of my class. Those of us that passed a Class I flight physical and were in the top 10% of the class scholastically and physically (there was a scoring system) were given a special reward. We were offered US Army Jump School, Sea Survival School, Escape & Evasion (E&E) Training, Special Forces Indoctrination, and Diving School. What a reward! First stop - Sea Survival.

We went through a seven day course. The first two days were strictly classroom. The third day was on the watercraft watching the class before us end their third day at sea. The fourth day we para-sailed into the water - we then had to inflate our Mae West water wings and then work to inflate and enter a raft. The first day wasn't bad - the second day was choppy and rainy. The worst part of the training involved our proximity to the safety ship. It was only one hundred yards away. Sometimes, we would get within ten yards free floating. The instructors would sit on the deck of our safety ship eating pizza. The eve of the second day, they offered us some. We could smell it; pepperoni, cheese and onions! Yum, yum! Here we were, surviving on dehydrated rations. I was ready. They let us get close and threw four pizza boxes that sunk immediately (we later found out that they had pieces of brick in them!!) That's torture!! The eighth day we were off to Ft. Benning, Georgia.

We were seven Air Force Airmen and the only ones on the Fort. We were jeered by the Army pukes and ended up in several fights at the snack bar (we weren't allowed to go to the club). We were assigned two US Army Drill Sergeants and Jump Masters. The seven of us were put through an accelerated twelve hour per day program. The Army trained only six to eight hours a day, but our Drill Sergeants billeted with us and dogged us constantly.

I remember my first static jump out of a Caribou (C123). I was standing at the door and the Jump Master gave me the jump signal. I looked out the door and back at him and thought better of it, shaking my head no, I had changed my mind. I wasn't going to jump outta that perfectly good aircraft! As I raised my hand to un-clip and go sit, an explosion hit my mid-section. I doubled over to find a fist in my stomach and it was attached to the Jump Master. I folded and he rolled me out. I didn't get my breath back until about 100 feet from the ground. Or should I say pine trees! I sucked in half the air in Georgia when I saw the trees at my feet. But somehow, I dropped to a clearing and was fine. I was right at the edge of the drop zone (DZ). The rest of the guys fell at different places across the DZ. Next stop - Washington State - Escape & Evasion and POW training for two weeks.

Now this was not a reward. The TI's made it sound like fun when we were at Keesler, but these Army guys were serious about Survival! I couldn't understand why they kept us separate from the other classes and accelerated all of our programs. During the first escape and evasion exercise with our special forces trainers, I asked why they were being so exact and accelerated with us "Air Force Air Traffic Controllers". We probably wouldn't even go to Southeast Asia, and, even if we did, we would be in an air conditioned control tower a hundred miles from hostilities - repeating the recruiters promise! "So, relax." I told the Staff Sergeant Green Beret.

He looked at me and just started laughing! "Is that what you think?" he said. "Well yardbird," (I later looked up the definition and found it to mean an untrained or

unskilled soldier.) "If you think that an air conditioned control tower is what's in store for you, you'd best listen and listen good 'cause if you don't get serious real fast you're not only gonna get killed, but you'll be responsible for a lot of good mens' lives, and you may very well get them killed and I wouldn't doubt their families will come lookin' for you boys!" He cleared a sandy spot on the ground and said, "Lookie here, boy. As an air traffic controller, you know how to talk to the fly boys. Right?" I nodded an affirmative.

"Air Force, Navy, Marine or Army, that's why you're going to different schools boy, so you understand a little about each service! Now, in the show (Vietnam) we have platoons, and platoons go on either recon or search and destroy missions. If we encounter hostile fire and can't overcome it, we need air support. Well, we're all in close quarters in the bush! Lately we've been getting a lot of friendly fire on us by our own. So, the staff came up with a new combatant - a combat controller or CCT. You're either assigned to a patrol and go to the bush with us - or we call you in from the FAC boys and you parachute in between the enemy and us, call in the air strike, and then hope we win so you can get back with us for extraction. You capichi flyboy?!"

I didn't like that one a bit, and neither did the six others with me. We were one of the first groups to be known as Combat Controllers. The USAF equivalent of Special Forces. Well, we got serious during E&E training Phase I. An Air Force Lt. Colonel and Master Sergeant came to our Phase I graduation and presented the berets and badges we had earned, then gave us orders to our next duty station. POW and weapons training and then to Oklahoma for me. Three of us went to Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma, home of the Third Mobile Communication Group or Third MOB. The other four went to Altus Air Force Base, Oklahoma.

Next step - Ft. Bragg, North Carolina: C-4 (plastic explosives), mines, nuclear, biological, chemical, electronic and psychological training were our training topics for the next four weeks. I won't even get into this phase. But it was scary!

"Okay Tatum Hey! Tatum! Earth to Airman Tatum, over."

It was the Captain. He had finished the pre-flight while I was in dreamland. I sure wish I could get my hands on that Tech Sergeant Recruiter about now. Air conditioned control tower, my ass!

The aircraft was small and simple. We went to the tarmac and started messing with the photo gear when an Air Force Tech Sergeant walked up and told me to get my hands off his equipment and don't touch it until after he offers it to me. I'd had just about enough crap at that point from Tech Sergeants!

I stared at him and he looked me up and down and stared at the beret in my thigh pocket and then said, "Sorry trooper, I didn't know." I thought, *Didn't know what?* The Captain saw the puzzled look in my face and saw an opportunity he couldn't resist, "That's alright Sergeant I'm sure Tatum doesn't mind, but I wouldn't let it happen again. Next time he won't be so forgiving." *What? Did they brainwash these guys to think that CCTs were tough or what?* In the air the Captain would explain a little about the CCT's reputation.

The Air Force was looking for a tougher reputation, so, at the suggestion of General Stoney, the Air Force Communications Service Commander, they took an

Olympic karate team touring Vietnam with the USO, dressed them in CCT outfits and put them in a GI bar in Saigon, knowing that the Greenie Beanies would pick a fight with those seven guys! They were right. There were bodies flying everywhere! But only Greenie Beanies were flying. The story was quickly disseminated and this new group called Combat Control Teams were heralded as the meanest combatants in the Nam.

"But they only taught us five days of hand-to-hand and only how to kill using certain "death spots" on the body!" I exclaimed.

The Captain looked at me smiling, and said, "Well, that's enough for me!"

At 3,500 feet the Captain went over the instruments in front of me. Artificial horizon, bank left, right, up, down and had me hold the stick and put my feet on the pedals with him. Yes! Airspeed indicator (an airplane speedometer) fuel gauge, engine temperature, throttle, and armament. Radios and procedures - how to initiate contact (I knew this part).

Then he said, "Okay - take me home."

I didn't have the slightest idea where I was, where I took off from or where I was headed. The aircraft was diving! I guess I leaned forward. Pull back - oops! Too much - it's going to stall - so push down - oops, too much again! Now I'm diving again! It was real frustrating! After about an hour I could hold a general direction left of north/south or right of north/south. The altitude - well I stayed within 500 feet of what he wanted. Now, let's land. *Sure*, I thought. *That's easy for you to say!* Ten landings later I did it alone! I landed four times on one approach!! (It bounced a little!)

It was breakfast time (brunch really) and we were back on the flight line at 1100 hours working with the equipment. The video style camera was mounted to the rocket pod on the right wing. I kept the still camera with the zoom. We took off and I started filming U Tapao Air Base, Thailand. That's where I was? Well - at least now I knew! That afternoon we made some adjustment on the wing camera and tried again. The pictures we got back from the 1100 hours flight weren't what we aimed at! I wondered if I had ever hit my own target at basic training?!

When Mac landed, he always did three go arounds with me on the controls all three times. We needed new struts though, after the first day!! At 0600 hours the following day I would begin my first FAC mission.

Our FAC missions involved flights along the Cambodian and Laotian borders as we worked our way back to NKP, located on the eastern district of Thailand along the border of Laos. We flew day after day marking the ground for air strikes with white phosphorus (WP). A Forward Air Controllers' mission was to identify the enemy's location and mark it with smoke. The fighter would then have the target spotted for their high speed bombing and gun runs.

We were pretty far removed from the turmoil our soldiers were going through on the ground. We heard the gunfire and screams over the radio - I kept thinking of the diagram our team leader drew for us and the need for us to parachute between the lines, so to speak. I kept looking for what would be lines. After about a week I understood how my FAC was discerning enemy and friendly. He told me that there's no way for CCT's to drop directly between friendly and enemy troops to call in the air strikes. He taught me to read terrain relief by the type of cover, colors of leaves, etc. High spots

were the ideal spot to call in the strikes, evaluate the AO (area of operation), "even as the ground guys recon an area, you do it too," he taught. "Look for movement or smoke. Look for possible landing zones (LZs)." Tree types were important. "You don't want to drop into tall trees - you're a sitting duck if you get hung up. Look for the smaller trees," he would say.

Mac taught me a lot. We worked well together. Mac lived in a small trailer (connex style) on the flight line with an air conditioner he had "acquired". He had invited me to move in with him. It wasn't bad. 'Dodger' flew my ration of Coors every couple days, since he was shuttling into Bangkok daily, and he made sure the Coors was always nice and cold!

We were finally ready to recon for TF "Alpha" rather than fly FAC missions. We contacted TF "Alpha" and told them we were ready. They sent us in to Cambodia filming the whole flight, in and out. Still photos, and video - eight different courses in and out. There was a lot of resistance via anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) to us being there. Apparently the NVA & VC would cross the border to regroup and resupply. It was a refuge for them since military orders to this point put Cambodia and Laos off limits. TF "Alpha" was happy with the films, but they always wanted a close-up of another building they saw or a suspect village. And we provided it daily. Sometimes we went in twice a day.

Then the tough one - all the way to Phnom Penh. They wanted a low level course in over the Mekong River, over the airport and then return through Laos to South Vietnam. Mac thought that an awfully demanding flight for an O-1. No air cover...just us and lots of auxiliary fuel! We had encountered little ground fire on all of our missions to this point. But at 300 feet above ground level ("AGL") we were within the range of small arms!

The first hostile fire we encountered was along the Thai/Cambodian border. The NVA had anti-aircraft guns - wheel mounted according to the photos, and we were low and slow. So Mac went down to 100 feet so they would lose us quicker. We took a couple of small arms rounds but nothing bad. There was more anti-aircraft fire approaching the "Y" in the Mekong River on the north side of Phnom Penh. No hits, but real hairy and it continued as we flew east/southeast to the Laos border. Then east to Saigon, destination Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

The hairy part was over - we had passed the Cambodian/Laos border unscathed. We were looking forward to a cold one - I was so hot and tired I laid my head back to rest for awhile. I must have dozed off 'cause I was startled by a slap, slap, slap as something whizzed right in front of my nose. The aircraft rolled right. I was disoriented...Mac was doing evasive maneuvers - diving and banking right, but we didn't recover from the bank, we were upside down now! I turned and looked at Mac. Wow, I was really dizzy! He was laying forward on the stick. I grabbed the stick, but Mac was too big. His weight wouldn't allow me to move it freely. "Mac!" I yelled, "Sit up!" But, he would never hear me. He was gone. That fast.

I was able to get the stick centered but we were still diving and cocked to the right. I looked at Mac and decided that I must get him off the controls. But I couldn't reach him. We were at 2,500 feet and in a 700 feet per minute descent...I pulled back

with both hands. The nose responded. *Oh yeah, my feet.* I put my feet on the pedals and centered the ball. "Okay, we're better now," I told Mac. "I'll get you back." But I knew I wouldn't be able to land with him on the stick. I looked back, and then I looked at the instruments - 100 feet per minute descent - *Okay* - I took my M-16 and pushed Mac up. I saw a distant stare in the grey eyes...he was gone. The M-16 wasn't long enough - *my bayonet*, I thought - but I couldn't - I had to! I mounted the bayonet and told Mac I was sorry. I pushed him up, placing the bayonet on his shoulder harness buckle. *Thank goodness it didn't go in.*

I wedged the butt of the rifle on the small dash he had installed to the left side of the aircraft. *It held! But, for how long? How could I have closed my eyes like that? Where are we? What am I doing here?* "Fly first, fly first, fly first," Mac's voice echoed in my mind. I went back up to 3,500 feet. *Okay, I'm flying. It's so quiet.* All I could hear was the steady drone of the engine. It sounded so different. *Oh, the headsets - they must have fallen off.* I put them on. *Think - 121.5 emergency - "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! This is....." What's our call sign? Think!* I couldn't remember the call sign, so I continued, "Pilot dead. Heading 200 degrees, air speed 120 knots, position - unknown, altitude 3,500 feet. Mayday, Mayday, Mayday." Silence - *Shit! No one heard me. Try again!* I did. Nothing!! *What radio am I on? Oh shit. The switch was on intercom. Radio one...which one is radio one? The switch had five positions, intercom, one, two, three, and four. I had no idea which radio was which. What a mess!* "Fly First" *Oh no! Altitude 1,000 feet! Go up - pull back, not so much. Airspeed - Airspeed, push forward. Shit, Shit, Shit! Talk! Remember! Fly - Talk - Listen - Then Fly - Talk - Listen. Okay. Try again.* On radio one..."Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. This is 'Bull Dog' One One. Pilot dead. Altitude 3,000." *What's my altitude? Shit! 1,000 feet! Up, up bitch!* (I didn't know I was transmitting when I was talking to myself! I didn't even know I was talking out loud! I let go of the mike.) *Fly, Fly, Get up.* "Bull Dog' One One this is First Son, over."

"What's that? Who?" *Fly, Airspeed 80 knots. More throttle. Up, Up, Faster, Faster. Who's calling?*

"Bull Dog' One One, this is First Son, over."

Yea!! "First Son", oh - the mike switch, "First Son, this is 'Bull Dog' One One, over."

"Bull Dog', this is First Son. Sounds like you're in a world of hurt up there buddy." (*No shit, Sherlock*, I thought.) "Hold on 'Bull Dog'. Let's see what we can do.....'Bull Dog', this is First Son. We don't have any pilots here to help - you're on tactical ground frequency, over."

Oh shit. Push the mike! "Okay, First Son. What frequency am I on.....oh yeah, over"

"That's classified 'Bull Dog'." I was in complete awe with his answer. I looked at the radios. Each had a different frequency. *I don't know how to fly*, I thought. *I'm at (looked up....good) 4,500 feet and this asshole tells me he's not allowed to tell me the frequency I'm on!! Shit!!!* "Well then, can you tell me what it starts with!!"

"Okay 'Bull Dog'. One, over."

"And what does it end with?"

"Three" I looked at my radios: 124.3, 126.2, and 121.5! *Bingo! Radio number one!* "Okay First Son. Thanks, I'll try Radio number two and see what I get. Please wait here in case it doesn't work, okay?....oh, over."

"Roger, 'Bull Dog'. First Son standing by."

Switch to - fly - 5,500 feet...no go down 130 knots...slow down "ease back the throttle a little bit.." as Mac would say. I looked at Mac. *Bayonet okay. Wings level, no ascent. Okay, talk - switch on radio two, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, First Son One One, Mayday."* *No, First Son is the other guy! Get a grip! "I mean 'Bull Dog' One One, Mayday, Shit!"*

"'Bull Dog' One One Mayday Shit, this is Falcon 27, over."

"27, 'Bull Dog'. My pilot's dead and I don't know where the hell I am except I know I'm not in Florida, over."

"Okay One One, are you a pilot and, if not, tell me what and who you are."

"I'm Chip and I'm an Air Force Combat Controller."

"Okay, Chip. CCT huh? Well, grit your teeth son, 'cause we got some work ahead of us. Who is your pilot?"

"Mac."

"What's his last name?"

"Raines, I think."

"Roger One One. Mac's a good man - I'm sorry. Fly high, Mac," and two other voices echoed through their oxygen masks, "Fly high, Mac". "Okay One One, I want you to key your mike and keep it keyed for a hundred count, over."

"Roger, keying now. I might talk to myself. Mac taught me the basic of flying so I'm going back to Fly, Talk, Listen, 1, 2, 3, 4,..." It was an eternity. My wings were level. I was at 4,000 feet and staying close. I looked out my left wing. Shit! A whiskey pete rocket was hanging...98, 99, 100, un-key.

"'Bull Dog' One One, this is Falcon 27, gotcha! What the hell are you doing over there? I need you to turn to the left to a heading of 085, over."

"Roger, 27, turn left to 085. Where am I? over"

"Well, looks like you're crossing the fence going south, so turn now!" Ground fire again. *Shit! Tracers. Shit! Shit! Shit!* Turning left, I watched the compass spin past 180 through 170, then 160 - *nose up - watch my altitude - 130 - not so fast - 100 keep going - come back - 090 - no stop turning - 080 - oops - come back a little more. Okay, there. Shit! (Let go of the mike!)*

"Okay 'Bull Dog'. Don't worry about that mike. We all went through it in flight training. The difference is our flight instructor was with us, huh!"

"Roger 27. I, uh, I have another problem. On my left wing a whiskey pete is hanging, over."

"That's okay One One. We'll take care of that later. Now listen. Hold your heading at 085 degrees. Got that? 085 degrees and an altitude of 3,500 feet, over."

"Roger 27. 085 and 035, over."

"Now you sound like a CCT, One One. Hang tough. We're sending up a chase bird to take over. His call sign is Sugar Daddy 06. We're gonna go burn some babies."

I took that to mean that they were fighters with a load of napalm and they were

fixing to make a run. "Roger 27. Standing by." *Fly - Talk - Listen.*

"'Bull Dog' One One, this is First Son, over." (Switch to radio one.)

"First Son, this is One One, over."

"Roger One One. Radio check, over."

"Lima Charlie, First Son. Thanks for your help. I've got a Sugar Daddy coming up on my emergency frequency. Out" Switch two - "Sugar Daddy 06, this is 'Bull Dog' One One."

"Hey there One One. I understand you need a little DF (direction finding). What's up Mac? Too much of that Coors your boy got ya? Over."

"06, this is One One. Mac's not with us any longer. This is his boy though, and I'd sure like a cold Coors about now."

"Shit son, do you know how to fly that fly trap?"

"A little - Mac gave me the basics and I did a few touch and go's. But only one full stop, over."

"Okay son. We're on our way. Maintain 085 degrees go to 2,500 feet."

"Roger 085 and 025." *Fly - Talk - Listen. Down, oops, too fast - throttle - back - easy does it - okay - there - 2,800 - 2,700 - start to level - there - 2,600 - close enough - too slow - more throttle - Shit! I can do this. And then it struck me - I really need to get this rocket off my wing. That's it, "My wing". I'm the pilot in command of this baby.*

I pushed the mike "Uh, any aircraft this frequency. This is 'Bull Dog' One One. I'm offering a case of ice cold Coors straight from the land of the Rocky Mountains to the first one to fly back with me." I let go of the switch and I couldn't understand a single call sign - so many aircraft answered!

Then, loud and clear through the babble, "This is Falcon 27. on my way to collect. I'm 2 miles to your 3 o'clock."

Another voice, "27, this is 06. I order you to return to base. That's my case." About then an F-4 streaked across in front from right to left and slightly above. He turned and popped his landing gear to slow down. He ignored Sugar Daddy and told me I'd have to get a little more airspeed, so I pushed in the throttle to just below red line and the air speed indicator started to rise. Wow it was low. 90, 100, 110, 120. The rocket was swinging.

Then I heard 27 say, "Okay One One. Lets get rid of that hanger. Shake your booty." So, I shook my wings left/right, left/right. "Use your pedals One One." So, I kicked in pedals and snap - it was gone.

"Okay One One, your airstrip is 25 miles at 12 o'clock. See you on the ground son." And with that his landing gear went up and 'Flame's shot out the back and a trail of black exhaust shot out in front of me. "Just follow the black road One One," and I knew what he meant. His exhaust trail couldn't be missed.

I heard him on frequency, "Tan Son Nhut, this is Falcon 27 on guard".

"27 Tan Son Nhut, over."

"Roger, boys. Your birds' at my six o'clock 15 miles. You'd best scramble alert crews and emergency vehicles. Get EOD (Explosive Ordinance Detachment) out too. Looks like he has hot ordinance on his wing. Pilot's dead and the enlisted R/O is flying the bird."

"Roger 27. Cleared to land, Taxi to 3C and stand by."

"'Bull Dog' One One, This is Tan Son Nhut, over."

"Tan Son Nhut, this is 'Bull Dog' One One, Emergency, over."

"Roger One One. We have you. Stand by." *Sure stand by. Shit! What now?*

A new voice said, "One One, this is Tan Son Nhut. I'm your travel guide to that cold beer. Now follow my instructions and we'll get you down."

"Roger, Tan Son Nhut."

"Okay One One. I need some info from you. How much fuel do have?"

"One-quarter tank, over."

"Okay. Say your name."

Communications security didn't allow the transmission of names. *Who was this guy? He should know that!* In tech school, our instructor always obliged by repeating what we asked. (I remembered the joke he played on us in ATC school, so I mimicked him) "Roger Tan Son Nhut - Your name."

"Say again."

"Roger Tan Son Nhut, Again, over" (I was feeling pretty good 'cause I saw the landing strip. I also saw the ordinance area where the landing aircraft dropped their unused ordinance. I flipped the armed switch and turned right to the ordinance area.)

"One One, maintain heading. You're turning right."

"Roger Tan Son Nhut. Ordinance away," and I fired 1, 2, and 3 and the pods were empty and I even hit the ordinance zone! I turned left back to course and asked Tan Son Nhut for permission to land.

"Roger One One, do you want foam?"

"Negative Tan Son Nhut. I'm fine now," and I landed that sucker just as smooth as if I'd been flying my whole life. I taxied to the tarmac with the fire trucks, Security Police, ambulance, and Duty Officer. The tower instructed me to taxi direct so I did. I stopped, but I didn't know how to stop the engine so I kept it idling until 27 taxied up and jumped over to cut the mags. He smiled and said "Hell of a job, One One. I'm buying. Let's go," and I turned to get Mac and he said, "No. Let them do it," pointing to the medics just arriving in an ambulance. I got my M-16 and climbed out with the still camera and removed the wing camera.

The Duty Officer walked up to us. He was a grounded Lieutenant. "Hey you!" The Lieutenant was pointing at me. "Yeah, you buster! Take him Sergeant" and an Air Police Sergeant and Airman First Class walked toward me. Man - my legs were shaking when I got out of that plane, but all of the sudden I was being threatened again. I didn't think I had any adrenaline left...but I felt it rush and my legs gained strength. Falcon 27 was standing next to me as I locked and loaded my M-16, bayonet already at point. The Lieutenant stopped and flushed white. The Sergeant and A1C Air Police raised their hands.

"That's close enough, gentlemen," I heard myself say. "Now, what's the problem?"

The Lieutenant spoke up, "This is my airfield buster and that's my ordinance area. You dropped ordinance without permission and used improper radio procedure. You're grounded!" I looked at Mac, his lifeless body being lifted out and onto a stretcher - then at Falcon 27 and he looked as surprised as me! I clicked off the safety on my weapon

and set down the cameras.

"Lieutenant", I began, "that's my pilot. Those holes in the aircraft are from anti-aircraft weapons. This hole in my uniform (showing him my left thigh) is where a bullet five times the size of your dick tried to take my head off. Now, I'm sorry for dropping that ordinance, but I didn't want to blow up your only active runway trying to land that shot-up piece of shit! And seeing that I'm not a pilot - I thought that the chance of me crashing on the runway was pretty good. As for the radio procedure, I did as I was told. You said say your name, I said 'your name'." At that point, I put on my beret. "You said, 'say again' - I said 'again'. Now, unless you want to occupy the stretcher next to my friend over there, you'd best leave."

Then a voice from behind me said, "That's right Lieutenant. Leave and report to my office ASAP. Lieutenant, change that," the voice continued. "You stand guard over this aircraft and the troopers' equipment, at attention, until you're relieved. By the way, this is *my* airfield and that was *my* ordinance area."

I turned around and saw my second bird Colonel - 27 introduced me, "Bull Dog' - meet Sugar Daddy." I saluted and he said, "Drop that son. I owe you the salute," and he and Falcon saluted me. "Now, about that Colorado Kool Aid", he said.

"Yes sir." I got the cooler out of the O-1 and asked where Mac's home #2 was.

"Oh, over there," 27 said, pointing to Mac's connex. A sign on front said "For Rent". I chuckled at Mac's humor. I was sure gonna miss him.

If I could find that recruiter, I'd kick his ass from here to sundown!!

We drank about twelve cold ones between the three of us, and were on our way to the "O" club (a first for me). We had been in the connex (nicknamed La La land) for two hours before we ran out of beer. So, it was time to find another source. We got in the Colonel's jeep and drove past the Lieutenant who was still standing at attention. I heard the Colonel murmur, "Prick," as we passed the Lieutenant. Then, he turned to Falcon and asked him what he thought they should do with Lieutenant Ashley. Falcon, who I learned was the Colonel's Executive Officer, turned around and looked at me. "Whaddya think, 'Bull Dog'?"

I suggested to him that, since Mac was gone, the Bird Dog needed a new friend. They both looked at each other and smiled. "FAC" they said, simultaneously in agreement. The Colonel gave him his orders the following morning. That should have taught the young Lieutenant the meaning of respect!

CHAPTER TWO

I wish I was there to see it, but I hopped a C130 and para-dropped into NKP. As I was flying my canopy to what I considered home, I saw a crowd gathering on the medevac pad - I had intended to land there. I wondered what was going on. I never dreamed that you had to clear a paradrop with the base commander! *Uh, oh!!*

As I drifted toward the ground, the tiny figures around the medevac pad came into view, an Air Police vehicle and about twenty people were there. *Ah, shit! What now!?* As I turned to a modified base to final, I saw Colonel Brown and Master Sergeant Cox. The rest of the TDY guys from Tinker were there, and some nurses it looked like. I pulled, flared and did a stand-up landing - on target - yes! Everyone cheered and clapped as my chute collapsed around me.

Master Sergeant Cox came up and shook my hand and welcomed me back. I had a pack of film hanging on my chest from the last mission with Mac that I gave the Colonel, then I asked Master Sergeant Cox what was up. He said, "The C130 pilot called TF "Alpha" and told them you were inbound at 10,000 feet to the medevac pad. They all thought you were wounded on a chopper. They had heard through the grape vine of your crash landing in Saigon. So, naturally, they assumed you were hurt."

"When your chute popped open and it wasn't round and we saw you spinning and playing up there, we decided you were giving us a show. You're some kinda hero to these folks. The Colonel is here to present you with the South Vietnam Campaign Medal with a "V" for valor and an air medal. And then you make this kind of entrance and give us these classified films - hell the Duke ain't got nothin' on you son!!"

About then the Colonel walked up to me. I had just gotten my beret on and snapped a smart salute when the Colonel called everyone to attention. He gave me the medals and off the cuff promoted me to Sergeant. He said, "That was such a damned impressive display, only a Sergeant could do that," pointing to the sky. "Put 'em on Sergeant Tatum."

Wow! I get promoted for an illegal paradrop and maneuvers. Only in Vietnam! Oh boy! A promotion party!!

The hospital Commander, a Lt. Colonel, invited our TDY contingent to have the party at the hospital club - it was normally off limits to any one other than hospital personnel (because of the nurses!). When Colonel Brown heard the invitation he wanted to give me another stripe! I was sure glad it was Saturday and Sunday was a "Dress Down" day. That meant that only essential staff worked.

As we were walking to the jeeps, we heard a chopper. Then the speaker, "Attention in the compound. Chopper inbound. Triage to helipad."

We all watched 'Dodger' land on the pad. The medical team went to evacuate the wounded when the door swung open and a Special Forces Captain and two other Green Berets jumped off with a stretcher. A red headed soldier was on the stretcher with a bloody bandage around his lower left leg. The Captain looked at me, gave the Special Forces Recognition and started running with the stretcher to the hospital. Colonel Brown ordered his jeep spun around to load-up the stretcher and Green Beret Captain. The

driver went directly to the hospital. I saw the Colonel and Captain talking, then they both turned and looked at me.

Oh shit! What'd I do now?

I walked to the helipad and 'Dodger' was still in the pilot seat. I invited him as my guest for my promotion party that evening. What a party!!

Sunday morning at 0400 hours the Sergeant of the Guard came to my hootch and woke me. He said to get dressed "straight up". The *Old Man* wanted me. *This is getting old!! What could Colonel Brown want at 0400 hours!?!?* Then my mind went back to the party last night. *Fraternization. I knew it! Ah Shit, here goes my new stripe!*

Master Sergeant Cox was waiting in the jeep. "Well, you're a popular little fellah these days, Tatum."

"I guess. What did I do now?"

"Wrong! Not what you did - what you're about to do!" We reported to Colonel Brown. The Colonel introduced us to his guest, the Special Forces Captain I'd seen the day before with the wounded kid.

"My Way, I'd like you to meet Sergeant Tatum, our resident special Forces Expert."

I thought, *that was the quickest transition from a yardbird to expert in the history of mankind. What the hell was I an expert at!?!?*

The Captain offered his hand shake to me and Master Sergeant Cox.

"Gentlemen, please sit." said the Colonel. That wasn't a request. Colonel Brown then entered into a dissertation about the war, stateside pressures, political decisions and unfortunate accidents which had brought the four of us together. They needed me for a covert mission "which could turn the events of the war" is how it was presented to us. But Master Sergeant Cox was our team commander and he had to release me to them. *(Whoever 'them' is.) I had never been on a real world ground mission in my life! And they were talking about a mission which could turn the tide of the Vietnam Conflict. Who the hell was this Lon Nol guy they were talking about? I was lost, and these old war lords were strategizing a final conflict of which I was to play a major role? I don't think so! I had already decided that when they asked me, I'd turn them down.*

The next thing I knew, a civilian showed up to begin an update briefing for the Colonel, the Captain, and me. *Update what? Don't you have to have a date to get an update?*

As the civilian began speaking, I raised my hand like a school boy to his teachers. "Don't you want to ask if I have anything to say?"

The civilian looked at me, and then the Captain.

The Captain said point blank, "Tatum, please don't disturb the briefing. You're our Commo man, whether you like it or not and let me tell you, I dislike the idea more than you."

Fat chance, I thought, but I knew better than to say anything.

"Pack your gear Tatum," offered the Captain. "We've got an 0600 flight."

I said good-bye to Master Sergeant Cox again and was off.

'Dodger' was waiting on the pad. He looked at me and smiled, "Welcome aboard 'Bull Dog'." The civilian was up front with 'Dodger', and the Captain and Colonel were

in the back. They put me in the "Hell Hole" - put a monkey strap on me and told me to man the .50 calibre machine gun. 'Dodger' signaled for me to put on a flight helmet and plug in. I did. He smiled and said, "You're a popular kid."

"I guess", I said un-enthused. I looked at him with my best disgusted look.

He said, "Hey, cheer up! I meant that! Two nurses want me to introduce them to you."

Well, that's better, I said with my smile.

Then 'Dodger' told me to chamber the first round and explained how to use a .50 calibre machine gun, and when to use it! He explained that on approach, at his command, his crew chief on the other door gun and I should "rock and roll".

"Just strafe the jungle. They're out there and it helps keep their heads down."

"Who's 'they'?" I asked.

"They are the guys who gave you your first solo in an Air Force aircraft."

I was sorry I asked. I was to be even more sorry after we touched down.

The intercom crackled. "Okay boys. Rock and Roll."

We let loose. I was watching the tracers mow down the jungle. What a sight! And the smell of the smoking barrels is something I would never forget.

"Firebase Three Alpha. This is 'Dodger', one mile final."

The response was cute, I thought, "Roger, 'Dodger'. Three Alpha's lobbing."

About five seconds later I saw explosions in the jungle - and the jungle was only fifty feet under me! We were headed to the center of an area which had mortar rounds exploding to the left, right and rear. A small compound came into view and I saw people moving, so I aimed the .50 calibre toward those gooks!! The Captain grabbed my arm and swung the weapon out to the right. He said, "You don't wanna do that son - that's your new home."

"Aw shit!" I said in a low voice, the Captain well aware of my statement.

When we touched down, the Captain yelled "move it, move it, move it!" I cleared the chamber, grabbed my gear and dove for the ground 'cause 'Dodger' was already airborne. Then I remembered - 'Dodger' told me I'd have seven count to clear the chamber and hit the deck. When I raised my head and looked around, I saw the Captain and several others walking toward me. I was laying on my stomach, in mud, with a stump less than one foot from my nose.

"I thought you fly-boys were crazy," said a big bruiser of a blonde haired beret, "but I've never seen a superman act quite like that."

"Yeah" said a sleazy looking soldier standing next to Hercules. "I'd a stayed and gone back with 'Dodger'."

I wanted to move but my brain and body weren't cooperating.

"You see that nut, sir?" Hercules said. "They must have been thirty or forty feet up."

The Captain just shook his head and signaled for the two to help me to the hootch. "Pull yourself together, 'Bull Dog'. We'll be back in ten to brief." Then he turned to the Burley Midwesterner and ordered him to "kiss the Nam" till he came back and "never use my rank! Do you understand, Haystack?" 'Haystack' replied with a "sir" while his whole mass was falling to the earth. I was amazed that his arms could lift him as he was

pushing away the Nam. He looked at me from the all familiar front leaning rest position and said, "Bull Dog!" with a smile and drawl. "More like tad-pole."

I sat up, ignoring the taunting and trying to remember what the hell happened! About then, the First Sergeant came in and smiled at me. "Figure it out yet?" He asked, knowing that I was still trying to comprehend what had happened. "You missed 'Dodger's' lucky seven - I expect you stepped out at about fifteen feet in the air."

The radio crackled and 'Dodger's' voice was choppy, "Three Alpha, 'Dodger'. How's 'Bull Dog'?"

"Dunno. Doc's on his way to look at him," the First Sergeant grabbed the mike and answered. "What count? Over."

'Dodger' answered back, "I gave him eleven. Seven come eleven. That's a crap. He's got it so far. Anyone want to challenge, I'll come back."

"Not this year, 'Dodger'," answered First Sergeant. "Three Alpha out."

It had come back to me - I heard the exit command, so I cleared the chamber, took off the monkey strap and grabbed my gear, turned around and jumped expecting the ground two or three feet below - but it wasn't there. The next thing I knew I belly flopped in the mud.

Doc was looking me over when my thinking cleared. He was shining a light in my eyes and asked if I could stand. I said I thought so and did but, man! I felt like I did on my first jump when the Jump Master put his fist in my gut. Doc kept hold of my arm and walked me outside where 'Haystack', was still at it. I began feeling better after Doc splashed 'Haystack' in the face by stomping a puddle. "Hey Asshole!" 'Haystack' said, coming out of the front leaning rest position. But the Captain was there and ordered his "ass" back down. Doc walked me around the compound and we stopped at my stump. Next to it was a hole full of water. "Mortar round two days ago. That's what saved your ass."

I looked down and smiled. Then it hit me - *mortar round in our compound!* *Whoa! Let me outta here!* I took my first look around the compound and saw craters and stumps everywhere. Boom! A loud explosion to my left and I saw a tree falling and yelled "Incoming!!" and dove into my mud hole. Doc grabbed me smiling and I was suddenly surrounded by about ten soldiers, all laughing, as I sat up looking around at them.

"Team Red Rock," the Captain said. "This is our new Commo - 'Bull Dog'. It seems Reddy's heading stateside for a while. 'Bull Dog', meet Team Red Rock. We have no rank here, right 'Haystack'?"

"Right, 'My Way'," he said poutingly.

I was introduced to the team members. I was still sitting in the mortar hole as the Captain began:

"Pop," he pointed to the First Sergeant. He nodded and smiled. The Captain continued saying, "artillery, weapons, and DF". 'Pop' was the oldest man on the team, I noted as I looked around. 'Pop' stepped forward and offered a hand to help me out of my "Tad Pole hole" as 'Haystack' named it.

"Pablo - Sniper". Pablo was quick to correct 'My Way' by saying "assassin". Pablo had black eyes and a high and tight hair cut. He reached out to shake my hand and

I saw the Seal insignia on his forearm.

"You met 'Haystack'. Okay, 'Haystack'. Get your tired ass over here and tell me my name." 'Haystack' popped up and ran to the Captain and said, "Sir, you are 'My Way', Sir."

"And why am I called 'My Way' soldier?"

"Sir, because it's 'My Way' or the 'Highway', Sir."

"Now, why do you keep calling me Sir, 'Haystack'?" 'Haystack' got a disgusted look on his face and hit mother earth again.

I was chuckling when the next guy was introduced. A well built black Greenie Beanie stepped forward and offered his hand. *What a grip* I thought. And his "expertise" the Captain continued, was demolition. *What did he call him? 'Blackman'?* I thought that strange.

"'Cajun'. Weapons Tech. If you want it, he can make it." He held up a peace sign. It fit him. Long hair, and sloppy. I later learned that he was CIA.

"'Chief' - weapons expert. Hand-to-hand, knife and crossbow." He smiled at me and held up an Indian sign and said, "How." I smiled and answered, "Any way I can."

That got 'Haystack' to pipe up, "Hey I didn't know Tad Poles could talk." The Captain ignored him and continued.

"'Snake'. Weapons, escape and evasion, transportation specialist." I looked at the Captain, puzzled at the remark about transportation. I would later find out that he could hot-wire anything. He ended up in the Marines in lieu of a jail sentence for grand theft auto. Apparently, the judge gave 'Snake' a choice - the military or the pen. He seemed to be of Arabian descent. Black hair, olive skin and rotten teeth.

"'Cowboy', explosives, mortar, .50 calibre." The well built Texas Green Beret gave a longhorn, "Howdy partner. Welcome aboard."

"'The Kid' - linguist". He was of Vietnamese descent but born and raised in the US. Obviously CIA, he stepped forward and shook my hand and nodded his head.

"'Flame!'" the Captain yelled looking toward the tree downed by the incoming round a few minutes before. A thin, tanned beret ran over and said, "Sorry 'bout that 'Bull Dog'".

A tired voice from the ground yelled, "Tad Pole!"

'Flame' said, "Don't mind him. He's pissed 'cause you beat his ten count."

The Captain offered the explanation for the explosion at that point. "'Flame's' been clearing the compound," pointing to the roll of explosive fuse in 'Flame's' hand. I felt like an idiot, yelling incoming, and diving for China.

"'Super Cop'", 'My Way' continued. "Navy intelligence 2 nce. Obviously a Naval intelligence officer, he nodded recognition.

"Okay 'Haystack'. Get up here," the Captain commanded. "Grab a seat men." We all shuffled around to find a log to sit on. "No more crap drops men. Reddy's out and we almost lost 'Bull Dog' here. We're less than a week from the operation and we can't afford to loose anyone. We're damned lucky that 'Bull Dog' here was available or we'd be shit out of luck on Commo. 'Bull Dog', your gonna have to get a new name for this operation. Your tactical call sign is the talk of Saigon these days and I imagine the Fonda Bitch will be lookin' for you," he said in jest. "You have two hours to offer your

choice or I'll let 'Haystack' name you."

'Haystack' beamed and lipped out "Tad Pole".

"Any word on our target 'My Way'?" asked 'Pop'.

"No," the Captain offered. "But a twist. We'll be taking in thirteen Charlie with us."

"Then a jump is out of the question. No one's ever jumped two under canopy" 'Pop' said.

I was reminded at that point of the Jump Master at Benning. He told us that our free fall sport canopies could fly double. I raised my hand. "Hey, Tad Pole" It was 'Haystack'. "This ain't no kindy garden. You don't have to ask permission to pee!" They all laughed.

"What is it 'Bull Dog'?" the Captain laughed.

"The square sport canopy that we use for CCT can support two. Especially if one's a small gook."

"Okay, 'Bull Dog'. I'll look into that. 'Haystack', take 'Bull Dog' here and get him settled in. All right men. Mark 0812 Mark." We all set our watches. "Lagger here 1000 hours. Dismissed. 'Bull Dog!'" I turned and looked. "Code name by then!" I nodded my head in recognition.

I walked toward the hootch, noticing it was the only building in the compound. 'Haystack' turned me toward the edge of the compound and said, "This way your highness. Don't nobody live in that death trap," he said, pointing to the bullet holes that riddled the small wooden hut. We stepped down into a three man bunker. "You and the Captain, uh, I mean 'My Way', stay here." He threw my gear in a dry corner (the corners and the center had high spots...the other area was mud.) *Holy shit*, I thought. *What the hell have I gotten into?* I decided not to unpack my kit bag. Instead, I would let the Captain know after the 1000 hours meeting that I wasn't the man for the job. I walked out of the bunker and walked the perimeter with my M-16 locked, loaded and on safety and ready to rock and roll in the full auto mode. *Why*, I wondered, *did they ever have a single fire mode?*

I walked over to 'Flame' where he was hard at work setting charges. I looked over at 'Cajun' working with some C-4 and small arrows - making something, but I wasn't sure what. As I looked around, everyone was busy, except me. About then, 'Pop' waved me over to a bunker - the supply bunker. He told me to help 'Chief' get the Commo gear set up in the Commo bunker (that's where the Captain and I lived), then start testing out the equipment and run a radio check on the net. I nodded in an affirmative and grabbed a box that said "R390 Receiver". *Whoa! Hernia time!* 'Chief' quickly grabbed half and we walked through the cratered compound to the Commo bunker. I found the TAC antennas and started assembling them. They were usually a two man job, but back in Oklahoma, Tech Sergeant Packer, the NCOIC of the MARS station, gave us a quick fix class on single man "erections". When I saw it on the training schedule, I thought it would be a "different" kind of class. But no-o-o-o-o-o. It referred to HF/UHF/VHF Tactical Antennas. Now I was glad Jimmy J. talked me into taking the class. I had two antenna masts assembled and ready to erect in thirty minutes. I asked the Captain for the HF frequency band he wanted me to monitor so I could adjust the long wire.

He looked at me confused and said, "Bull Dog'. You're the communications pro here - I'm just a grunt. But you just make sure that when I need to talk to somebody, I'm able to talk to them then. If you can't do that, it's the highway for you. Do you understand?"

Aha! The old "My Way' or the highway, bit, huh?" I thought. Then I opened my big mouth, "I've been meaning to talk to you about that, 'My Way'. I'd like to take you up on that. I'll take the highway."

'Pop' was in ear shot and I saw him perk up and whisper to 'Cajun'. 'Cajun' rounded up the troops for what was to be a monumental event. I found out later that several others had opted for the same at some point in team training with 'My Way'. Everyone lagged loosely around the two of us so that they could hear what was to come. But to their obvious surprise he said, "Okay, 'Bull Dog'. Get your gear." I double-timed it to the bunker and gathered my gear and proceeded back to the team. They had been talking about something. What, I wasn't sure and really didn't care. All I could do was think, *Yes!! I'm outta here!*

"Should I call 'Dodger', 'Pop', or will you?"

"Why do you want 'Dodger', 'Bull Dog'?" asked 'Pop'.

"Your choice, 'Bull Dog'," the Captain said with authority in his voice, "it's 'My Way'," pointing to his chest, "or the highway," he said, pointing past me to a trail at my 5 o'clock position.

I turned and looked. *Ah shit!* I remembered the ground fire - the mortar rounds being fired from Firebase Three A to the surrounding terrain to clear the flight path of hostile fire. Then it struck me - *I don't even know where I am...much less where that 'highway' goes.* And, as a 'highway' goes, it left a lot to be desired! The Captain pulled out a map from the map case he kept on him.

"All right men. Here's your chance. Anyone wanting to hit the highway, I'll show you where you are. You choose your destination and 'Super Cop' will brief intelligence. 'Cajun' will equip you, and 'Pop' will kiss your ass good riddance! 'Bull Dog' here is the team leader." Pablo stepped forward. *Well,* I thought, *maybe it won't be so bad.* Then 'Blackman' stepped forward. I said "Welcome aboard 'Blackman'." He just frowned at me. 'Chief' was next. "Any way we can," he said to me. 'Cowboy' popped up next and said, "Hell. I hear 'Bull Dog' has the coldest Colorado Kool Aid in country. I'm in." 'The Kid' smiled and said, "I like Kool Aid."

"Any one else?" asked the Captain. No response.

"Okay men. Get your gear. It's a two day patrol to NKP. That's your destination. 'Pop'. You take 'Bull Dog' and the rest of the 'Highway' Team and run point. Maybe you can get them home alive." *Maybe?* I thought, *holy shit!! Two days!! Walking!! Man-o-man! Six-man team plus 'Pop'. That's seven, just like a CCT escape and evasion team. That's how we trained. That's odd.*

"Okay men", 'Pop' said. "Bull Dog'. Stow the kit bag," and he gave me a back pack. Next he issued ammunition and grenades. I *really* like grenades. 'Cajun' brought the small arrows he was making and gave some to 'Chief'. Next, LRPS, Yuck!! Long Range Patrol Rations - the dehydrated crap. I much preferred "C" rations. But the weight was so much more for packing through the jungle.

"'Bull Dog!'" the Captain said. "Get my antennas up before you go."

I jogged over to the antenna pole and pulled up number one pole and adjusted the guide wire; I adjusted the second poles wires while the pole was still on the ground. I then attached the coax wire to the antenna, then erected it. I walked in and turned on the equipment to warm up. Fifteen minutes after giving the order, he had a fully functional communications center. He looked at 'Pop' and smiled.

'Pop' asked, "Are you sure you won't reconsider and stay with us 'Bull Dog'?"

"You know 'Pop'," I said, "when I was in E&E training our team leader read me the riot act about being prepared and taking the Nam seriously. Well, now I understand what he was tellin' me. Listen, no matter what Colonel Brown told you about me Captain, I'm not a trained or experienced soldier. I would only endanger and possibly cost you lives or even the mission. Why, I haven't even been on a recon or patrol, and here I am in critical mass with a hand picked special operations team of real specialists."

They both looked over the comm center and the Captain said, "It took Reddy two days to put up the comm center and have it operational and he had 'Haystack' helping him. It took you two hours...alone. That's a specialist. And don't let anyone tell you any different."

The Captain left at that point and 'Pop' asked me, pointing at the HF radio, "Does that thing really work?"

"Sure, I guess. Wanna try it?"

"You bet," said 'Pop'. I didn't know many active HF frequencies but in setting up the NKP TF "Alpha" comm center, I remembered a few frequencies for aeronautical stations. I had also RON'd (Remained Over Night) for six days in Guam and was able to work the airways station for a few days. I tuned the KWM2A Collins Transceiver to the 11176 upper side band frequency and put out a call, "Any station, any station. This is," I looked at 'Pop', "Red Rock One One", he said. "Red Rock One One, over," I said into the mike.

"Red Rock One One this is Andersen Airways, over."

"Andersen, this is Red Rock One One radio check, over."

"Red Rock, Andersen. I have you Lima Charlie, over."

The noise from the radio brought the Captain back into the bunker. "Who's Andersen, whatever?"

"That's an airways station in Guam, Sir."

"Guam! That's half way around the world!!"

"Well, sir, not quite."

He broke in, "Is that the HF radio?"

"Yes sir."

'Pop' whispered to me, "Two days and two Special Forces Green Beret Commo guys couldn't get it to work - we almost had to scratch."

"It's the long wire antenna 'Pop'. They had it all screwed up." Then the radio speaker crackled, "Red Rock One One this is Andersen. Authenticate Lima Bravo, over."

I reached into the Commo safe and took out an authenticating table and looked up Lima Bravo and answered, "Charlie Whiskey, over."

"Roger Red Rock. What can we do for you this afternoon, over." That's right,

it's a few hours later there. I remembered Jimmy J. getting me to go to a "MARS" training class. He told me that the Air Force was communicating in secret with aliens from mars. Boy, did I fall for it. I signed up and was the only one. Tech Sergeant Packer was delighted to have a sucker. I found out that MARS was Military Affiliate Radio System - the military equivalent to ham radio. But the one on one training was invaluable. We ran hundreds of phone patches from soldiers in Vietnam to their loved ones. I really enjoyed being able to do that for the guys. Then, I thought, why not now? "Andersen Red Rock One One. Request phone patch, over."

"Roger One One, say number"

I turned around and asked 'Pop' if he'd like to talk to home. He was so excited he couldn't remember his phone number. I told Andersen to stand by and gave 'Pop' the mike. I said, "Say 'over' when you're finished with a sentence, and your wife will be instructed to do the same." He gave Andersen his phone number and they said, "Stand by" and we all waited. By this time, the other ten team members heard the radio crackling and they were all crowding the bunker to see if we could really do it.

"Chuck, is that you honey? Oh, over."

"Jill! Holy shit honey! I can't believe it! You'll never guess where we are! We're in the middle of the bush with cong all around us, over."

"Oh honey, we've been so worried! We haven't heard anything for three months. We were so worried! Are you okay?, over"

"Fine, Fine, Jilly. How are the kid's and mom and dad?, over."

"We're all fine now, Chuck. Have a lot of news for you. Remember the R&R in Hawaii? Well, we've been blessed with another. Due in July."

"Ya Hoo-oo-oo-oo!" grunted everyone making me aware that the team was there.

"How are you doing this, honey? Over"

"You'll never believe it. You know how I always cussed the Air Force 'cause of they're always dropping their bombs on us? Well, they got serious and sent some of their boys to Special Forces school. They're called Combat Controllers and I'll tell you, I've met my first one and I'm a believer - they're the best! We've got guts but this guys got guts and a head on his shoulders."

We heard a break in at Andersen (it is an Air Force Base) and they all gave a "Ya hoo-oo-oo". They were able to talk for twenty minutes before Andersen had to cut them off. I got back on the radio and told them who it was and the shift supervisor, Staff Sergeant Lee, got on the radio and had me change to a discrete frequency. So, I changed frequencies and Lee came on. "Bull Dog? Tatum, is that you?"

"Sergeant Tatum to you Staff Sergeant Lee." I said.

"Sergeant?" he asked "Two months ago you just made Airman first class - war must be hell!"

"Believe me - it is, Sergeant Lee. Listen, I have eleven more team members that would like to call home. They've been incommunicado for three months. Can you do it?"

"You bet" he said. "Anything for the boys in green!"

So everyone got a call home that day. As it was, it would be the last time they would have talked to loved ones before operation "Red Rock". Before signing off, I

thanked Ssgt. Lee and he advised me that he would make sure that this frequency was monitored by airways personnel - 11117 or triple one one seven. "Red Rock One One out."

I walked out of the bunker after securing the crypto and the radios to a cheer and a new call sign, "Highway". The Captain let everyone settle down and talk to each other about their call home. He was actually relieved that no one received bad news. Bad news could have been devastating to the mission. But now morale was up, senses alert. It was time to train. 'Pop' read 'My Way's' mind - it was amazing how these guys could communicate so effectively without saying a word. If nothing else, I would always honor this special group of professionals. They were truly dedicated military fighting men, and I was proud to be associated with them, even if it was short lived because I was heading back to NKP.

We all followed 'Pop' to center compound where 'My Way' first took out a map and laid it on 'Cajun's' work bench. As 'My Way' led the briefing, explaining our current location, I realized that I wasn't the only one that didn't have the foggiest idea where I was, neither did anyone else, except for 'Dodger' and 'My Way'. I swore that would be the last time I would ever allow myself to be lost.

I remembered when I was a teenager, growing up in Florida. Hunting season was a time that my friends and I would wait all year for. We'd go to the Gulf Hammock - set up camp on the weekend and hunt squirrel, and wild hog, and turkey. Tim Leigh, had been a friend since I was five. Danny Pasuik, 'Dan the Man the Ladies Man' is how he would come to be called - and me, the beak (due to my nose). Tim's dad would go with us.

On this particular occasion, we had hunted in the morning with no luck. So, we hiked back to camp and ate our sweet rolls and milk that Mr. Leigh had ready for us. Mr. Leigh was a St. Petersburg fireman. Cecil was his name, and we would sit around the fire and talk about the morning hunt. "I saw this, man" and "Man, I just missed the biggest ____ that I ever saw". We were learning the "Florida Hunter Talk", as Cecil would tell us. We knew it as "Shuck and Jive" talk.

Well, that Saturday evening we decided to go for deer, so we loaded our shotguns with slugs. We spread about one hundred feet apart and started our sweep. I was on the left, Tim in the middle and Dan on the right. We heard Dan yell and shoot. Tim ran over to find what he shot at and he got his answer pretty quick. Dan the Man was holding a five foot water moccasin on his barrel. They yelled for me to come see it but I hated snakes. I hated them so much that on one hunting trip I was jumping a fence and jumped down and saw a rattler about ten feet in front of me. Now, I had a Browning semi-automatic 12 gauge shotgun with three shells loaded. The second it registered in my pea brain, I yelled "Snake!" and ran. After getting to Tim, he laughed and said, "Why didn't you shoot it?"

"Oh," I said, "I forgot I had the gun!"

So, needless to say, Dan's great find didn't interest me. I was after the famed Florida white tailed deer! So, I kept walking. The Gulf Hammock was palmettos, palm trees and on higher ground, pine trees. It all looked the same. Hundreds of square miles

of the same thing. I had been walking for about thirty minutes before I realized that I didn't see Tim or Dan. So, I started veering off toward where I expected Tim to be. Not there. Uh oh. "Tim!" "Dan!" I yelled. No answer. It was getting dusk. "Tim," I yelled and I shot into the air. "Dan," I yelled again, and I listened. I heard an answering shot. I was taught to stay put when I was lost so I found a place by a large pine tree and fired another shot. A reply, but from where? I loaded two more shots - fire - listen - there - but which direction? It was dark. I knew that Cecil would bring the jeep at first light and look for me, so I settled in for the night.

You can't imagine how many sounds there are in the woods when you're alone, lost, cold and scared shitless! My senses must have been at their peak. I could swear I heard a mosquito fart! I looked at my watch - 12:05 - man I'm tired.

Then, I heard it. What was that? It's so dark. I looked up and didn't see the moon. Just a black sky - no stars - oh, great! Clouds - probably going to rain on me...well, at least a bear will have a freshly washed meal! There it was again! Something was moving out there. Off to my left. I cocked my head and listened. It was louder. Something is stalking me. The hunter being hunted. Now, I'm just another link in the food chain. Closer, I grabbed my shotgun and slipped off the safety. Here it comes - a bear definitely. Dad told me that the bear roam at night. I was ready. I heard him coming. What's that? I saw a pair of eyes. "Hey" I yelled. "Hyaaaaa. Get outta here!" But it was crouching down. The eyes were shining and close to the ground now, it was crouching. Whoa! Now the eyes were higher. He's coming! I aimed the shotgun. I knew if I just wounded the bear, he would attack and maul me to death. Boom, boom boom, thud. It's down! Reload quick! Three more in the chamber. What's that behind me now? Headlights!

"Tim! Dan!" I yelled. I shot one in the air. The lights turned toward me and I was in their beam.

"Thank God" I yelled. "I didn't think you'd come 'till morning! I killed a bear! He was attacking me, but I got him first!"

"Where is he?" Cecil said, getting out of the Willy's jeep that they had modified by putting on C-130 airplane tires.

"Over there!" I pointed.

Cecil took out his 45 and his flashlight. He walked over very slow, his gun and the light pointing down. He shot twice. "Yep" he said. "What was he doing Chipper?"

"Attacking" I said. I smiled and looked at Tim and Dan.

"What kind of bear is it Cecil?"

"Don't know" he said. "Never seen a bear like this one."

"Big foot" Tim said.

"Naw," Cecil said. "Cow"

"You mean a female bear?" Dan said.

"Nope" said Cecil. "I mean Chipper killed his first cow."

We all walked over and looked. Sure enough a brown cow, lay deader than shit.

"Okay men," Pop' said. "Mount up and lets get outta here. 'My Way', meet you at RP-1 (rendezvous point) by 1700 hours tomorrow."

"Roger 'Pop'. Mark 1247 hours, mark now!"

"'Highway'", 'Pop' said, "point with me. You'd best learn how to survive out here - too many of us depend on you CCT's. We gotta make sure you learn to survive the Nam."

Point didn't sound bad - at E&E training our team leader always took point and we only got captured two out of seven times. I made sure my M-16 was in the rock and roll, full automatic mode and caught up with 'Pop'.

I've sure seen better highways in my life. The highway or foot trail, as 'Pop' would explain, was used by villaagers about two clicks to our south. If we had headed north, we would have come to a river bottom area where the villaagers grow their rice and roots. Heading south, 'Pop' kept the team spread out over a 100 yard area. This would protect us from falling into an ambush.

About 30 minutes out, he stopped, bent over, and picked up a brass casing. "AK", he said, and continued along the foot path. He stopped again, looking at some discolored and loose soil. He motioned. Pablo stepped forward, took out one of his knives, and started probing the mound. He looked up and smiled, "You're good, 'Pop'," he said as he uncovered a round object with a small round plunger on top. He opened a grenade bag and found a pin. He placed the pin in a small hole in the plunger and put the land mine in his grenade bag.

"Wow. I'd have walked right over that thing." I said.

'Pop' looked at me and said, "In time you'll learn what to look for. See the dark soil on top. That means someone dug a hole. The soil from eight inches down is darker than the surface sand. In time though, the sun will bleach the new top soil and it will blend in. We're lucky, this was set not more than a week ago."

I turned and looked back toward camp. "About a click and a half", 'Pop' said. *Man, that's close*, I thought. I looked back at him and he said, "Probably one of the villaagers. They won't attack us directly - too dangerous. But they will booby trap us or lay mortar rounds on our ass in the night."

About then I heard the pop, pop, pop of a Huey. I saw the belly of 'Dodger's' Michelle. He had three Michelle's in his life: first, his girl back home was Michelle...a beautiful brunette. She was in college and 'Dodger' was one of the few I'd met that hadn't gotten a 'Dear John' from a college girl back home. It seems the campuses didn't care for the Vietnam war. Hell, they didn't have any thing on most of us. We wanted out of here a hell of a lot more than they wanted us out of here!

His second Michelle was the Beatles song. He had an 8-track player installed in his third Michelle - his Huey - and would play his tapes constantly. He had a stretcher set up so that he could sleep in Michelle at night. He did admit that this particular aircraft was the fourth Michelle. I hoped he was easier on the woman than he was on choppers.

'Pop' said, "Supplies and Intel. He'll probably take 'My Way' back with him so he can round up a new team. Time's really getting short for Red Rock and it has to be all volunteers."

I looked down the line of the military's elite and wondered why they didn't want to continue with Team Red Rock. A few minutes later we were at the outskirts of a

small Thai village. It sent shivers up my spine to think that these same, seemingly friendly, villaagers were the ones trying to kill us. *Why the hell are we even here?* I thought. But, 'Pop' brought me out of my thinking mode with two words, "Stay alert".

'Pop' motioned and 'The Kid' came up to the point position. He began speaking with three villaagers, asking if they had seen anything unusual, trucks or patrols. With a negative for a reply, he broke out a box of aspirin tablets and some chocolate and gave it to the chief. He explained the use of the aspirin and the chief acted as though he had heard it a thousand times. 'The Kid' had hired a guide to take us from the village direct to NKP. The highway was getting too dangerous and the chance of more mines between us and NKP on this highway route was increasing daily.

We were off again. This time the guide was on point. He couldn't have been over 15 years old. But then at E&E training, I learned that the children were as much a part of the effort to rid them of the 'dirty Americans' as the trained soldiers. We traveled at a markedly increased pace. 'Pop', stopping to show me the different methods used to take out foreign soldiers (I say foreign because the United States wasn't the only military force in Southeast Asia. I had met a unit of Korean "Rock" Marines, the most feared combatant in the arena. I had also met some "Aussie" or Australian pilots at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base "O" club. They were sure a hard working and hard partying group of pilots.)

The most repugnant part of the booby-traps was the use of pungi sticks. These were pieces of bamboo about one inch in diameter and sharpened to a deadly point. Charlie used them in several different ways. Sometimes they would dig a two foot by two foot pit and fill it with pungi sticks, tipped with poison. A GI would step into the camouflaged pit and a stick would impale him in the foot or leg. Then the poison would go to work. Many times the Cong would use venom from the Cobra to poison the deadly sticks. I had learned in Chemical Warfare Training that the two most prominent agents were blood agents, which would attack the blood stream and shut down the ability of blood to oxygenate the body, and nerve agents, which attack the central nervous system and shut down the body's neuro-electrical ability. The poison from the viper Cobra was the latter - a nerve agent. Minutes after the wound is inflicted, the first signs of a terrible death would appear on the soldier.

The pits could vary from 2x2 to large enough for a man to fall into and impale his body. Some pits were filled with vipers or even a tiger. In all, booby traps were a nasty business, and probably our greatest threat. In Thailand, along the Cambodian border where we were, the Chinese communists were very active. Terrorizing whole villages into carrying out anti-American raids, or, in a passive sense, setting booby traps. They would also be coerced into concealing Viet-Cong in their villages.

I wasn't looking forward to my first night in the bush. I'd heard horror stories about sleeping soldiers being bunk-mates with scorpions or the dreaded "three-step". The "three-step" was a snake named after the reputation of its victim taking only three steps after being bitten before falling dead. Many stories we heard concerned soldiers going to sleep and being bitten in their sleep, never to wake. And the fact that our guide showed us a set of tiger prints, *fresh* tiger prints, didn't help.

Pop, pop, pop went the rotor blades in the distance. 'Pop' looked up, "probably

'Dodger' taking 'My Way' back to NKP. Okay men", 'Pop' said, "set up".

The six of them went to work, digging in, moving branches and downed logs. "Home sweet home" I thought. I didn't know quite what to do, so I gathered some dry wood for our fire and stacked it in what I considered the center of our compound. As I picked-up the wood, I couldn't help but think of these elite soldiers, assassins, and killers, were some of the most dangerous men in the world. And the tenderness in their voices and faces as they talked to their loved ones at home seemed contradictory.

I was rudely disturbed by 'Cowboy', "Hey, 'Highway'. I don't think a fire's a very good idea."

I thought of how awful the dehydrated LRP's were without hot water to absorb and soften them. Then I thought, *But then again, a fire would be a beacon for the enemy. No fire!* I smiled at 'Cowboy' and said, "Yeah, but a cup of coffee and some of Cecil's sweet rolls would sure be good." It went past him.

It was dark and do I mean dark! We all sat around the stack of firewood I had prepared to light, but didn't. 'Blackman' had the first perimeter shift - they were two hour shifts. That gave everyone the opportunity to get some shut-eye. Tomorrow would be a "full day", as 'Pop' had put it.

I looked around and noticed the guide wasn't with us. I asked 'Pop' if he had seen him. 'The Kid' said, "He left about an hour ago - sneaking out of camp back toward his village." I wondered why he did that.

At that point, 'Pop' looked at me and said, "Not meanin' to tell you how to run the show, 'Highway', but with that little gook gone, you can bet we're gonna have company tonight."

"Ambush?" I asked.

"Naw, just a social visit." he said smiling. "Want me to show you how Team Red Rock would welcome the pricks?" 'Pop' asked.

"Sure" I said it, but I don't know how. My mouth had gotten so dry I couldn't even swallow - much less speak!

'Pop' lit the fire. He had the guys stuff their gear in their sleeping bags. He disbursed us fifty feet outside the camp in a one-third circle to the south. Then we waited. I felt a hand on my shoulder. I gasped! It scared the shit out of me. But it was 'Pop'. I must have been dozing. He pointed to the other side of the camp, "On the ground" he whispered. Two dark objects, snake-like, moving on their bellies toward the fire. As I looked closer, I saw them both with satchels in their hands. *Those assholes!* I thought. *They're gonna try to blow us up!* 'Pop' signaled 'Blackman'. I saw 'Blackman' pitch a satchel through the air toward the fire. Then all hell broke loose.

Team Red Rock was spraying bullets in the jungle behind the two Charlie on the ground. The satchel landed between the two figures and exploded - followed by two secondary explosions. There were yells from the jungle following bullets and rifle fire - machine gun fire and then silence. A few moans and screams of pain in the jungle beyond the camp continued. I looked at 'Pop'. He said, "We'll stay put for the night. The wounded will have bled to death by morning." The enemy, as far as I could see, didn't get one shot off. I looked across the smokey clearing, listening to the dying Viet Cong. The smell of war was heavy in my nostrils.

What the morning brought, I wasn't prepared for. Just before dawn, 'Pop' waved 'Chief' and Pablo to flank the right of the encampment. 'The Kid' and 'Blackman' flanked the other side. That left 'Cowboy', 'Pop' and me. 'Pop' signaled for us to spread out the width of the encampment and cross to the far side.

As we reached the edge of our camp, I surveyed the grounds. I saw the sleeping bags, undisturbed, but covered with dust and chunks of what looked like damp earth. 'Pop' crossed the encampment in the center. I crossed on the right, and 'Cowboy' on the left. About half way across, the flank teams signaled all clear but we still moved cautiously, not knowing if anyone had survived and crawled into cover. I got to the sleeping bags, which were mine and "Pops".

The clumps of dirt came into focus. I looked in disbelief. I suddenly felt dizzy and couldn't breath. 'Pop' grabbed my arm. I was sooooo hot and clammy. 'Pop' told 'Cowboy' to get rid of this stuff, pointing to our sleeping bags covered with chunks of bone and muscle. At the foot of 'Pop's' bag was what looked to be half of a head with the eye hanging out over what would have been a nose. I stumbled to the right and stood for a moment trying to recover but I couldn't get my footing. My foot was stuck. I looked down to find my boot sunk in the chest of one of our would-be assassins. I lifted my foot with an awful squishing sound and bent over, wrenching with pain. I felt as if my whole insides were coming out of me. By then, 'Blackman' and 'Chief' were standing beside me. They each grabbed an arm and carried me away from the gruesome sight. But the smell followed me. I couldn't clear my nostrils of the distinct smell of the blood, mixed with the smell of the rotting jungle floor.

"Five minutes men," 'Pop' snapped. "We've got a long day ahead."

The reality of death and war struck home that day. I suddenly realized that I hadn't thought about Mac since his death - as if I didn't want it to be real. If I don't think about it - it didn't happen. A temporary defense reaction, but not effective. I sat, sobbing with my head between my knees, sitting on the jungle floor.

'Pop' was right. It took every bit of daylight to traverse the booby-trapped jungles and rice paddies to get to the highway into NKP. The dirt road seemed to jump out of the jungle. The closer we got to our destination, the angrier I got. I found that confronting Mac's death made me start seeking revenge. 'My Way' explained that a special forces tour in the Nam involved three distinct steps or adjustments and the first one was:

Inevitably, you would lose a friend. With this loss, and time to reflect, anger would build and you would seek revenge. It really didn't matter whether the revenge was aimed toward the NVA or Viet Cong. All the Vietnamese and Thais had the same appearance to angry GI's, so villaagers, prostitutes, or Cong, could all satisfy the need to get even.

'Pop' saw it in my eyes, and that's just what 'My Way' was counting on. They knew that I was no different than the tens of thousands of other young Americans thrown into the prongs of war.

We flagged down a Deuce-and-a-half (that's a cargo truck named for its capacity to carry 2 1/2 tons of weight.) The driver was good enough to carry us to the TF Alpha

compound. 'Pop' had called over the VHF and 'My Way' and Colonel Brown were waiting, with an E-6 Beret. They greeted us and sent us off to the shower to get cleaned, changed, fed, and return back to the compound for a briefing. When we returned, the rest of the team was waiting. They had secured the firebase and loaded up the equipment, then returned to NKP. That made sense. Five team members chose to take the 'Highway' with me so obviously the mission was off.

'Pop' briefed the Colonel and Captain on our mission. "The Kid" briefed about the villagers and their obvious anti-American feelings. I knew then that the village would be destroyed by an air attack within the hour. All the women and children too. *Good*, I thought. *Kill all these dirty gooks!* I was deeply enthralled in "step 1 - revenge".

The Colonel took over the briefing, "At 'My Way's' request, we've looked into those sport canopies 'Bull Dog' told you about. It seems they just may work. I've requisitioned twenty of those babies. They should be here by 0300 hours. I expect you to report to Sergeant Willis here," pointing to the E6 Special Forces Jump Master "for further instructions."

The team got up to leave. I was confused. *Why were they acting as though nothing happened and the Team was still in tact?* I looked at 'My Way' and he was smiling. "How was your first ground recon, 'Highway'?"

"Eye opening, Sir," I replied. Then I turned and squared off with him, "You set me up! You knew about that village and you got 'Cowboy' and the rest to dupe me!"

"Pop' says you'll do," the Colonel offered, "so go and get some rest. You've made more jumps with that new canopy than Sergeant Willis, so I want you in on training the team."

"But, I thought it was a volunteer mission", I objected.

"It is. You don't remember volunteering?" the Colonel asked.

"Hell, no, sir. I mean, I *know* I didn't volunteer."

"Sure you did," the Colonel said, opening my field file. "Here it is. You volunteered to serve your country back on March 7th of 1970." Then he squared off on me, "The day you swore in you volunteered for any damn thing I want you to do. Now, get the hell outta here."

I stood, glaring at him. *I really want to find that recruiter!* I saluted, spun and left.

CHAPTER THREE

I slept hard. 0300 hours came and I sure didn't want to go to Sergeant Willis' training. 'Pop' was rolling out everyone, so I guess I wasn't the only team member feeling the toll of the day. It was sure good to have a hot meal. The Colonel had arranged a "ground school" in the chow hall. He also arranged for a steak and egg breakfast - real eggs instead of the powdered or dehydrated stuff. I had mine over easy, but you know, military cooks have only one talent, and that talent is to destroy the flavor of anything in their reach! But, it was hot and the coffee was plentiful.

The air was dead still. The smell of burning kerosene filled the air. I looked at my watch - 0400 hours and the base was coming alive. I looked across the base at the columns of black smoke reaching skyward from the latrines. Staff Sergeant Willis took his place and let us know that we only had an hour for the ground portion. He had a chute laid out on the chow hall floor and quickly explained the difference in structures, packing, and maneuverability. From there, we were off to a hangar. He had a chute "hanging" from an engine lift in the top of the hangar. He strapped each of the team in and explained the control cords.

Next stop - 'Dodger'. Staff Sergeant Willis took up the first group. 'My Way', 'The Kid', 'Blackman', Pablo, 'Flame' and 'Cowboy'. The rest of us were on the ground at the helipad. That was their target. I explained to the team what they could expect and what jumpers were experiencing without the round canopies they were used to. Thermals didn't affect them as much as they would these canopies. "You can actually fly that chute," I told them.

As the team grew more comfortable with their jumps throughout the day, they began having fun with the sport canopies. We jumped eight times that day, and could have kept going, had it not been for an inbound storm. I thought of Fire Base Three Alpha and what a mud hole it would be; I was real glad that we were here.

The weather should clear by 20:00 hours and we would try a two-man jump. It was decided that Staff Sergeant Willis would go first with a Rock Marine in hang. If that was successful, I would jump with 'The Kid' in tow. I really didn't like the idea of jumping at night, much less jumping at night with an extra man strapped to me. When 'Dodger' arrived, he had reservations also. But orders are orders.

The first jump was at 5,000 feet, three count free fall and pull. 'Dodger' would flash his landing light at jumpers away. We all waited patiently at the drop zone, flash lights pointing in the direction of the helicopter. There it was. Michelle's landing lights flashed and the radio crackled as 'Dodger' called jumpers away. We all pointed our flashlights toward the point where 'Dodger' flashed his landing light. This was to help illuminate the drop zone. We also had an ambulance on site with its lights flashing and headlights on. We waited two minutes - nothing. Two and a half minutes - still no sign. 'Dodger' maintained his altitude until we called all clear. I started gearing up, knowing that it wouldn't be long - even if Willis was hot dogging up there, he couldn't stay up more than four minutes. The air was still - three minutes - no sign.

I heard 'My Way' and 'Pop'. 'My Way' whispered, "Whaddya think?"

"It's not good. I just don't think it's possible to free fall with an unexperienced skydiver" said 'Pop'.

"Three minutes, thirty seconds" the Colonel announced.

I called 'Dodger' and told him three and-a-half minutes and no sign.

"Cleared for 1,000 feet per minute descending right turn to DZ. Maintain 500 feet."

"Roger Bull Dog," he repeated, "descending right turn - hold at 500 feet."

"And 'Dodger'", I added, "keep your eye out for them."

"Roger", he said.

Four minutes. "Okay Doc, call 'em." Doc got on the ambulance radio and called a search, mobilizing the air police and putting the medical staff on alert. 'Dodger' started a low level recon with his search light. He looked south of the DZ, below the exit point of Willis and the Rock Marine. No luck. We would have to wait until sun up, one and-a-half hours away. 'Dodger' landed and refueled. The Air Police were searching the base. At 0613 hours, Colonel Brown was notified that the bodies of an American and Rock Marine were found about 100 yards outside the southeast perimeter fence. I didn't go. 'Pop' and 'My Way' had over 100 combat jumps and would be able to ascertain the problem.

We met at the chow hall at 1000 hours. A pot of coffee on the table and the parachute on the floor. We all stared at the harness. We were stumped. The tangles on the cord were indicative of a cut away. But why? We got our answer from the base surgeon. Staff Sergeant Willis sustained severe scratches to his face and one eye was gouged. The Rock Marine had pieces of flesh under his fingernails and blood on his thumb which matched the torn eye on Staff Sergeant Willis. The Rock Marine must have panicked at free fall and Staff Sergeant Willis attempted a cut away to pull his emergency canopy. What a dilemma.

We had attached the Rock Marine to Willis face to face. Now we would try a different set up. Taking a harness from a military canopy, we used D-rings and snapped it to the cord rings on my harness. For safety, 'The Kid', a qualified jump master, would wear the emergency belly pack. If a problem arose, I was to cut him away and turn immediately right 180 degrees. The command to do so would be "breakaway". I geared up and 'The Kid' checked me. He geared up and I checked him.

'Pop' was going to jump with us to keep an eye on us. We wanted to see if 'The Kid' could reach any critical area facing away and two feet lower than me. Five thousand feet. Initial point.

"Jumpers away! Go! Go! Go!" We were hooked up by D-rings. 'The Kid' stood at the door and gave the sign of the cross.

"On three, 'Kid'." I said. "One, two, three." Away we went. He kept his hands tucked to his body and I spread. I looked at our altimeter. Three thousand feet. Pull. I did.

The chute popped - bam! What a backlash! We were okay but the force of the chute opening made my thigh strap cut into my leg. "Okay Kid?", I asked with a yell, although I didn't need to. The adrenaline must have been pumping. It was a good ride.

'The Kid' reached up and tried to hit me in the face, but the positioning didn't

allow it. "Seems like a good adjustment," 'The Kid' said.

"Okay. You wanna drive Kid?"

He nodded his head and grabbed at my arms and piloted us to the deck. He was good and 'Pop' was right on our tail, yelling and smiling. It would work! But we really paid a dear price for the lesson we learned.

"Okay Sir," the Captain said to the Colonel. "It's a go. When do we get our new canopies?"

The Colonel looked at the Captain puzzled. "What do you mean new canopies? These are right out of the box!"

"But sir! Look at them! When mine popped, it was red and sky blue. The one Staff Sergeant Willis used was orange and white!" *They were sure good looking*, I thought.

"Well," the Colonel offered, "it's a night jump. Be sure you bury them real good." he said smiling.

The Captain saw his chance, "Night jump? Where sir?"

"Not yet boys. Security you know!" The Colonel explained, "Three days till mission brief, then two days to drop."

The three days prior to mission brief were used to practice two-man jumps. 'My Way' decided against doubling-up team members - another canopy failure could scrap the mission if two members were taken. 'My Way' suggested to the Colonel that we make the jumps with the actual men we would be delivering. This would enhance our probability of success by familiarizing our cargo with a jump and increase the odds of a safe landing on a night jump. The Colonel reluctantly agreed after a heavy push by 'My Way', and the following morning, when the cargo arrived, we understood why the Colonel was so hesitant.

At our 0600 muster formation, a deuce-and-a-half pulled up with four military police jeeps. The military police opened the tarp on the back of the truck and escorted twelve North Vietnam Army Regulars (NVA's) - the enemy. We were being asked to risk our lives to parachute these gooks, these murderers, these scum of the earth, these lowest of God's creations - I think I was bitter! Bitter? Hell, no, not bitter - angry!

We quickly adjourned to TF "Alpha's Tactical Operations Center (TOC). 'The Kid' accompanied a civilian that was with the POWs. 'The Kid' explained to the NVAs that they were to be exchanged for American POWs, but this would take place in a country other than Vietnam or Thailand. It would be necessary to move them in the cover of darkness. "It is possible," 'The Kid' continued, "that we will be met with hostilities as we move secretly to the destination and your freedom." The prisoners met 'The Kid's information with smiles and questions. 'The Kid' explained, however, that he could say no more, other than they would be parachuted into what he called the "Freedom Zone," during the cover of darkness. He offered any of the NVA soldiers to withdraw at this time and go back to their imprisonment. There was no resistance. The next step was practice jumps. 'Pop', 'The Kid', and the civilian who accompanied the POWs, gave the ground school. At 1600 hours (that's 4:00 p.m. Air Force time!) we were teamed up. A C-130 would be provided as our jump platform.

'My Way' had reservations concerning the use of Snake and Pablo as delivery men

for this mission. The mens' complete disregard for the rights of our enemy to live had become obvious during patrols.

Prior to my arrival to Team Red Rock, the Team, while on patrol east of our training camp, jumped a VC patrol. The fierce but short firefight ended with two VC wounded and eight dead. The wounded were placed in 'Snake' and Pablo's hands to extract and send to TF "Alpha" for interrogation.

When the chopper was grounded due to mechanical problems, the men simply cut the throats of the POWs and returned to camp. 'My Way' asked why they didn't RTB (return to base) with the prisoners. 'Snake' simply replied, "They were liabilities. They were wounded and would have endangered my life. Any gook that puts my life on the line - dies."

And Pablo clarified his position. "They didn't have to endanger my life. If they're in knife range, I'll kill 'em. Any Gook." and he looked at 'The Kid' with that threat.

There were twelve NVAs and thirteen of us. It was obvious that Pablo would not carry a Gook. It would be left to the other twelve team members. Pablo would be tasked to carry ammo and supplies.

The number of weapons, ammunition and explosives required for the mission, posed a problem. There were too many, in terms of gross weight, for one man to deliver with our sport canopies. Normally, it would be dropped by cargo chute. But the round canopies would simply settle rather than fly, so we could be two miles from our supplies when we landed. 'Pop' was in charge of logistics, so he had some work ahead of him.

My charge was a NVA sapper named Nguyen. I was surprised at my thoughts when 'The Kid' brought him over to me. My earlier feelings didn't surface - I felt rather agnostic toward him. I would rather not be around him, but I had a job to do and I would do it. No ill feelings, simply a cold, stern attitude. I was moving to 'My Way's second phase, the mechanical soldier.

Although many soldiers fell in this category, it was imperative, according to 'My Way', for any Special Forces soldier to become a mechanical killer in order to survive. You could not think before pulling the trigger. No thoughts - no regrets.

I helped Nguyen (my number two man) adjust his harness. I would stand on a bench and clip him to my harness rings as he stood on the ground. For our safety, we adjusted our number two's harness so that their head would be positioned three feet below ours. This would restrict their ability to maneuver. In addition, we used a crotch strap to the bottom of our back harness to keep our number two from turning. If they tried, we could grab the harness with one hand and hold them forward. If our number two continued to cause a problem, we carried a survival knife at shoulder level, and would simply sever their spinal cord beneath their skull. This required one swift movement and the number two would be paralyzed and die within minutes.

Since I was the most experienced with the canopy, I would jump number one position. Pablo would jump last. 'Pop' decided that he wanted to see how far a cargo delivery would deviate from our landing, so they palletized a stack of sand bags and dropped it first. I followed.

The cargo chute was static, so it was above us as we entered free fall from 8,000 feet. My number two hung below me and his legs kept moving in a running motion as

if he was trying to balance himself. This caused a slight right twisting motion and we began to tumble on our side. I kicked Nguyen and that movement caused us to rotate completely around. I was to pull at three count, but I couldn't. To pull now would cause the cord to wrap around us and probably snap my neck. I grabbed my number two's hands and held them out, then worked to regain control. On the count of eight, we had finally stabilized and I was finally able to pull the cord. We were falling at about two hundred feet per second. The canopy snapped above and I felt as though my heart would fly out of my ass. The "G" force was enormous. But we were flying. I looked up and counted four canopies and a cargo chute. My altimeter read 6,000 feet. I continued to watch the sky above - five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen canopies - we were all flying. My number two didn't move. I didn't even see him turn his head. We were moving fine and I noticed that his arms were still out like an airplanes wings. I reached down and pushed on one - he got the idea. He placed his hand on his harness. He didn't look up - and he didn't look down. 'The Kid' had instructed them to look straight ahead and their pilot would kick them two times when they were to prepare to land. The ground was approaching faster than normal. I was busy trying to find wind direction so that we could turn into the wind and decrease our fall rate with a hard flare at the bottom. The smoke from the 'shit-burn' cans provided the visual reference I needed. I turned a modified base leg then right, into what would be final. Here it comes - pull - now number two hit hard. He collapsed to his knees when the flare took effect and neutralized the fall rate. Settle - Settle - Standby - Landing. I quickly unbuckled my harness and did the same for my number two. I let the canopy fly off as I watched the others settle toward earth. The cargo chute was down next. It seemed to disappear in the trees downwind of us. I was surprised at the separation between me and the next team member. I realized how the free fall had put quite a distance between us. 'My Way' was next. He seemed to have everything under control. His number two was smiling as they turned their final to the landing zone. 'My Way's' concentration was evident. Although the canopies could support the weight of two, it was critical to control the flare at the bottom. If the flare was too low, the number two would smash into the ground and could be killed, or possibly injured. If he were to flare too soon, it could leave him in the dead zone twenty feet up and no forward airspeed. The entry to the flare had to be made within a one-and-a-half second time frame to safely land. His stare was intense. I could see him calculating his flare. "Entry now," I said to myself. His flare was perfect. His number two landed standing and 'My Way' dropped two feet. Almost perfect!

'Pop' was next. 'My Way' hustled to clear his gear and his number two retrieved it. 'Pop' was still maneuvering for a base leg. I looked at 'My Way' and got a smiling thumbs up.

I took in the rest of the terrain and noticed the landing zone secured by security police and military police. I hadn't considered the possibility that our number twos would take their first opportunity to escape. I pointed to the downed canopy and number two gathered it, following the lead of 'My Way's' number two.

'Pop' was coming in hot. He had what seemed to be a partial collapse on his left corner of the canopy. Nothing too dangerous, as long as he was aware of it. He was

turning final, but at his current descent rate he would land about 100 yards short of us. Flare - his flare must have caught a wind gust. It caused his descent to completely neutralize and his forward airspeed landed both his number two and him at a small trot. Now that was a sweet landing! Perfect!

The last, Pablo, was really enjoying his flight. Without the added weight, he was able to maneuver and perform modified loops. The canopy's aerodynamics were quite impressive, especially under the hands of these professionals. The least experienced of the military team members was 'My Way' with just under 200 combat jumps.

During initial single-man training the previous days, the team members displayed why they represented their respective services "elite" corps, whether it was the Seals, Marine Forces Recon, or the Green Beret. As their comfort level rose, their control ability and willingness to "take a chance" was obvious. They would enjoy free fall maneuvers such as I had never seen. They would actually maneuver and form a circle, hand in hand. They would fly stacked three high. That is where one would stand on another's canopy and the top man would stand on the middle-man's canopy. Now that looked sharp! 'Pop' later told me he had been involved in sport jumping at Ft. Bragg between tours in the Nam.

The rest of the members settled in and within three minutes after I touched down, all thirteen team members were gathered and 'My Way' was getting each man's report of his entry and flight. It seemed that all of us had to settle down our number two. 'Snake' offered to test the paralysis swipe on his number two. 'My Way' turned him down on the offer.

We needed to continue the jumps so that our number twos were more comfortable with the entry, especially at night. There's nothing scarier than stepping out of the back of an unlit aircraft into a black void. The air in Southeast Asia was always hazy, and at the altitude we would jump, we would not have a ground reference, unless, of course, we would be jumping close to a city. That presented another problem. Due to the varying sink rates of our canopies, it is very possible that a mid-air collision could happen. Especially without visual contact with one another. This problem was presented to 'Cajun'. 'Cajun' told us at the TOC, during a mission brief, that he may have the problem solved but he wouldn't know until the following day. He had heard of a chemical light which put out a small glow. Through his agency contacts, he expected a delivery of these lights the following morning. In the mean time, we were to continue to familiarize our number twos with the para-drops. "All day, every day, OOOOOAHH." as 'Cowboy' would so aptly put it.

Anxiety was growing. Not knowing what we were expected to do caused concern to all of us. The Colonel would only assure us that nothing other than our usual skills were required to complete this mission.

During the TOC mission brief for the day's jumps, a crisp looking young Lieutenant strutted in and introduced himself as the S-1. He further advised us that, due to the sensitive nature of our mission, the Colonel asked that we update our SGLI (life insurance) and emergency notification documents. "Additionally," he continued, "you should insure that your last will and testament is in place."

Whoa! What the hell is going on! It was bad enough in Oklahoma when they

made us update these documents in a muster formation, but to bring in the S-1 specifically for thirteen of us. Where the hell is that recruiter!!

When my time came to update my documents, I had really worked myself up. This guy didn't pull out an existing file, he brought out a package of blank forms. He wanted all of my personal data, including next of kin and who to notify in case of emergency.....at this point I asked him to define emergency.

He looked at me with a frustrated look on his face like he really didn't want to be there, (*well, I sure as hell didn't!!*) and said "If, or when I should say, you hard-ass John Wayne-types meet your match, which, in my opinion shouldn't be hard, it will be my job to notify family or next of kin of your unfortunate demise."

The Colonel spun around and caught me by my shoulders as I was moving slowly to a standing position - choosing which of the "death points" I would use on this little cock-sucker and I mean this literally! The Colonel, while staring at the Lieutenant, pushed me down in my seat. 'My Way', 'Blackman', Pablo, 'Pop', and 'Cowboy' were slowly forming a circle around the little 'dip shit' and me. Apparently, by the look on their face, they had heard the rumors about the Lieutenant.

'My Way' began, "Lieutenant, we certainly didn't ask to come to this hell hole! But, while we're here, we are determined to do everything in our power to return safely to our families or next of kin. The men standing in this room with you, Lieutenant, at some point in their tour, decided that the only way to survive, is to be more ruthless than our enemy. But being ruthless does not mean that these men lack discipline. The Green Beret represents the very best of America's fighting men. True experts, professionals in their field. We do not tolerate three things:

"First - we will not tolerate slackers. Even as we are professionals in our field, we expect every American soldier to be working toward the same excellence in their respective field. And," he continued, following a brief pause for what he had just said to sink in. "Second - we do not tolerate disrespect from within our ranks or even more from outsiders. "And last - we do not tolerate violators of the Uniform Code of Military Justice - specially those violators who participate in sexually deviant behavior. By that I mean, as Sergeant Tatum so aptly put it, cock-suckers. Do you understand me, Homo?"

The Lieutenant stared at the Captain with a smirk on his face. "I really don't care what you over-rated, sexually frustrated, macho deviants will or will not tolerate. I only know that because of the Special Operations Group (SOG) my workload has become completely unbearable. Now, if you're finished airing your frustrations, soldier-boy, please move on so that I may finish my work with you very unpleasant thugs!"

It was just about on the word "thugs" that the bone in the Lieutenant's forearm snapped. I don't think Pablo was happy with this Lieutenant. I looked at his arm and saw the jagged end of a red and meaty bone poking through the skin. The screams from the Lt. were absolutely agonizing. I mean, sure it must have hurt like hell, but you would have thought that the end of life was upon the little twerp!

The Colonel spun and left, sending in our Special Forces Medic, after having a few quiet words with him! Doc came over the tend to the Lieutenant. Doc had been

sitting with the S-2 (intelligence officer) and S-3 (operations officer) listening to the heated words. Doc had 'Cajun' and 'Blackman' hold down the Lieutenant, while he looked at the arm and began moving it around. I was surprised that there wasn't a lot of blood. Now don't get me wrong, there was blood, but a tear in the muscle and flesh like that, I would have expected pools of blood - but no.

Doc looked at Pablo and said, "It's a good clean break." The corner of Pablo's mouth curled up in what I think was a smile.

The Lieutenant was oblivious to any conversation. Surely he could not hear anything except his own screams!

Doc gave the Lieutenant a shot of morphine, "but only a little", he said, as he spoke to the young Lieutenant. It took the Lieutenant about five minutes to settle down. While the Lieutenant settled in with the assistance of the powerful pain killer, Doc wrapped the wound, set the arm and splinted the arm with a temporary splint, with the expertise of the true professional that he was. When he finished, he looked around the room. The Lieutenant was threatening Pablo with charges and assured him that he would not find Ft. Leavenworth very pleasant!

When the Lieutenant returned his attention to Doc, Doc began, "Now Lieutenant. If you were in the combat arena, I would give you your rifle and tell you that you're still fit for duty and report to your Platoon Sergeant for limited duty. Your life would depend on your ability to overcome the physical pain that you are experiencing. The enemy will not stop their press because you're hurt! But, we are not in the bush right now, are we, Lieutenant?"

The Lieutenant shrugged away from Doc and told him to "Get away. I need a real doctor."

"Unfortunately," Doc continued, "these men won't be able to return later to complete this critical paperwork. Are you right or left handed?"

The Lieutenant lifted his right hand, grimacing in pain as he had to let go of his left arm.

"Good" continued Doc. "I am limiting you to right-handed duty only. So you may continue your work with the Air Force trooper here. And those are orders direct from the Colonel." Then he spun around and looked at 'Super Cop' and said, "Captain, the Colonel has instructed you to treat the Lieutenant here as a deserter if he leaves his post."

"Aye, aye." 'Super Cop' said, pulling out his .45, chambering a round and pointing it to the Lieutenant's head. "Now fella," 'Super Cop' began, "let's get to work and remember, the key to you getting us to cooperate and get you outta here quick is respect. If you can show a little commitment to duty, and a whole lotta respect to us, we may be able to recall who our next of kin are! Now, that shot Doc gave you should wear out..." and 'Super Cop' paused and looked at Doc.

Doc offered, looking at the Lieutenant, "In thirty minutes. I only gave you 10 cc's."

"But it still hurts!" cried the Lieutenant. "I can't work in this pain!"

At that point 'My Way' jumped in. "We all do what we have to do to survive Lieutenant. Now, get to work!"

The Lieutenant picked himself off the floor crying. Tears streaming down his face, he looked at Pablo and said, "You asshole!" I think Pablo smiled again.

The Lieutenant worked quickly. I must admit that he knew his business. His bedside manner left a lot to be desired though.

When he finished the last team member, who happened to be Pablo, he stood up and faced off with his assailant, Pablo, "Now I have all I need to file my complaint against you. I don't expect I'll be seeing you again!"

"You can bet on that Lieutenant", answered Pablo with a glassy-cold, grey look in his eyes. His point didn't miss any of the team members. The Lieutenant gathered his documents and left. The S-2 (Intelligence Officer) and S-3 (Operations Officer) sat silent - not moving through the whole affair.

When the S-1 (Administration) was gone, the S-3 stood and invited us to be seated. The S-2 left and returned minutes later with two civilians. We had just settled in for the briefing that was to finally divulge our mission, when the S-3 called the room to attention. We were facing a covered map at the front of the briefing room. We expected the Colonel to march into the room and take his customary place at the command table in the front of the briefing room. To our surprise, two men preceded the Colonel to the front of the room. I could only see the back of the Army officer who led the procession. When he turned and seated himself with an authoritative, "Take your seats men." I was sitting face to face with a four-star General. Wow!

"Gentlemen, may I present General Alexander Haig."

At that point, the Colonel sat in his assigned seat and General Haig began, "Gentlemen, you're dismissed," the General said to the S-2 and S-3. He waited until the intelligence and operations officers were out of the room. Then he continued, "With a very special trust and confidence, you men have been hand-picked from the combined Armed Services and civilian sector for a special para-military operation. We (meaning the United States) are at the point in this conflict that we require a substantive and aggressive posture by our Cambodian neighbors. It is the intention of our Commander-in-Chief to replace American troops with Cambodian and Laotian troops through political channels. Efforts to involve these countries in the conflict have been met only halfheartedly by the respective governments. We need these countries involved one hundred and ten percent! Now, in order to accomplish this level of involvement, they need to be mad, damned mad, at the Reds. Unfortunately, Lon Nol, Cambodia's new leader, has not taken a decisive position in this action. To point, the Cambodians have only retaliated to the aggression of North Vietnam by raids along the borders. We have provided "Mr. Nol" with the availability of arms, equipment, and aircraft which, if used in an aggressive manner, would decisively wound the NVA's movements south and west. Our analysts have determined that a NVA assault against a major artery of the Lon Nol government, will piss them off enough to allow us to supply training and logistics to his government. Now, I don't think that the North Vietnamese will do this for us. So, its up to us to see that this raid on Cambodia's heart is both aggressive and ruthless. With that, I will turn the floor over to the gentlemen from Washington." The two civilians uncovered the map to show a cutout of Northern Cambodia, Southern Thailand, and Western Laos.

"Gentlemen," (we didn't really look like gentlemen, rather dregs) "your target is Phnom Penh." The CIA briefer paused. At that point, we all looked at one another with the same thought: *across the fence*. (The fence was the border into Laos and Cambodia, which was supposedly off limits to both sides, but the NVA were using the two countries as if they owned them. My thoughts went back to my last flight with Mac. *Had the photos we were taking had anything to do with this?*)

'My Way' interrupted at this point. "This is suicide. There are at least 150 known anti-aircraft positions between the border and Phnom Penh."

"One hundred and seventy three confirmed less than one week ago", a voice boomed from the command seat. The General stood.

"Less than a week ago, one of your team members flew the route six times. We have been able to pinpoint every weapon that could be used against you. I'm sorry boys - I don't like it either, but this is bigger than me - it's straight from Washington. The big boys are pretty excited about this. They figure if a little O-1 can successfully fly six missions across the fence and survive, we can successfully fly one mission across and drop off your team! 'Bull Dog' here sure pulled off what we thought would be impossible."

He looked at me and said, "Sorry about your partner son. No one ever said war was fair." But, I certainly didn't deserve any praise. Mac is the one who got us in and out of there. But my mouth was too dry to speak and I had a terrible-nauseating feeling in my stomach.

The General sat and nodded for 'Mr. Peepers', one of the CIA briefers, to continue. "Targets include the public works, the airport, and a military installation located at the north end of the airport, the fuel dump, the ammunition dump at the installation and, if you have any explosives left, you may lob at will."

The second civilian stood with a briefing board. *My pictures!* "These are aerial photos, of the targets. Thanks to 'Bull Dog', we have precise locations."

The team took their cue and gathered around the boards. "We suggest three, three-man teams and one four-man team. But the team size and assault criteria will naturally be left to you," the briefer continued.

We studied the photos. The power station was about five miles from the main target - the military installation. However, the public works station was a vital link to communications in the city. Take it out and a blackout, including communications, would affect both the target area and the palace and command center.

As I looked at the military installation, I saw rows of what seemed to be Gooney Birds (C-47's) and small fighters. They were all US aircraft. I noticed the CIA briefer watching me and he smiled and said, "Yes, we provided most of their arms and training. As a matter of fact, we are completing a training facility for the new recruits we should get from the Prime Minister." Then he smiled and said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." referring, I'm sure, to the US providing the military machines we were about to destroy.

"All right men, now for the bad news." *I really hated these dooms-day CIA guys!! Where the hell is that recruiter anyway!!*

The CIA briefed both ground and air threat. Most of the NVA anti-aircraft

placements were within twenty-six clicks of the boarder. The anti-aircraft threat of Phnom Penh was minimal at best - besides we would most likely be on the ground outside of the target and hoof-it in - or maybe, I thought, we could hitch a ride - remembering the capabilities of the team. We lagged in the TOC for about three hours. The maps and photos were then put in the planning room and secured by a marine guard, provided by the General. At 1800 hours we were to meet with a "crack" aviation group which would be providing air cover. We headed over to the helipad with our minds swimming with information. But something was missing and I didn't know what. *Oh, Shit...the North Vietnam prisoners. Where the hell did we drop them to get our guys?* I posed the question to 'Pop' as we all sat around 'Dodger's chopper. "In any guerilla operation," 'Pop' began, "there are casualties."

"Whoa! We're going to ice 'em?" I asked.

"Someone will." 'My Way' concluded.

"I will," a voice cut in. I didn't even have to look up - it was Pablo.

"Hey fellas" 'Dodger' began, "That's all well and good, I mean the big boys have gone through a lot of trouble to plan gettin' ya'll in and blowin' the hell outta my tax dollars at work, but we seem to be missin' one important element here. How do you get out?"

"Hell" piped 'Cajun', "We get ol' 'Bull Dog' here to fly us out."

'Dodger' chuckled and said, "I don't think ol' 'Bull Dog' here wants behind the stick for a while."

"Damn right" I popped in real quick.

"I'd do it fellas," said 'Dodger', "but I can't get there and back on a fuel load, so the Army's out. Our Hueys only hold two to two-and-a-half hours of fuel. Probably your best bet is a 53 - you know, the Jolly Greens. They've got the fuel and one of those babies can carry fifty-five men plus their gear. With aux tanks for fuel, I estimate, oh, thirty men. And, from what I understand, the mission is 25 in, 13 out." 'Dodger' said.

"If we get out." Cajun offered. "Phenom Penh is spread out. The Prime Minister has an elite guard unit that is notorious. They'll be swarming that whole damn city. A "hit and run" it won't be. Getting in and annihilating the place is no problem - it's the sojourn out that will take our collective effort." Those were more words than I had heard 'Cajun' say collectively the whole time I'd been with the team! But they were definitely on target.

It seemed that the team had their work cut out for them. I would be little help, other than relaying the flight data and general layout of our mission over Cambodia. The number of possible landing zones however, were unlimited. The lush countryside offered large, open fields or paddies. I just wasn't sure what 'My Way' was looking for. I wished Mac was here. He could remember from one flight to the next where to avoid and which anti-aircraft sites posed the most threat.

The discussions continued, ranging from two-man teams with the gooks, to single-man assaults. The single-man assault, however, was out. If any of us were wounded or worse, the body was to be recovered or destroyed. We could not allow the Cambodians to recover an American! 'Cajun' and 'Flame' had the answer - a napalm pack and a white phosphorus grenade. The napalm pack was a petroleum gel which could be put on the

body and ignited with a "whiskey pete" grenade, leaving any body unrecognizable. Each of us would be provided with a gel-pack.

"Okay men", My Way' called us together. "Seventeen forty-five hours. Lets get to those hot shot fly-boys and see what they've got."

We straggled back to the TOC, stopping first at the chow hall to grab an urn of coffee and some cups. It's funny how the mess Sergeant would give everyone a hard time about getting a second cup of java. But 'Pop' could go in and get a whole coffee maker and pound of coffee without a peep from "Fatty". (I don't know why they called him that, he was thin as a rail! It obviously bothered him, but he wouldn't say anything. As a matter of fact, Fatty took pretty good care of us.)

We all filled up with 'go juice' and waited the arrival of the "Royal" Air Force. The choppers shook the building. They buzzed right on top of us and landed on the Colonel's front yard. Three Loach's OH-6 observation/attack helicopters set down and shut down. The unruly looking crews departed the helicopters for the briefing.

"Well," 'Pop' yelled at their leader, "I thought you were dead."

A broad smile spread across the tanned, weather beaten face of the man dressed in cowboy boots, blue jeans and a jungle fatigue shirt, cut into short sleeves and custom tailored. The rest of the pilots were in civilian attire.

"Hell 'Pop'", replied the man, "Them gooks ain't figured out how to spell my name yet! How are ya, you ol' fart?!"

"Good Taz," replied 'Pop'. "Men, I'd like to introduce you to Taz and his flying devils - better known as Air America."

The pilots all offered individual introductions and handshakes. I was the youngest of the team and Taz looked at me and yelled over at 'Pop', "Hey, you boys pretty hard-up, eh? You sure robbed the cradle with this one. Hey boy, whatta they let you play with? Your water pistol?" as he grabbed his crotch.

"Wouldn't stand too close, Taz. That there's 'Bull Dog' and he don't take kindly to airplanes these days."

Taz smiled and offered his hand with a smile, "Hell of a job 'Bull Dog'. They wanted us to fly that route but there ain't enough gold in China to pay us to thread the needle. Sorry to hear about old Mac. Hell of a guy. We offered him a home when he DEROS'D. But he wasn't interested. Yep," he said thoughtfully with his smile leaving, "damn shame."

"Okay men." the Colonel commanded, "Take your seats. Taz, I take it you've met the ground team. They're the best in the business and I need 'em back - in good health, so you need to keep the Cambos busy in that city so our boys are able to get outta there mosh scosh."

"Well Colonel", Taz started, "We've been able to 'acquire' a few surprises. We've got some NVA aircraft that we've been practicing with, right boys?"

His men responded with Chinese accents, saying 'asshole' instead of 'ah so', smiling and talking like China boys in chorus. *What a bunch of nuts!* I thought - I liked 'em!

"We understand, 'Pop', that your biggest challenge will be getting the hell outta Dodge. Well, you're gonna encounter beau coup Cam Guards. 'Peepers' has arranged for

a unit of 'Yards'..." ('Yards' was the nickname for Montagnards - the largest minority group in Vietnam. Their population was thought to be about 200,000 and were divided into twenty-nine tribes. I had first heard of 'Yards' at my two week accelerated introduction at Ft. Bragg. The Special Forces had been working with the Montagnards since the early sixties. The Vietnamese called them "MOI", which meant "savage". In most Special Forces units, 'Yards' were assigned to augment the firepower. Most of the Montagnards were fifteen to sixteen years old, all that was left. The older men of the tribes had been either crippled or died from battle. I recalled the story of these primitive people. Before the arrival of our troops to the area, the Montagnards called their gun "pow", after the sound they made when it was fired. They didn't have a formal name for the weapon. Fearless in battle, the Montagnards looked at battle as a ceremony of life, not death, and approached fighting as a ritual. They were known to cut the heart out of their victims and eat them as a symbolic rite. They hated both the North and South Vietnamese equally. But a loyal group of fighters, there were none finer.) "...to move you quietly through the city. Tran here will arrange for your transportation outta the vil, boys. So he'll stay behind to go over the details. The 'Yards', by the way, are already in place in the "Bode" (short for Cambodia).

"Ten hut!" called out the Colonel as the General joined us. "Seats men" offered Haig.

"The President has named this one himself, 'Operation Red Rock'. Thus, you gentlemen, and I use the word gentlemen very loosely," as he gazed at the unruly flight crews (it was common knowledge that Westmoreland had attempted to run these guys out of the country on several occasions) when he was MACV Commander. But now, as Army Chief-of-Staff, he saw a limited need for the unruly pilots, (I realized that General Haig, though no longer on active duty, felt the same) "are Team Red Rock".

For the past three days, "Spooky" (rename for a unit of black C130's with a row of 120mm Gatling guns pointing down through the floor of the aircraft which, when activated, makes toothpicks of the heaviest forest) has been devastating the anti-aircraft fire you'll encounter during the night insertion. You need to be in place by 0200 hours. The attack will commence at that time. Gentlemen, you have your assignments. I wish you good luck and God speed."

"Ten hut!" a voice boomed from the rear. The military members of Team Red Rock snapped to attention while Taz's Devils called cadence for the General. "Hup-two-three-for-that-Jane-Fonda-she's-a-whore. Hey, I'm buyin' boys!" Taz bellowed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The following morning I went by the hospital to get some Ben-Gay from the MOD (medical officer on duty). As I walked in, one of the nurses walked up to me and introduced herself. "Bull Dog, I'm Allison. I don't know if you remember me from the party last week, but I just wanted to let you know - oh hell, I'm no good at this. Would you like to have dinner with me tonight?"

"Ali, I'd love to, but unfortunately I have duty tonight. Can I have a rain check in about four days?"

"You bet. We saw General Haig and all that brass here today. Do you, I mean, are you fellas okay? I mean, here at NKP it's always been a low key, laid back place and then twelve of the best of the best are here parachuting with weird parachutes, and dying. Taz and his Air America buddies - I mean, the word is something real big is going on and we like to think of you as our resident Special Forces herd - you're the only CCT we've ever met and," she grabbed my hand as I stood and listened, "well 'Bull Dog', we'd like to keep you here and healthy. Let those other guys play shoot 'em up. I'm sure if you were the shoot-em up type, you wouldn't have joined us in the Air Force."

"Ali" I said, cupping her hand in both of mine and rubbing it...man, she was soft and smelled good, "You said a mouth full and most of it, if not all of it, is true. But, unfortunately, I have a job to do and I was taught by my dad to finish what I started. We'll be back and when we get back here, I'd advise you girls to lock your doors and post some Security Police outside."

She laughed and turned to walk toward the sign-in counter with me, still holding my hand. *Great, I thought, here I am holding a Lieutenant's hand just bucking to get arrested for fraternization - but she smelled so good and felt so soft! I wonder if she would lend 'My Way' some of her perfume,* I thought smiling,

"What?" she said with a smile, catching me off guard.

"Huh?" I looked her in the eyes.

"You have very pretty eyes," she said to me.

"Hey," I said, "I'm supposed to say that to you!"

"Beat ya!" she countered. "Now why are you here?"

I had been bothered by a bone bruise on my right thigh since falling out of 'Dodger's chopper, and the number of jumps we were doing every day kept it nagging at me. I explained what was wrong and she took me to the exam room and told me to slip off my pants and she left the room. *Whoa! Hey, what a day,* I thought. I did better than that. I stripped down to my jockey shorts and stretched out on the exam table. I heard the door open behind me and I closed my eyes and waited for her soft, sweet hands to caress my body. I felt a slight breeze as she walked close to me. Her touch on my thigh. *Higher, I thought, higher.* I tried to talk to her with my mind.

"Well" the male voice exploded. "You've got a hell of a bruise there. It may be a hairline fracture." My eyes popped open to find the Flight Surgeon standing over me. "Nurse!" he yelled over his shoulder, "get some x-rays here. Two views."

"Okay" and Ali walked in while he pointed, "Here, and from here," showing her the angles he wanted.

The Flight Surgeon looked at the festering cuts all over me from the jumps and jungle patrols. "Let's scrape these scabs and wash them with Betadine solution. As a matter of fact, I want Team Red Rock in here ASAP to get a complete overhaul. Rumor is they're gonna have a tough one and real soon."

Ali looked at me with saddened eyes. "Yes sir" she said and spun and barked out orders to a Corpsman,

"You see Meyers this morning?" the Major asked Ali.

She acknowledged, shaking her head from side to side in disgust.

"You mean what's left of him. I've never seen the VC attack just one person, sir" she said.

"He got fragged, Ali," the doctor said.

"Fragged? What's that?" she queried.

"Killed by his own men."

Her eyes grew in disbelief.

"Who's Meyers?" I asked.

"The fag Lieutenant at S-1. It was bound to happen with that attitude. I hear he had a go at you boys," the Flight Surgeon said.

"Yes sir," I said, "But I think he had learned his lesson."

"Doc told me!" the Flight Surgeon said. "Too bad he learned it too late."

Pablo - I thought and quickly flushed the thought.

"Come on, tough guy. Your bath awaits." Ali said and threw a gown with no back in it at me.

"Ditch the shorts, 'Bull Dog'," the doctor added. "The Geisha girls say they get in the way."

So, I was swept off to the first hot bath I'd had in two months. I didn't care if it was hot water and Betadine (red), it felt great. I didn't care for the stiff brush the Corpsman used to scrape the softened scabs off with, but what the hell!

I soaked in the bath until other team members started showing up. Then Ali put me in a wheelchair and we were off to X-ray. A Corpsman offered to take me - and I offered to walk - but she looked at me and said, "You sit," putting her hands on my shoulders, "and you leave" looking at the Corpsman. "Since you can't make it for dinner, we'll have lunch together," she said not leaving room for an excuse from me. "The Major (Flight Surgeon) has grounded you boys till 1600 hours. So relax."

The X-rays were negative - no fractures but a hell of a bruise. "Small price to pay to win 'Dodger's' crap shoot," I kidded.

No one ever asked Pablo about Lieutenant Meyers - I think that he might have told us the truth. Then what would we do?

Lunch was an absolute delight. The nurses quarters were all made up and feminine looking inside. The girls did amazing things to a hootch. It was the same type of building that the men had, it just had - character. After lunch, Ali put some eight-track tapes on that she had received from home. I hadn't heard this kind of music since I had gotten to the Nam. This was the first time I had heard Country Joe and the Fish's new

hit about Vietnam. I made her play it over and over until I memorized the song.

"Now com'on mothers across the land

Pack your boys off to Vietnam

Com'on fathers don't hesitate

Send your sons off before its too late

Be the first one on your block

To have your boy come home in a box.

And its 1, 2, 3, whatta we fightin' for?

Don't ask me, I don't give a damn.

Next stop is Vietnam.

And its 5, 6, 7, Open up the pearly gates.

Well, there ain't no time to wonder why

Whoopie, we're all gonna die.

CHAPTER FIVE

1600 hours came too soon. I hadn't been able to relax and enjoy myself like this since coming into the Air Force a year and-a-half ago. Time suspended itself for those few hours and I forgot where I was. Not till I opened the door to this heaven Ali had built for herself, did the harsh reality of the Nam kick me back to what was at hand. With the first breath of the outside air my nostrils flared. It was the steady stream of smoke from behind the latrines where the feces was burned in diesel fuel. We named the Vietnamese that had the unpleasant job of burning the waste, "Diesel Dan". We even made up a song about him.

"They call me Diesel Dan
I work the shit burn can
I hear kerplop and I lite them up
They call me Diesel Dan"

I often found myself humming the Diesel Dan song while contributing to his cans!

At 1600 hours, I rendezvoused with the team members. The Flight Surgeon gave us all a mild sedative and put us in a hospital bed, in the air conditioning, to insure that we had adequate rest. He further instructed us that at 2400 hours we were to report back for another session - our last night sleep before Operation Red Rock.

During the next eight hours we had to put the pieces together for Red Rock. We knew the following:

1. The target city
2. Location of individual targets
3. Entry point
4. Exit plans from city
5. PZ (pickup zone) location

Now, we had to assign teams and match to targets. Before the evening was complete, we had walked through the assignments several times, identifying potential problems. We had decided on the following teams:

Team #1 - 'Cajun' - eight satchels/mortar
Pablo - four satchels/mortar rounds
1 - NVA

Assignment: Public works and any other worthy target on way to RP (rendezvous point).

Team #2 - 'Chief' - four satchels/mortar/explosive arrows
'Pop' - four satchels/mortar rounds
2 NVA

Assignment: North side of airport, ammo dump, fuel depot, then cross to join main force taking out military targets.

Team #3 - 'The Kid' - Eight satchels/rockets
'Cowboy' - Four satchels/rocket launcher
3 NVA

Assignment: Civilian terminal take out guards at entrance and rendezvous with
Team 4

Team #4 - 'My Way' - rocket launcher
'Highway' - comm gear
'Super Cop' - four satchels - rockets
3 NVA

Assignment: Civilian terminal with Team 3, rendezvous with Team 2 on flight
line.

Team #5 - 'Blackman' - six satchels/rockets
'Snake' - rocket launcher
'Haystack' - machine gun (.50 calibre)
'Flame' - four LAWS and machine gun ammo
3 NVA

Assignment: Military base and tarmac

The pick-up zone was located 22 kilometers north of the airport, an LZ northeast of the Y in the river. The field was ideal, according to recon photos, approximately 200 meters by 200 meters. A CH-53 (Jolly Green) would be able to maneuver and land, free from known anti-aircraft positions, and exit low-level to the east of their entry corridor.

'My Way' and 'Pop' stopped at the TOC on their way to the hospital. It was pretty short notice, but they needed to requisition the weapons and coordinate the PZ with the Operations Officer. The Duty Officer told 'My Way' that the S-3 was on three day pass and that the Colonel was holding down the fort. So, 'My Way' reported to the Colonel's office. The other problem still not solved, he advised the Colonel, was the supply pallet. The Colonel advised 'My Way' that a low-level drop would be done by utilizing a ground transponder, which I would have to set up and control. 'Pop' was sent to get me. I was almost to the hospital when 'Pop' caught up to me.

"Highway', what do you know about location transponders?"

"Why?" I asked 'Pop'.

"Well, the Colonel wants to use the transponder to drop weapons and ammo."

"You mean we're going in there without ammo and weapons?"

"No! But the rocket launchers and mortars are too much for us. Pablo can carry a 200 pound cargo but that's it."

"Well", I answered, "transponders are iffy. We used them at Keesler and field tested them at Ft. Bragg. We found that the units were fragile. They couldn't sustain the rigors of battle." I suggested that we use intermittent broadcasts (keying method) and allow the drop aircraft to find us with their ADF, then give a verbal drop command. At least use this method as a backup if no transponder signal is received.

'Pop' was familiar with the second method and was comfortable with it as a backup.

When we arrived at the TOC, I went to the communications center. My equipment was in and installed. The HF gear was for a new net called "Bench Girl". I dialed in the frequencies and started playing with the equipment.

"State of the art," a voice boomed from behind the console.

I stood and looked and there was Master Sergeant Cox. I smiled and walked around and shook his hand. Master Sergeant Cox had been called back from Bangkok when the equipment suddenly appeared. "Put 'er through some tests, Tatum", he said with pride.

We started dialing in HF frequencies and calling around the world to HF facilities listed in our COMSEC guide. We increased our power output and were able to receive our own signal seconds after transmitting. I looked at Master Sergeant Cox and smiled. He said, "Now, that's state of the art!" While we talked to Airborne Command Posts/Aeronautical stations/MARS stations/secured networks and even some ham operators around the world, I was making notes of call signs and frequencies. One such interesting call sign was Moonbeam. Moonbeam, as Master Sergeant Cox explained, was an airborne command post with its ear close to the action.

"I've heard them (Moonbeam) relay messages to control and operations centers concerning aircraft problems and other items."

"The net we have installed" he explained, "will be used to monitor F-111 flights. There have been too many of those birds downed. We think that they are literally disintegrating in flight - some sort of flaw in the airframe. But there's never anyone left after the crash to debrief. Their VHF's don't have the distance to raise anyone, so we've started installing HF radios in 'em so we can talk to those boys during flight emergencies. Bench Girl will be their primary flight monitoring net."

"Wow" I said. "You mean they just come apart with no warning?"

"Well, 'Bull Dog'," he said with a smirk on his face 'cause he knew that I wasn't what others thought I was. *Well, that's two of us. If I could only convince the Colonel!* He was continuing through my thoughts, "Those birds are spread out in relatively small pieces when we get to 'em. The debris patterns seem to indicate that the boys were in a low-level/high airspeed scenario. Sure the hell hope they figure it out quick or ground those suckers. Here." Master Sergeant Cox handed me an OD green canvas covered box and clicked the box on. "Here you go, now when the red light goes out and the green light comes on, push this button," and he pushed it, "and voualla, you're transmitting. See the pulsing red light? That means you're transmitting. I'll give the code to the TOC for your CH-53 pilots. Now, you know the procedure for transponder failure - Roger 121.5 and key at five second intervals - release fifteen seconds and key five second - repeat until Lone Wolf repeats his call three times, then QSY to 122.6 and give fifteen second alternating transmit and receive. When in sight, use GCA to touchdown."

"Okay, son" and he grabbed me by my shoulders, looking me straight in my eyes as if he wanted to tell me something. "I hate to lose you Tatum, you're a good kid and heaven knows how we need more like you these days. You take care of yourself and whatever happens - you remember what me and Ol' Packer taught you about communications. There's a lot of options out there - if one doesn't work, keep your head and go to work. Those boys are counting on you and, if all hell breaks loose, you listen to 'My Way' and 'Pop'. They're the best in the business. They really know their shit. Now, get outta here. I hate good-byes."

I smiled at him, stuck out my hand and grabbed his and said, "Thanks, Sergeant

Cox. I'll be back lickety-split and you can get me the hell outta here. Deal?"

"Deal" he said and turned and walked away. I didn't know where he was going - I was in his office. I just thought - *Old folk - they always forget where they are. Man, I hope I never get old.* I would soon learn never to wish for things - they may come true! But not the way you intended!

I left the comm center and stopped by the TOC. 'My Way' was just finishing with the ammo requisition when I walked in. I gave the Duty Officer the briefing sheet with frequencies, schedules and PZ coordinates and I highlighted it on the map, just in case. The Colonel came in and picked up the brief sheet and erased the map I highlighted. "Security," is all he said. As I was briefing the Colonel in the TOC, 'Dodger' walked in and listened intently. I explained to the Colonel our transponder technique for team recovery, call signs, and frequencies three times, 'till he read back the instructions correct. 'My Way' motioned for me to follow him. I said my farewell to 'Dodger' and followed 'My Way'. On my way out, I heard 'Dodger' quizzing the Colonel to see if he still had it right. Walking down the hallway, we heard 'Dodger' yell, "If you screw this up, I'll mess you up bad! Got it, Sir!?" sarcastically. 'My Way' smiled and looked at me.

"We've got a good ally there. He wants to keep you alive and well. The championship crap jump for the whole theater is in two months."

"No way" I said. "That's gonna be 'Haystack's baby."

"Either way, according to 'Dodger', you and 'Haystack' will whip the other units bad!"

We laughed at the annual ritual and headed toward the hospital. The Flight Surgeon would be waiting. I wondered if Ali was on duty tonight. As we entered the hospital, we were greeted by warm, friendly smiles. The doctor pulled out a bottle of scotch (I hate scotch) and insisted on a toast. The duty staff and some off duty hospital personnel were there to join in. The other team members were all ready tucked in for the night.

"On behalf of the hospital staff", the Major began, "we wish 'America's best' the wings of eagles, the strength of tigers, the speed of the cheetah, and the venom of vipers. God bless."

It was a stirring moment for all of us as we lifted our glasses. As the scotch passed my lips to my taste buds, the muscles in my face, mouth, and throat flexed. The look on my face couldn't be disguised. *Yuck!* I thought, but refused to let the good staff think I had never tasted scotch. 'My Way' saw it immediately and came to my rescue. He picked up the bottle while I was still trying to recover a breath of air and poured another! "A toast" he said and looked at me. (*Oh man*, I thought) "To good friends", and everyone lifted their glasses and returned, "To good friends." *Ah shit*, I thought as it went down. I grimaced, shook and put my glass on the desk and turned to talk to "Doc". I saw a quick exchange between Doc and 'My Way' and Doc looked at me and said, "How about a toast from our resident hero."

(*Ah shit! I'll get even!*)

"Here's to my mom
who brought me into life."

I began calculating the results and looking around at all the faces in the room with my glass of scotch held high.

"And here's to the girl
who may become my wife"

I continued looking at the nurses and raising my eyebrows up and down.

"I'll choose the lass
as I raise this glass"

I said in my finest Scottish accent, then belted out in my male, macho special forces voice,

"And look to find
the nicest ass!"

That did it! I was told no more for me and everyone laughed and pointed me down the hall. Two nurses, one on each arm, guided me toward the baths. The doctor had ordered another soak and scrub session. Lydia, the head nurse, a Major, on my right arm leaned over and asked, "Well?"

I looked at her and said, "Well what?", obviously confused.

The nurse on the left, who I hadn't met, asked, "Which one of us wins?"

I was looking at her confused and she returned, "You know, the nicest ass."

'My Way' and his two escorts were behind me. I stopped and looked down as they walked past me. 'My Way' put his arm on my shoulder and his escorts walked ahead of us also.

"'Bull Dog', you're either the luckiest guy I ever met or the craziest!" As we stood, looking at the four ladies posteriors, with their smiling faces looking at us.

"Well" I said with a serious face as if I was comparing and considering. Even in jungle fatigues, they had sweet looking asses, "Although you all have wonderful proportions, and those are definitely fine asses," 'My Way' was looking at me as if I were crazy!, "The OD green government issue pants hide the wonderful curves. I guess I'll have to call it a tie."

"Spoken like a politician," 'My Way' whispered.

"Don't you agree, Captain?" I said to 'My Way', catching him off guard. ("What goes around comes around, asshole" I whispered.)

He turned three shades of red and said, "I'm the only grunt here. I'm out numbered."

"Okay boys!" the Major said, "strip down and get into the soak."

"Two times in as many days - a hot bath and then scrubbed by beautiful ladies." I said. "Who could ask for more."

'My Way' returned a smile. As we sat in the Betadine bath soaking, the nurses disappeared toward the reception room. I slid down so that only my head was out of the bath. I looked at 'My Way' and slowly dipped my head into the cleansing bath. When I came up, my hair and face were streaming red. "Whoa" 'My Way' said. "Now I know what they mean 'sweating blood'."

"But man - it was worth it." I said. "It really feels good," I looked over to see only 'My Way's knees poking up. I heard some one coming and I turned and looked at

a sight that I couldn't believe. Standing in front of me were four females dressed only in a hospital gown. My mouth dropped open and I sat there staring. I looked down the mass of blue material to the end and there were legs! Miles and miles of beautiful, tanned, shaved, wonderful legs! And then I remembered that the back of those gowns didn't exist! *Hot shit! Please let it be!* As I sat staring, 'My Way' popped his head out of the solution, looking at me. I must have looked like a company of VC were locked down on us. He turned and grabbed for his weapon, which was cautiously placed within arms length of the disciplined Beret. His eyes caught the sight as he grabbed the weapon and one of the girls said teasingly, "I think you've been here too long Captain. Most guys would grab their other weapon!" And I assure you that I had a choke hold on mine! Just trying to keep it underwater was a chore!

"Now, smart ass!" the Major said. "It's time. Choose." And the four ladies did it. Yes, my hard, I mean my heart, said. They turned and displayed those beautiful bottoms. We were awed!

"Now what do you do?" 'My Way' said without moving his eyes from the smiles in front of him.

"I'll show you how the Air Force does it." I said loud enough so the contingency of Air Force nurses heard me, "Well me lasses" I started, "'Tis fine, one and all, but a problem I have."

"Now what problem would that be, me lord?" one of them piped in her Irish drawl.

"Well, me ladies," I said, "'Tis the shadows from them ugly covers yer a wearin'. 'Tis casting odd shapes on the asses of the lasses!" 'My Way' knew I was bonkers now. His eyes turned to me and he said it without a word. *Hey, maybe I'll work out as a team member yet!* Then movement ahead,

"They're gonna kill us" he whispered.

A gown hit the floor. Then the next and right down the line. The choke hold tightened!

"Need a tourniquet yet, 'Bull Dog'?" Ali said. Ah shit it hurt!

"Okay ladies, I give! Uncle! You win!"

The Major gave the dreaded command, "Ladies, about face." They turned, smiled and picked up their gowns and put them on - slowly. And a few even put them on backwards. It was going to be a hell of a night! The nurses came over, gave us a pill, then started scrubbing the soaked scabs off our bodies. When they finished, we were escorted to our rooms. My mind began working. As I was tucked into bed, Ali stood on one side, stroking my hair, and Lydia was massaging my feet. It felt so soothing, I began drifting off.

Then I was home. In St. Petersburg, Florida. House sitting. Just before I reported to the induction center in Miami, Jimmy Nagelson, one of my friends, was left alone for the week end. His dad was a dentist and was going to be gone until Sunday night. Jimmy had asked permission for Tim, Dan and me to stay with him. He lived out by Lake Seminole and had a heck of a ski boat. We had decided to go and spend the

weekend water skiing. We had just taken our first trip around the lake and dropped Tim in the water by the shore. I threw out the tow rope and all of a sudden, Dan the Man jumped out of the boat.

"Where the heck is he going?" Tim asked.

"I don't know."

Dan spun in the water and pointed to some girls swimming in the lake.

"Forget it Dan - they're kids." Jimmy said.

But Dan was the man! He continued toward the girls about twenty yards away. A couple minutes later, Dan and the girls were swimming to the boat. Tim was ready, skis on, tips pointing out of the water and tow rope between the skis. Dan and the girls got closer.

"They're kids." Jimmy said. "He'll get us put in jail!"

I put the ladder out over the side for the girls to get in. The first one started up the ladder but her bikini top was not able to keep its cargo in. Whoa!

I sat up in bed. Everything was spinning. I laid back down. *Where was I? What's going on? Ali? Lydia? Ah shit! What happened?* I looked around, still spinning. Lydia walked in and came to the side of my bed.

"Hey, hey" she said. "Lay back. It's only a dream. Do you have nightmares like that often, 'Bull Dog'?" she said.

Nightmares? Often? I thought, I wish!

"It's all right. Lydia's here." She sat on the edge of the bed and I put my arm around her waste and stroked her thigh. *Clothes*, I thought. I was beaded with sweat. (You would be too, if you saw those floatation devices coming out of the lake!) Lydia left and came back in with a cool washcloth.

"Here now, 'Bull Dog'," she said, scooting closer and wiping my forehead.

I just laid there and enjoyed the attention. She took my hand from my chest and put it back on her leg. *Boy, do I love it here!* I thought as something cold touched my upper arm, then... *Ouch! A shot?* She put my hand back on my chest.

"There you go 'Bull Dog'." She started stroking my head, then put her hand on my chest, stroking ever so lightly. "Its no wonder you can't sleep. You must be terrorized with your dreams. All the terrible things you've seen - death - torture - never knowing if you would wake up if you fall asleep out there in the bush. The pain and fear you face daily. I wouldn't want to dream either!"

I just laid there enjoying her voice and caressing fingers. The more she talked, the better her hands felt. I put my hand back on her waist and pulled her onto the bed. She scooted closer and put her head on my chest. The smell of her hair and the light smell of perfume filled my senses. Her hand moved to my stomach, lightly stroking. I put my other hand on my waist - no clothes. She lifted my arm from her waist and put her head on my shoulder, laying next to me. My hand stroked the curly locks of her hair. Her hand moved softly down my waist to my side and onto my thigh. Using her fingernails ever so lightly she followed the side of my body from my thigh to my chest. My hand moved down her body slowly to her hips, then around, touching the beautiful

cheek displayed earlier. She scooted closer. *I think you won*, I thought dreamily. I might have even said it as I drifted away again, feeling her hand ever so lightly moving down my chest to my stomach to my.....

"Chipper, you and Skipper get down from that tree," my Aunt Sandy yelled. Skip was my cousin. We were born only three months apart. I was the first of the children born into our generation. Named after my dad, Dois Gene Tatum, I was a Junior. My mom had two sisters: Izola, the oldest, known as Ikky. Donna May, called Sandy was next, and then my mom, Alberta Rose, nicknamed Jinx. (My family is really into nicknames!) Three months later, Aunt Izola gave birth to Dorsey Milburn Brown, Junior, named after his dad, my Uncle Dorsey.

"So," my Aunt Sandy said to her two sisters, "You've gone and done it now."

"What?" mom said.

"Their names. These boys don't have a chance getting through life as Dois and Dorsey. Get with it girls."

So we were nicknamed Chip and Skip. And I hear we were a Chip and Skip too. We were everywhere. Here I was, sitting with Skip in a crabapple tree at Grandpa Sandlin's apartments. We loved to watch grandpa work. He had, bar none, the neatest tool room and work bench Skip and I had ever mischiefed into. We had gotten into his tool box and got some nails to hammer into some wood. We didn't want to hammer holes in the building we watched him paint, so we figured no one would mind if we put up a few nails in the crabapple tree. Skip had already finished hammering his nails in and it was my turn. Aunt Sandy had come out and choked when she saw us sitting in the top of the tree.

"Daddy!" she yelled, calling grandpa, as Skip started down. "Daddy, hurry!" Gene (my dad), Claude (my uncle), Sandy's husband. Aunt Sandy was calling all the grown-ups! Grandpa was the first to the tree. He started climbing as Sandy told me to stay still and don't move. Don't move? Is she crazy? I thought. I didn't climb all the way up here to just sit! I could have had the hammer taken away from me at the tree trunk on the bottom. I'm up here 'cause nobody can get to me till I get this hammer and nail thing figured out! Whoa. Grandpa can climb pretty good!

"Daddy, hurry! Gene! Claude! Help!" Sandy yelled.

I saw dad and Uncle Claude reach Aunt Sandy. She was screaming. Boy - hadn't she ever climbed a tree before? Uncle Ray does it all the time when he comes over. (Ray was my dad's youngest brother. He was eight years older than me, mom said, and able to do things I couldn't. Huh! I got higher than him! And I'm only four, I reasoned.) Uh oh. I think Grandpa's going to get me. I better get to it. So I put my left hand with the nail in it against the tree and swung the hammer. Whoa! That's heavy! I missed and the hammer took my hand way down - oops - I hit Grandpa on the head!

"Gene! He's gonna kill Daddy!" Sandy yelled.

Grandpa recovered.

"Chipper" he said in that soothing voice. He's so nice.

"Sorry Grandpa. I didn't mean to hit you."

"It's okay Chipper. Lets get outta this tree. Can you get on that roof?"

I looked at the roof on the apartment house and said, "Yes".

"Okay, give me the hammer and get up there."

So, I handed him the hammer and started to climb.

"Chipper!" Sandy screamed.

I stopped and looked at her.

"Come down here right now!"

I looked at Grandpa. He said, "Climb on up there son - those girls don't know what they're doing."

Yeah, I thought, silly girls. So, I climbed up and onto the roof. Grandpa was right behind me. Poor Grandpa. Aunt Sandy, Izola, Mom and Grandma were yelling at him the whole time. He could have fallen, I thought. He can't climb as good as me.

After we were both on the roof, grandpa picked me up and carried me to the back of the apartment where dad was waiting with a ladder. Gramps handed me to dad and he handed me to Uncle Claude. Uh oh. Here comes mom and Aunt Sandy. I had seen Skip catch it from Aunt Izola, his mom, when he got down. Uncle Claude was laughing as he handed me to mom. I felt like a grocery bag getting handed to everyone. I could have climbed down that ladder. Mom hugged me then - someone is shaking me.

"Hey - wake up 'Bull Dog'." I opened my eyes and saw 'Pop'.

"'Pop'. Hey. What's up?" Where are we? I thought. Hospital - "Lydia" I said.

"Who 'Bull Dog'?" 'Pop' asked.

"Oh, what time is it?" I asked.

"0900. 'Cajun's got the chemical lights. We need to pop the chutes and sew or tie them on. Up and at 'em, boy!"

CHAPTER SIX

When we arrived at the chow hall, 'My Way' had placed a guard at the door. Team Red Rock was walking through their assignments. I got a cup of coffee and slid down behind Pablo and 'Cajun'.

"'Highway', you finish up that coffee and take 'Cajun' and 'Pop' over to S-4. Need to get those canopies lit, and last night's requisitions together," said 'My Way'. "Man, you fly-boys are soft, sleeping in all hours of the morning. Whadda ya think, you're on vacation?"

I just chugged down the java and tapped 'Cajun' on the shoulder. 'Pop' took a thermos and filled it for us and told us to bring our cups. "It's gonna be a long day," he said.

The Colonel assigned a jeep and utility trailer for us to use. 'Pop' jumped in first and hopped in the back, 'Cajun' took shotgun, and I drove. Off we went across base to the supply room. Staff Sergeant Howe, our Supply Sergeant, was assigned to oversee the adjustment of the harness for our number twos. We also stored our canopies with Staff Sergeant Howe.

Howe was waiting for us at the supply room. When we arrived, he walked with us to his warehouse. 'Pop' was talking to him and 'Cajun' had hopped in the jeep, "No use wearing myself out," he exclaimed. I waved him on.

Something had caught my eye and I wanted to go investigate it in the supply room. I had seen a pallet covered with a piece of canvas. Someone had sprayed "Red Rock" on the canvas in white spray paint. I looked at the two Sergeants making their way to the warehouse and 'Cajun' weaving and honking in true CIA style (I didn't care much for the spooks, but 'Cajun' wasn't as stiff as the briefing team).

I quickly spun around and headed into the supply hut. "Hello, anybody here?"

"Yes, sir. What can I do for you, sir?" a little Airman asked.

I pointed to the pallet and began walking toward it, "Oh, sorry sir, but Sergeant Howe said no one's to bother that."

"First of all Airman, I work for a living, so you can drop the sir. This is my rank," as I pointed to my shoulder, "and this is my name," as I pointed to the name tag sewn above my pocket. "And this is my authority to do whatever I want with that pallet," I threw my beret on the counter where the young Airman stood. Then I smiled and said, "I'm on Team Red Rock. Staff Sergeant Howe and our First Shirt just went to the warehouse. Now, lets see what goodies we have."

"It's neat, sir, uh, I mean Sarge. We've been getting things put together all week. Red Rocks' gonna do a top secret spooky thing, huh?"

Some secret, I thought. The whole damn base is in on it! As I would later find, the fact that we were up to something was limited knowledge. The Colonel had started a disinformation campaign to throw off the VC spies who worked on the base as civilian employees during the day, and, after work, they would carry out their attacks against us throughout the night. "The true target and intent of the mission must never be revealed,"

as the General had so adamantly stated.

"Whaddya think, Sarge?" I was looking at NVA sapper uniforms, satchels, rocket launchers, rifles, grenades, rockets and mortars, captured from the North Vietnamese Army. I had forgotten that the M-16 and other American weapons would not be used on this mission. *How the hell do you work those things?* I thought to myself? "Sarge says you guys are gonna pose as sappers, taking NVA prisoners back home to the north and then ice all the gooks. Man, I wish I could go."

"I do too!" I said in a low voice to myself. "Thanks, Airman," I said and then threw the tarp back over our 'tools'.

I grabbed my M-16 and jogged over to the warehouse. They had the canopies laid out on the floor and 'Cajun' was explaining the use of the chemical lights. I had never seen anything like them. They were cylindrical, white plastic, with a greenish-yellow substance inside. 'Cajun' said that inside the tube was a small glass tube of a second chemical. By bending the outer plastic, the inner glass would break. Then you shake the tube and "vuolla"! It had a soft light-green glow, small enough not to be seen from the ground, but when placed on the top of a canopy, it should provide the proper marking for us to identify the location of the men beneath us. Unfortunately, the light will only last 4-6 hours. We decided that we would mount the lights, two per canopy. We would wait to pack the chutes until 1700 hours. That would carry usability through midnight. Our time on target (TOT) was 2000 hours (8:00 p.m.).

"Now, how do we get these babies on?" Staff Sergeant Howe asked.

We all stood staring at the canopies.

"Sew 'em," Pop' answered after a few minutes of studying the canopy. "How about it, 'Bull Dog'? Run over to the packing shop and see Lieutenant Rimerez. Tell him what we want to do and see what he has."

I grabbed my rifle and ran out the door. The canopy repair shop and packing line was only two buildings down. I asked for Lieutenant Rimerez, but the Sergeant told me he wasn't available.

"The asshole's late gettin' back from R&R, 'Bull Dog'. He was gonna check out Australia and get back so's I could leave next week. If he don't hurry back, I'll lose my R&R window."

The NCIOC of the repair shop, Tech Sergeant Grey, walked out of a muster formation he had called for all of his workers, "Damned Gooks!" he declared, shaking his head. "I can't get it through to them!"

The young Sergeant looked at his boss and asked "What exactly don't they understand, Sergeant Grey?"

"It's quite clear! No nylon thread is to leave this shop. I know it, and you know it, but I can't get them to understand that. The *Old Man* is dead on this pilferage shit!"

Sergeant Grey looked at me, acknowledging with a quick, "Hey, 'Bull Dog'!" Then he returned his remarks back to his young Sergeant. "Well - lives depend on our work and, as it is, we will not be able to finish the 180 canopies we have! Damn!" he exclaimed.

"Whatta they rippin' you off, Sergeant Grey?" I asked.

"Hell, I wouldn't mind them taking a little here and a little there, but, we're missing 100,000 linear feet of cord in addition to the ten large spools of nylon thread. As a matter of fact, if they'd ask, I'd even give 'em enough to use around their huts, but, shit! They'll be killing our Rangers and Jet Jocks if we can't get these chutes repaired and back over to Da Nang."

"I'll be right back." I offered. "Maybe your local Special Forces interpreter can get it through to them." With that, I ran out and over to the jeep.

'Pop' was just walking out to see where the hell I was. It shouldn't take but three minutes to get some needles and thread. "Hey, where the hell you goin'?"

"Public relations!" I yelled back, spinning out in a 180. *I like these jeeps!* I pulled up to the chow hall, honking the horn and yelling for 'The Kid'.

"Hey Kid, I need you for five minutes!"

'The Kid' hopped in as shotgun and I "180'd" it again, speeding for the repair shop. On the way, I explained Tech Sergeant Hill's problem with all the missing cord and thread. I added the fact that this was the main repair shop for two countries. 'The Kid' acknowledged and said he could get the message through to them, "No problem!"

Now, 'The Kid' was quite a unique person. His mother was Vietnamese and his dad was an assistant at the American Embassy. At the age of twelve, they moved to the U.S. where he was raised in private schools in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He attended two Ivy League colleges before graduating from Princeton. Fluent in seven languages, and familiar with six others, 'The Kid' was one of the Agencies brightest "talent".

Sliding to a stop, 'The Kid' smiled at me and said he enjoyed the ride, we should play more often. With that, he hopped out and pulled Tech Sergeant Grey to the side. I don't know what he discussed with Sergeant Grey, but Grey didn't agree with him. Finally, TSgt. Grey nodded his head in agreement and waved 'The Kid' on to follow him.

'Pop' was still standing outside, finishing a cigar. He saw the exchange between 'The Kid' and TSgt. Grey. He obviously thought it was worth investigating.

"What's up, 'Bull Dog'?"

"Highway." I said, smiling.

"Yeah, yeah," and he pushed me aside and walked into the repair shop.

'The Kid' was yelling for the workers to gather around.

"Ditty Mau Chop! Chop!" Tech Sergeant Grey yelled.

'The Kid' smiled and shook his head.

As the ladies gathered around, 'The Kid' sent 'Pop' to walk around to their baskets and see if any of the workers were bold enough to try and take any materials after Tech Sergeant Grey's admonitions.

'The Kid' was asking the ladies questions, very politely, and they were obviously complaining and pointing to Tech Sergeant Grey. I looked around the shop and found 'Pop' going through a basket near the rear of the shop. The workers brought a basket containing their meal or any other item they may want or need for their days work. The workers were permitted to do some repair work to clothing of their immediate family with the machines in the repair shop. Tech Sergeant Grey even kept domestic threads and needles in his office for the workers to sign out and use in the repair shop for personal

items. I thought that was pretty nice of him.

'The Kid' turned to Tech Sergeant Grey and started relaying the ladies remarks. "It seems, Sergeant Grey, that you are mistaken about the amount of inventory missing. Nylon thread and OD green parachute cord would be obvious if they used it in or around their homes."

Knowing Tech Sergeant Grey's response, he waited and looked to the back of the shop. 'Pop' was making his way to a position behind the ladies. There they were, 'Pop' and 'The Kid', talking to one another without talking, again!

Whatever Tech Sergeant Grey said, he was finished now. 'The Kid' continued with the ladies. 'Pop' signalled Tech Sergeant Grey to join him. 'The Kid' was holding a firm position with the workers, obviously supporting TSgt. Grey's authority.

I watched 'Pop' and Grey whisper back and forth. 'Pop' opened a bag and Tech Sergeant Grey looked in. His eyes widened and he looked around the group, pointing to a young woman in the center of the group. Most of the ladies had been arguing, or at least putting in their two cents worth, but this worker just stood - obviously bothered by the events and anxious to be finished.

'The Kid' had seen the exchange between the two soldiers and was aware of which worker to approach. He said something and started walking ahead, the crowd splitting to allow him to pass. He passed the young woman and stopped, talking to an elderly woman at the rear of the group. The elderly lady shook her head, denying an obvious accusation.

"Is this not your basket?" he asked, pointing to the basket 'Pop' brought with the bag. "Then these are not yours either?" pointing to the black/blue pajamas (the uniform of the Viet Cong), 'Pop' was pulling out of the bag.

A spool of nylon thread dropped to the floor. All of the ladies were staring at the elderly lady at this point. The older woman was adamantly denying the charge. In the interim, 'Pop' signaled me to move closer to the young woman. Drawing my .45 and releasing the safety, I moved in behind the woman. I had no sooner repositioned myself when two of the ladies, including the older woman, pointed to the young woman we had identified earlier. She spun to run and ran right into me. Her right hand had been in a pocket in her ankle-length skirt. Her hand came out of her pocket in a single, swift movement. My left hand met her hand, engulfing the small hand. My adrenaline was pushing through me. I could only hear a rushing sound in my ears. Time seemed to stop and the movements of the young lady and others surrounding us seemed to be in slow motion. I lifted my .45 locked to fire. The woman's mouth was moving - saying something - yelling something. The high-pitch sounds were overcoming the rushing sound in my ears. My hand was tight around hers. She was struggling, trying to pull her hand away. 'Pop' was moving toward her. The barrel of my .45 was moving toward her face. *Shut up*, I thought as I placed the barrel in her mouth.

The sound of breaking teeth broke the squeals of the woman. Her left hand moved swiftly over my head. Something flashed. I looked up and saw a knife reach its apex and begin moving down. Then, a deafening sound of thunder. The woman's hand continued down, and 'Pop' was still several feet away. The woman's hand was closer, the

blade aimed at my neck. Suddenly, her whole body flew backwards, the knife striking my right upper arm, my left hand still holding her fist as she slumped to the floor. I looked at our hands and saw the grenade with the pin missing. I dropped my .45 and cupped her hand, gently removing the U.S. made weapon. 'Pop' handed me a pin and I placed it back in the grenade, dropping the dead Viet Cong's hand.

I hung the grenade on my pocket and looked down. The woman was still, her head in a crimson pool, eyes holding a distant stare. I looked up and saw the shop emptying in short order. Everything was still slow motion. 'Pop' was talking. 'The Kid' and Tech Sergeant Grey, weapons drawn, were following the workers out of the rear of the shop. Security Policemen, M-16s pointing toward the lifeless body, surrounded the three of us.

"All right, men. Shoulder your weapons," one of them said.

'Pop' took my .45 and cleared the round which reloaded in the chamber. He handed it back and said, "Mechanical. Good catch, 'Bull Dog'. We didn't dream that the VC would be this bold. Security must be lax," he said, looking at the Security Police, ready for action, but three minutes too late!

'Pop' grabbed the grenade and tossed it to one of the SPs. He dropped his M-16 to catch it, thinking it would blow up. The weapon discharged a single round into the exterior wall. He may as well have kept the weapon in his hand! The three Security Police dove as the grenade fell to the floor.

'Pop' smiled at me and said, "Did I say security was lax? Obviously, I'm mistaken!" He picked up the M-16 and the grenade, cleared the weapon in a swift move, simultaneously dropping the magazine to the floor and ejecting a chambered round, put the M-16 back on the ground and said, "Here, Barney. Maybe you should keep these here," as he put the bullet in the right breast pocket of the young Air Force policeman's uniform. "C'mon," 'Pop' said, taking his kerchief off and tying it around my arm.

"Damn, 'Bull Dog'" I heard from behind me. "Quit playing John Wayne, will you? I need you healthy. How is he, 'Pop'?"

I looked up at 'Pop'. He shook his head and said, "Compared to what we all *could* have been, he's fine."

"Well" 'My Way' said, looking at the VC laying on the floor. "He do all this?"

"Holy shit!" Pablo said, looking at my arm. "Does it hurt?"

I looked at my arm and saw the handle of the knife, with 'Pop's' kerchief wrapped at the bottom. *Why doesn't it hurt?* I turned and walked with 'Pop' to the jeep.

"Mechanical." 'My Way' said to Pablo.

"Damn" he replied.

The jeep wheeled up to the hospital. Someone must have called ahead. The Flight Surgeon and his staff were waiting - stretcher in hand. I jumped out, carrying my M-16 in my left hand and a knife sticking out of my upper right arm. Eyes widened as I walked past them to the reception area. Everyone followed me up the steps.

A siren sounded and the SP vehicle pulled up. One of the Security Police called for help and the triage team quickly responded with a stretcher, loading a Security Policeman onto it.

I went to the treatment room with Doc's direction. I put the M-16 in the corner and sat on the treatment table. I looked at it, Doc looked at it, and we looked at each other. Doc took off 'Pop's' kerchief. 'Pop' had grabbed the stretcher and helped carry the Security Policeman into treatment room number two, with the triage team following. The Flight Surgeon poked his head in, "Hold on there, 'Bull Dog'. We've got a bad one over here. I'll be back as soon as I can!"

"Wow" I said to 'Pop' as he walked in. "What happened to him?" pointing to the next room with the Security Policeman in it. "He get shot by that falling rifle?"

"Don't know." 'Pop' said. "Must be bad - Sergeant Grey from the canopy shop called after we left and alerted the hospital about a major injury. I thought 'My Way' had called for 'em to get you fixed up."

Damn, I thought that round hit the wall! "Humph" I declared as I looked at the knife. "How come it doesn't hurt, Doc?"

"It doesn't hurt?" he asked, shocked.

"No, not really." I got a closer look. The knife had gone in my upper arm behind the bone, held only by the muscle on the back of my arm.

"Is it poking out the back?" I asked.

"Nope" Doc said. "But hell, if it doesn't hurt, I'm not gonna touch it 'till Sawbones gets over here!" Doc was referring to the Lieutenant Colonel surgeon on staff.

We were all wondering about the Airman in treatment room two, when the head nurse walked in. Lydia stopped at the door and looked at me. "What you guys do to see a girl!" she exclaimed, shaking her head, but staring at the imbedded knife.

We heard 'My Way' about then. He came to the door and looked over Lydia's shoulder. I was sittin' on the exam table with the knife still in my arm. 'Pop' was sitting on a stool with his boots resting on the trash can, and Doc was blowing and talking in a stethoscope.

"What's wrong with this picture?" he looked at the head nurse and asked. "Where is everyone?"

"Over there, working on that poor SP that got wounded disarming a VC of a grenade," she said. "The VC was right here on base and he single handedly, with your men held at bay, disarmed and shot the Charlie," she said proudly.

I couldn't tell whether 'My Way' was going to yell or laugh! "Well," he said very politely, "when you find the bullet wound in that hero next door, tell me and I'll get General Abrams to personally award him the Purple Heart and Medal of Honor!" His anger was building. "In the meantime, I've got a man over here that has a VC knife poking out of his arm, and its probably poison tipped."

Doc, 'Pop' and I all looked at each other. "Oh shit!" I mumbled, "No wonder it doesn't hurt! It's killed the tissue around the wound!" Then I remembered the methods used with pungi sticks and viper venom. *Ah Shit!* I thought out loud, the obvious concern in my eyes.

"Oh! We thought you guys were just playing and he got stuck on a bad throw by 'Chief'," the nurse said, obviously exasperated as she tumbled through a drawer for some gloves. "Move it, Edwards." she said to Doc.

"Doctor!" the nurse yelled to our Flight Surgeon. He ran in.

"Damn" he said. "We can't find the bullet hole. They're stripping him now. What's up 'Bull Dog'?" the doctor said as he leaned over my wound.

My mouth and throat were so dry, I couldn't talk. I was getting cold and clammy feeling.

The doctor grabbed the stethoscope from Doc, he slung the scope around his neck and started looking into my eyes. He held his hand out and the nurse handed him a light. He flicked the beam in and out of my eyes. "Lay back, son" he said. Pointing to the knife he asked, "VC?" and 'Pop' acknowledged. "Shit!" he said.

"Great bedside manner." I heard 'My Way' say from the hall. "Get that pussy outta here before I put a bullet hole in him myself!" 'My Way' exploded to the team working on the Security Policeman. "The little son of a bitch just passed out when he saw the back of the VCs head missing! No telling what he would have done if he would have seen 'Bull Dog' sink his .45 in her throat with one hand and cover a live grenade with the other while she stabbed him with her free hand! Christ! Check the pussy's underwear. They're probably full! And now," he continued "one of my best men is in there with viper venom getting sucked through his body every time his heart beats, while you play nursemaids to a pussy!"

"Sawbones - get your ass over here and pull this knife out!"

Doc yelled.

The nurse had a syringe, filling it with something.

"Hold on" the Flight Surgeon said. "Bull Dog, tell me if this hurts" and he pinched my other arm.

"No" I said. I barely felt it.

Then he held out his hand for the syringe. He lifted up my pants leg and wiped my calf, then scraped me with the needle. "How about that?" he asked.

"Nope," I said with a clear mind.

"Get his chart from last night." The nurse handed it to him. "Hmmm" he said. He grabbed some gauze and removed the knife. It twinged a little, but not much. By now, we had an audience. Everyone was in awe when the doctor removed the knife without medicating me first! He kept the gauze on the blade of the knife. Then he put a sponge in my arm, "Hold this - with pressure." he said to Lydia.

"Okay. Show's over. Clear out." Everyone left except Lydia, 'Pop', and 'My Way'.

"Damn," 'My Way' said. "That didn't hurt?" he asked me.

"No, not really, only a little." I replied.

'Sawbones' walked back in.

"Doctor?" 'My Way' asked.

"'Bull Dog' will be okay. But, if you were counting on him, you'll have to wait three days."

The Colonel had quietly moved into position behind 'My Way'. "That's perfect," the Colonel pronounced. "Storm headin' in. Air support grounded for two days. Looks like a reprieve!"

I saw a Vietnamese officer and one of the CIA agents with the Colonel as I acknowledged his remarks. "Hell of a job 'Bull Dog'." The Kid' just finished briefing the Colonel and me about the incident. Apparently, someone had been supplying the VC with nylon thread and parachute cord from our repair shop. Tech Sergeant Grey just completed his monthly inventory and found gobs of it missing. Before you came on board 'Bull Dog', Team Red Rock reconned the area and found boobie traps utilizing the cords and nylon thread as trip wires for mines and punji swatters. We figured it had to be one of the workers, but we didn't think we'd get this lucky. The VC you got has been number three on our list of notorious assassins. She worked as a prostitute in Bangkok for a while, putting to rest seventeen American soldiers. She would get them in bed and put a stiletto into their brain during their lovemaking." He pointed to the base of his skull on the back of his neck. "That's probably the stinger of the "Black Widow" as she has been so aptly called," as he pointed to the knife the doctor just removed from my arm.

The Vietnamese Colonel took over, "On behalf of our government, I would like to offer you our Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal for Valor."

Shit, I thought. *I'm lying here, dying from viper venom and this guy wants to give me an award before I die! Shit!* "Thank you Colonel," I mouthed.

"Never have I heard of such a selfless and heroic act. It is a pleasure to meet a man as noble as you, 'Bull Dog'." With that, he bowed his head, stood, looked at me, and left.

"I'll get your medal over to ya this afternoon, 'Bull Dog'," the Colonel said.

It's still morning? I thought. *'Pop' was right - it's going to be a long day.*

The doctor poked the needle in my left arm and squeezed out the contents. Then he took the knife and dipped it in a solution. "Nope," he proclaimed, "just traces of venom material. Enough to counteract with the medication from last night and deaden your ATP - that means your nerves aren't communicating pain to your brain. That, along with shock, kept the pain down. But don't worry, your secret is safe with me."

I looked at the knife handle and the three-inch blade. *The ice pick-like blade did resemble a stinger*, I thought.

A nurse walked in with a wheel chair and signaled me onto it. "Okay boys, to the dog house!" and with that she wheeled me back to the room I had spent the night in. Someone had written "Dog House" on a piece of paper with a magic marker and taped it to the door. "Up you go," she said. "Now roll over and show 'em to me," she said as she was pulling another needle out of her pocket. "Antibiotics, just in case."

"Ouch!" I said, kidding.

"Thought you couldn't feel," she said.

"Well, nurse, just look at that needle! Even though I can't feel it - it's gotta hurt!"

'Pop' chuckled and threw me a backward nightgown. I was getting a little drowsy by the time I changed and got back into bed.

"Man," I proclaimed, "I'm gonna be a drug addict soon, 'Pop'. We gotta get outta here and on to Red Rock!"

"Well," Pablo said, "I really don't mind being able to hang around the hospital." Most guys would say that because of all the female company. Don't get me wrong.

Southeast Asia had a lot of female entertainment for the GIs, but it was nice to be around 'round eyed' girls from the States. But Pablo was referring to the knife collection of Sawbones introduced him to. They had arranged a few modifications to the surgical ware for a special set of weapons for Pablo.

"Okay boys" the nurses said to Team Red Rock, "Don't you guys have some babies to kill or something? Out! Out! Out!"

'Pop' said that he would be staying awhile, and everyone else left. I noticed a Security Police standing outside my room. 'Pop' picked up a Newsweek and got comfortable, putting his feet up on a stool.

"Gangway!" the Corpsman said. "Sorry, Sergeant, doctors orders," and two other Corpsmen pushed in a big leather easy chair. "If you gotta stay in here with Bull Dog, you may as well be comfortable."

"How long are your shifts?" the doctor asked 'Pop'.

"Four hour rotations", he said. "How 'bout them?" shrugging his head toward the Security Policeman.

"Four outside and two inside, six hour rotations."

"Tell the Colonel no more than four hours for them too. They tend to get too complaisant after four hours. That can get us killed."

Now, I was drowsy, but I sure wasn't out of it! "Hey," I asked, "what's up?"

"The Vietnamese Colonel tells us the girl you iced is the daughter of the village chief ten clicks east of here. They're known VC sympathizers. We expect the word will get back by this afternoon. There'll be trouble tonight. We're flying in two teams now." (speaking of special forces units) "They'll be in position tonight around the vil to curtail any possible attack. Nip it in the bud, so to speak. We've boosted security on base, just in case. The boss seems to think you may be in danger."

"So, that's why your here," shaking my head. "Give me that." I said, pointing to my .45. 'Pop' reloaded it and handed it to me. I slipped it under my covers and waited.

I must have napped, because when I looked over at the chair, 'Blackman' was busy working on something. "What's that, 'Blackman'?" I asked.

He looked up at me with those angry eyes. He didn't look at the others on the team in the same way. 'Blackman' was our demolition expert. If it could be made, 'Blackman' could certainly figure out how to assemble any explosive device.

"Why do you call me that, 'Highway'?"

"Call you what, 'Blackman'?"

"That!"

"What?" I asked, not understanding.

"Is it because of my race, because if it is, we gonna go around." 'Blackman' threatened. "Now, I'll ask you one more time, why do you call me 'Blackman'?"

I sat staring at him, only half awake, trying to sort out what he just said. *I think he asked me why I call him 'Blackman'. Hell, I dunno! Why, Oh, yeah. I was sitting in the tadpole hole, as 'Haystack' called it. 'My Way!' That's what he called him when we were introduced. 'Blackman'. I think. Humph. Think now! Hell, I'm sure!*

"Well 'Blackman'", his eyes fired up again. "Isn't that your name?"

"My name is John, my call sign is 'Bagman'" he said, holding up a satchel of explosives.

"'Bagman?'" I said, both questioning and surprised. I let that absorb. "Oh shit, John! I'm sorry, but when I was sitting in that hole and everyone was introduced, I could swear the Captain said, well, you know. Shit, man! I thought it was a strange name, but I sure as hell wasn't gonna be the one to question you!"

"'Bagman,'" he said. "Try it!"

"'Bagman'" I repeated, "And you don't have to tell me twice! Can I start over?" I asked, looking at him.

He nodded his head and went back to work.

"Whatcha doin' 'Bagman?'"

"'Pop' has me making twenty slap packs."

"What's a slap pack, 'Bagman?'"

"Okay, you got it," He said, speaking of my new-found knowledge of his name. "Here." and he threw one of his satchels to me. "See the pockets on the side?"

I acknowledged nodding, but still examining the OD green canvas bag.

"Well," he continued, "slap that pocket real hard and throw it here on the floor," he said, pointing to the end of the bed.

So I held it with my right hand and lifted my right hand to swing - OW! That hurts! The pain shot into my head. Then I slapped the pocket and looked over at the back of my arm, still holding the satchel. 'Bagman' jumped up and grabbed the satchel out of my hands and threw it on the floor.

BAM! I jumped at the small explosion - about like an M-80 or cherry bomb.

"Hey, that's neat!"

"Sorry, 'Highway', but you only have five seconds to dump it! Now, that was only my detonator. Imagine having plastics and some raw napalm in that baby!"

"Are those the primary weapon?" I asked.

"Yep. They're gonna wipe out a whole air force!" he answered. "See, the primary explosion will do the primary damage. But the flaming napalm will provide collateral damage to nearby aircraft or soldiers we may encounter. Hell of a deterrent! The napalm is spread over about twenty-five yards. Not enough to kill a man, but it disables 'em!"

Two nurses and a Corpsman came running in.

"'Bull Dog!'" Ali said. "You gotta hide! They're coming!"

'Bagman' was standing at the foot of my bed and slowly slid the satchel under the bed. He spoke to me without speaking. *I was getting a hold on this new language!*

"It's too late to run!" I said. "'Bagman', take Sharon to the room next to us and barricade. Corpsman," I said, throwing my M-16 to him, "you post yourself at the reception door. Tell the SP everything is secure in here! He'll understand!" *Understand, hell!* I thought. *He'll shit, thinking sappers or VC are around back. But surely he knows that broad daylight isn't their style! Surely!*

"Okay, 'Bull Dog!'" the young Corpsman said, grabbing the weapon.

'Bagman' didn't waste a second. He was already securing the room next door, protecting Sharon. *What an opportunity! Alone with Ali, locked in the room, in my*

hospital garb, .45 in hand and ready for action!

"Here," I said, patting on the bed. Ali sat down, looking out the window.

"I don't see them." she said so seriously.

"You never do," I returned, just as serious! "No need to worry though, you've got the best of the best here on NKP! No way Charlie will get past Red Rock!"

"I'm scared," she said.

"Here," I put my arm around her shoulder and pulled her to me, singing her a song to calm her:

"And, its 1, 2, 3

What are we fightin' for?

Don't ask me, I don't give a damn

The next stop is Vietnam!"

"Quit!" she said.

"Okay, Okay. Here, I'll do a quick recon," knowing the source of the excitement. "You stay here. I'll be right back." I locked the .45 John Wayne-style, stood up and turned, half creeping as if we were in the bush. I slowly crept to the door. In full recon style, I opened it and cleared the hall, first spinning to the right, weapon pointing, then left, weapon pointing. I heard Ali laughing.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's a hell of a sight! I mean, here's this guy that just saved a room full of people by grabbing a grenade, shooting a VC and getting stabbed. I picture this guy in jungle fatigues with his face painted black and grenades hanging off him maybe even a bandoleer on his shoulders. But all I see is a skinny guy with his ass poking out of a nightgown. It doesn't fit!" she finished giggling!

I shook my head and started to walk back in to her when I noticed the reception area. "Ah shit!" I exclaimed under my breath. "How the hell? Aw shit!"

"Bagman!" I called. 'Bagman' stuck his head out and looked at me. I signaled for him to look beyond the reception area.

"Uh oh" he said. "We done it now 'Highway'! Maybe we'd best sneak out and find us a VC and drag 'em in."

We both turned our gaze to the reception area. There, on the floor, sprawled and hiding, were all the soldiers and medical staff for afternoon sick call. The young Corpsman standing, his back to the wall between the door jam and window, M-16 cocked, loaded and held to his chest, peering out the window. These people were scared shitless!

"Only one thing to do 'Highway'," he whispered. I turned and looked at him.

We both crept out the back door and snuck around the main building. There I was - bare foot and bare backed, with 'Bagman', trying to get out of a hell of a mess, 'cause crouching behind the desk with the sick call personnel was Colonel Brown and the ARVN Colonel.

We were standing behind the Security Police at the corner of the building when I startled him by whispering in his ear, "All clear back here Sarge!"

"Man!" He almost came out of his boots! Then, we crept around to the entrance and up the steps to the second Security Police.

"All clear!" 'Blackman', oops, I mean 'Bagman' announced as we walked in.

"'Bull Dog'! 'Bagman'! See anything?" the Colonel asked, coming out of his

crouch, holstering his .45.

"No sir. Maybe a jeep backfiring, sir. You know how jumpy everyone is!"

"The young Corpsman here said you ordered everyone to take cover. Good head, 'Bull Dog'. Never hurts to be safe. Especially with all these Air Force types - you know how we're not exactly warriors. Good to have your men looking out for us. And look at you. What a sight! Get that skinny ass back in bed boy!" he said, pointing to my hospital room.

We walked back toward the room. "Sir," the Corpsman said, "Here ya go." handing me the M-16.

"Sarge," I said to him. "I work for a living," smiling at the Colonel.

'Bagman' and I continued toward the room where our beauties were waiting, as Colonel Brown told the ARVN Colonel, "Now, if we could get your men to be that dedicated to battle - we could get somewhere with this war."

'Bagman' and I looked at each other, smiling. I forgot I was also smiling at a clinic full of medical staff and base personnel out of the back of my gown!

I turned the corner into the room and found Ali standing, so innocent looking in the middle of the room. "Oh, 'Bull Dog'. You're so brave!" she said. "Wounded, drowsy from medication, you still rose to the occasion to protect me. How can I ever repay you?" she said and her left hand reached up and unbuttoned her top button. *I love this place*, I thought as I moved forward for my reward. Her hand on the second button. Pop!

I moved closer, placing my M-16 against the bed and the .45 on it. As I put my hands on her hips, I felt a blast on the left side of my head. Then something was being shoved into my chest. I grabbed a hold of whatever it was. I looked down and saw the satchel she had found under the bed, it was now in my hands.

"Asshole" is all I heard as she darted passed me, out of the door, buttoning up her shirt.

"Come on Sharon, back to work," she called to 'Bagman's' companion as she passed the door to the exam room. But, Sharon didn't come out right away. About five minutes later, Sharon and Bagman walked into my room. I was already in bed, pouting at my luck!

"Smooth move ex-lax!" Sharon said, poking her head in. "Ali's pissed! Better go and apologize or we'll all have a lousy night! She's the duty nurse tonight!"

I sat down, wrote a note and then gave it to 'Bagman' with delivery instructions. He read it, smiled at me, and was off to deliver it.

The pain in my arm was full strength now. The Flight Surgeon stopped by with a couple of pain pills. Thank goodness for pills. I was real tired of getting stuck with needles! He told me that the staff had instructions to medicate me at my request. He and Lydia re-banded my arm and told me I should be fine - but it may be sore for a while. He said that he'd talk to 'My Way' about my wounds. But orders were standing - I was to remain in the hospital overnight. I put on my jungle fatigues and asked permission to run over to my hootch and get some gear for the night.

He looked at his watch and said, "Those pills should kick in any time."

He called a Corpsman over and told him to drive me where I needed to go but have me back by 1600 hours.

We went to the hootch and picked up some grooming gear, shorts, shirt and a pair of tennis shoes. *I'll be damned if I'm gonna go through a VC attack in a nightgown!*

Next we went to the TOC. 'Bagman' was just coming out. He had given me the thumbs up and told me that he had been able to contact Dodger. Dodger gave an ETA of 1500 hours. I looked at my watch - 1330 hours. Man, it sure has been a long day!

Now Dodger was not only the VIP pilot, but, because of the contacts he had with the brass in Bangkok, he was also our "supply expert". So, I was in luck when 'Bagman' was able to catch him via Lima Lima (land lines or telephone). 'Bagman' had told him what happened and he agreed to try to find a peace offering for Ali. I told him in the note, that I had \$40 (greenbacks) so see what he could arrange.

The medication was taking effect. I seemed to be slurring slightly, so I asked the Corpsman to get me back to the hospital. 'Chief' was standing outside when we arrived. I raised my left hand in an Indian gesture, smiling and said "How" to him.

He kept a straight face and said, "Well, first I take a straight shot of bourbon, lead in the ol' pencil you know! Then I ask her to strip slowly..."

"Okay, Okay. I don't wanna hear it!" I said, giving in to the quick wit of 'Chief'.

"I'm here to baby sit you. Damn, I wish we could get real men instead of you fly-boy kids," he said in jest, helping me out of the jeep. "Oh, by the way, one of those nurses was looking for you, 'Highway'. I told her you should be back soon and asked if I could help, but it musta been something personal. She mumbled for me to make sure you know she was looking for you."

"Which one was it?" I asked.

"You gotta charming life, 'Highway'," he said. "I don't know anyone that wouldn't know which nurse was looking him up - 'cause us grunts don't know more than two people on earth! I donno." he answered.

"Well, what'd she look like?" I asked.

"You know - female and white. I don't usually don't remember the face since you all look the same smiling, but the legs were tanned and she had nice calves. She'd make a good Injun woman, except for that blonde hair."

"Thanks 'Chief, you just described about six of the nurses!"

"Yeah, but I'd just take the first one that happened by. I'm not choosy!" he said as we walked into the hospital.

I assumed it was Ali since she was off duty until midnight.

"How's the arm?" he asked, looking down at the bandage.

"Hurt's like hell!" I said.

"The grapevine says you got stabbed and shot by a VC. Fought him in a fierce hand-to-hand battle," he said with all the gestures, "got wounded, then when the VC lobbed a grenade at you, you caught it in mid-air, drew down and blew the gooks head off, threw the grenade out back of the chute shop, and walked to the hospital with a dagger hanging out of your gut!"

"Holy shit!" I exclaimed. "First of all, it was a she, and the rest is pure crap! Where'd you hear that?" I asked 'Chief', as I sat on the edge of the bed.

"Overheard the Colonel trying to sweet talk one of those lady journalists that's been poking around. Told her that if she would like, he'd bring her along when he gives

you the South Vietnamese Award for Valor this evening at the hospital. He told her it'd be later 'cause, according to the Doc, you should be out of intensive care and in recovery by eight this evening. So, she agreed to have dinner with him and then come by here!" 'Chief' smiled and sat in the Doc's easy chair, "Nice" he said, as he kicked back.

I took my bag and went to the soak bath to clean up and change. After a hot soak in the red stuff, and a comfortable pair of shorts, I asked the duty nurse to change my bandage. Then I went to bed, after all - I was probably still in intensive care, musing at the Colonel's story.

I woke to the sound of a chopper on the dustoff pad. I wondered if it was incoming wounded or Dodger. I got my answer soon enough. I had just closed my eyes again, when a Dodger hat landed on my chest.

"Hey, Bull Dog! Up and at 'em boy! 'I'm in crew rest and ready'," he yelled out the door of my room toward the nurses station.

One of the new nurses came in with two more pain pills for me.

"Hold it nurse," 'Dodger' said. "'Chief', frisk her."

I never saw 'Chief' move so fast!

"What's this?" 'Dodger' said picking up my pills from the nurses tray.

"Bull Dog's pain medication" she said.

"You sure it's not poison?"

She looked at 'Dodger' like he was nuts! Then he popped one in his mouth.

"Hey!" she said, "You can't do that. It's against regs!"

"Turn around and spread your legs." I heard the 'Chief' say.

"I'm outta here," the young lady said, shaking her head and leaving her tray on my chest.

"Thanks, you guys," I said. "That's all I need! Another nurse pissed at me!"

"Shut up and take your pill." Dodger said, putting the remaining pill the nurse had left for me on the tray in my mouth, and then pouring a cold beer in to chase it down. "When word about your peace offering for your nurse gets around, won't anyone be pissed. I will say - I am good!" he touted.

"What?" I asked.

"It's in the chopper" he said, looking around the room at the equipment. "But that's for later tonight. Right now, we've got some problems we have to deal with. I just brought in eight wanna be's."

I looked at 'Chief' for translation. "Journalists," 'Chief' began, "Dodger says they wanna be a soldier and wanna be famous - so they're always looking for the big one."

"So," I stated, "let 'em try and dig up a scoop - we aren't about to let 'em know about the mission!"

"No, not that, you lug-head. Some broad called back today to tell her boss in Bangkok to hold a spot for her in tomorrows wire back to the world (slang for the U.S.), she's got a real 'hero story'. Something about one Special Forces guy against six VC's - real front page stuff. I figured they messed up and confused the story about the 'Black Widow'. Anyhow, if you're the hero, you're supposed to be barely hangin' on to life and maybe amputated or something!"

'Chief' and I just chuckled. "Who cares about your wanna be's," I said. "I want

to know how much of my greenbacks you spent and for what."

"Okay, okay. You're gonna love it!" he said, and dashed out to the helicopter, grabbing a Corpsman to help him.

'Chief' and I worked our way to the hallway, and then toward the reception area. As we passed the nurses station, the new nurse called Lydia over and, pointing to us, said, "There. They're the ones. And that other guy that ran out to the helicopter, too."

Lydia smiled at us with a mischievous twinkle in her eye and said to the young nurse, "These are Special Ops. You shouldn't go around them without knocking three times on the door and giving them the password - and never ever go in alone!"

'Chief' and I stopped and looked at Lydia and got a wink from her and a scared look from the girl! We continued to the front door, waiting for the ultimate of peace offerings as 'Dodger' had described it.

The helipad was about fifty yards away.

"What is it, 'Chief?'" I asked as we watched Dodger and a Corpsman unload something from the helicopter and load it on the trailer attached to our jeep.

"Dunno. Looks like furniture."

Then they loaded on a box in the front seat of the jeep and the Corpsman hopped in the trailer to hold the furniture. When he pulled up, he waived his hand, "Voila". There, in the back of the trailer was a mirrored vanity with lights surrounding the mirror. On the mirror, in red lipstick, was written, "I'm sorry Ali! Please forgive me. Chip"

"Yep," I said. "It's good!"

"Good?" he said. "Hell! It's grrreat! and it only cost you two cases of Coors, and this was one case," as he picked up a box and brought it into the hospital. I looked in and saw a huge assortment of cosmetics: eyeliner, lipstick, eye shadows, all in big Christmas packs. "Left over from the holidays," he said. "I traded the BX manager in Bangkok. There's twenty-three combo boxes full of whatever a girl needs! And this," he reached in and pulled out an eight-track tape of *Joan Biaz*. There was also about thirty bottles of Hawaiian Surf cologne for the men.

"Slow and easy," he said, shifting his hips in a circular motion.

"So, where's Ali?" he asked.

"'Chief', go recon and see if she's at her hootch," I said. "Give us an all clear if it's safe," and I gave him directions to her hootch. About three minutes later, we heard a blood curdling war cry. Dodger and I looked at each other and said, simultaneously, "All clear!" We hopped in the jeep with the Corpsman still on the trailer and headed out.

We decided that the cosmetics would be handed out by 'My Way' as a gift from the Team for putting up with our antics. We were sincerely thankful for their concern for our well being.

"Oh, almost forgot, and this," 'Dodger' said, pulling a Virginia smoked ham off the back seat and dropping it on my lap.

We went to the chow hall and got Fatty to slice it and put it on a tray with bread and condiments for a small gathering by Team Red Rock. My Way agreed to have the gathering at the hospital at 8 pm sharp. Then we went to the hospital orderly's room and asked the CO to call a meeting at 8 pm and told him what we had in mind. The ham sold the CO on it. We drove to the chopper and parked.

"Hop in 'Bull Dog' - I gotta move this baby to the command pad and check in."
I jumped up front. It was the first time I'd been in the cockpit of a helicopter. 'Dodger' lifted off the pad and taxied around the base at about fifty feet altitude to the command pad. He saw the excitement in my eyes. "Maybe someday I'll have time to teach you how to fly this baby, 'Bull Dog'. As far as I'm concerned," he said, "there's only one thing better than flying." I left it alone, smiling.

We walked into the TF "Alpha" TOC so 'Dodger' could check in. As we passed the briefing room, I noticed the group of wanna be's milling around with the new S-1. The Colonel, seeing me, signaled us over to him.

"What the hell are you doing here 'Bull Dog'? Get back to that hospital and get in bed..." he hesitated, "and for God's sake look sick! You see all that press in the briefing room?"

"Yes sir" I said.

"Well, they're here to hear about you. Somehow they think you're a damned one man army, mortally wounded!"

"It's the drugs, sir." I said.

"Yeah," he returned. "Get your ass back over there and I'll take care of this."

"Sir," 'Dodger' broke in. "'Bull Dog' asked me to bring him here to personally invite you to join us for some fresh smoked ham sandwiches from the world this evening at 8 pm at the hospital."

"Eight huh?" he said, wheels turning. "That'll be fine, men. Now, go!"

"Yes, sir!" we saluted, and left.

The hospital CO was true to his word. He announced a mandatory muster at 2000 hours for all hospital personnel. 'My Way' jumped to the opportunity to return a little of the kindness offered the Team by the medical staff. So, it was on, and 'Dodger' was right - he had out done himself! I asked the young nurse for another pain pill and she unquestionably obliged me. I took it from her, and thanked her.

She stood as if she wanted to ask me something, but was afraid. I decided to help, "Something else?" I asked her.

"What's the password?" she asked, in a whispering tone.

I've got to admit, she caught me off guard. I stumbled and blurted out, "Oh, that's classified," and walked off to my room to rest.

About five minutes later, three knocks at the door and a feminine voice hailed me, "'Bull Dog'?"

"Yes? Come in please." I said.

The young nurse entered my room.

"Sorry about this afternoon. I didn't know about the special handling of Team Red Rock!"

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Nancy DeGraff" she said.

"Well, Nancy DeGraff, somebody owes you an apology! You did fine. 'Dodger' was just on a roll. As far as the three knocks and a password, Lydia was pulling your leg. When we're in here, you're the boss. The only reason I have another team member in here is for security."

"I heard," she said. "That's awful - that 'Black Widow' thing and venomous knives - I mean, they told us about that stuff in orientation back in the states, but when you see it for real - I mean it's far out!"

"Yep, pretty unbelievable. You do things here that you never thought you could do - but you do it to survive!" I told her and laid my head back on the pillow.

"Doc told me that you're getting a medal tonight from Colonel Brown. That has to be quite an honor."

It was obvious that Lieutenant DeGraff wanted to talk. "I guess so, Lieutenant." I said, "But I didn't do anything heroic. I was standing next to her when she (the 'Black Widow') pulled out the grenade. Really, any one would have done the same."

"Not true!" a voice booming from behind us.

It was 'My Way' in dress greens and medals all day long. The young Lieutenant turned and looked at the handsome Captain. Her eyes were filled with complete delight as she admired the fit officer and rows of 'earned' combat ribbons, a Green Beret topping the uniform, but no name tag.

"Sir, may I introduce you to the Air Forces newest addition to NKP, Lieutenant Nancy DeGraff. Lieutenant DeGraff, Captain 'My Way', US Army Special Operations Group and Team Red Rock Commander."

"Well," she said, "That was a mouthful!" She extended her hand and he accepted it in a true gentleman's form. It was obvious that he was well rounded in education and etiquette.

"Don't let him kid you, Lieutenant," 'My Way' was going to finish what he started. "Bull Dog' saved a lot of lives today and I would be willing to bet that few on this base would have the automatic conditioning and response required to meet a foe as deadly as Kim-Yung. We have attributed the death of seventeen of our finest soldiers in Special Operations Group (SOG) to the 'Black Widow's' hand. And no telling how many Cong sapper attacks! This kid may be young, relatively inexperienced in combat, but he has nerves of steel and the coolest head I've ever seen in stress situations. If there's ever a problem or trouble, find 'Bull Dog' and you'll be in good hands, Lieutenant. Now, I need to talk to my trooper, please. It was very nice to meet you." and he stepped aside to allow her to leave. He closed the door and took the easy chair.

I wolf-whistled at 'My Way' as he sat down. "What's the occasion, 'My Way'?" I asked. "Gettin' married?"

"Blowhards!" he said, obviously bothered about something.

"Chief tell you?" I asked, referring to the story being passed around.

"Yeah, 'Chief', the S-1, the Colonel. How the hell do these stories get so screwed up?"

"I took a speech class once in junior college," I began. "The instructor pulled five students out and sent them to the hallway. She then called one student to the front and told him a very brief story. She asked that student to tell the story to one of the students in the hallway. Then have that student tell another and so on until the story was told six times. The last student to hear the story was tasked to tell it to the class. The story told to the class was changed so significantly, we hardly recognized it!"

"Yeah, the military term is 'misinformation'" he said. "Well, I'm going over there

to brief the truth! Undoubtedly the press will want to get to you. But we can't let it happen. You aren't here - understand?"

"You bet, Sir," I said, relieved.

"Good. I'm working up to those ham sandwiches. Wish me luck, 'Bull Dog'."

"See you, Sir"

"Yeah," as he walked out, still disturbed.

I laid my head back down and closed my eyes. When I woke up it was dark. 'Flame' was working on satchels, but I knew better than to ask! I looked at him and he said 19:30 (7:30pm) so I sat up and began putting on my uniform.

"Nope" 'Flame' said. "Doc said you're down for the night. They've set up a wheel chair for you to go to the shindig tonight." Then he pushed the call button. Our medic, 'Doc', came in with a lab tech.

"Gonna draw some blood and give you a little fresh stuff" he said. "'Sawbones' is concerned about those traces of venom on the knife. Take a deep breath and hold it to ten count."

I breathed in heavy - it hurt and I could only hold it to a three count. I released the air early and told him why. "Hmpff!" Doc said with concern in his voice. He stood back as the lab tech drew three viles of blood.

"Be back in twenty minutes," she said.

Doc pushed the button. Lieutenant DeGraff came in, "You'll need to wait outside," she said to 'Flame'. *Just like a boss*, I thought.

'Flame' obliged. 'Sawbones' came in and had me repeat the breathing exercise. Then he called for the wheel chair and sent me to X-ray. X-rays were all clear - just some muscle constriction around the lungs. He said, "Should be okay tomorrow, but just in case, roll over."

Stabbed again! I was so full of antibiotics and anti-venom my blood had to be immune to every bacteria on earth!

Lieutenant DeGraff returned with a unit of blood which was "typed" to me. "Here you go, 'Bull Dog'. This is the 'freshest' nourishment in Southeast Asia" she said as she installed an IV pole on the wheel chair and hung the plastic bag of blood on it. *Another needle!* I thought. She was quick and painless, hitting the vein the first time. "Okay, that's it." She smiled as she adjusted the flow of someone else's blood into my body! I wondered how safe it was - what if they had some kind of terrible disease? When we gave blood in New Orleans, they screened it for syphilis, but that was all. At least, that's what the blood bank worker told me. *Oh well, if the enemy doesn't get me - my own government will*, I thought as I resolved to the situation.

"Thanks, Lieutenant. You did good." I said, smiling at Nurse DeGraff.

"Anytime, 'Bull Dog'" she said, looking past me toward the door. "I think I hear the war calling me," she said, then smiled and left with a "Good luck!"

I turned to watch her leave and my heart sank. Standing in the door with her fists on her hips was Ali. *Oh shit!* I thought. *I'm really not ready for this.* "DeGraff!" I yelled, "I think I'd rather be at *your* war!"

Ali stepped in and closed the door, ignoring my remarks. As she closed it, I noticed several other signs on the door in addition to the "Dog House" sign "Stud

Stables", "Quarantine", "Rabid Dog", Tadpole Hole". I had no doubt who wrote that one! She stood there, taking in my new attachments and waiting for something. Silence ensued. My mind was working at mach ten. She continued to stare at me as if she knew I was attempting to wiggle out of what needed to be said. *Hell!* I thought, slamming on the air brakes in my head and abruptly flushing the excuses forming in my mind. *Here goes!* "Ali, I was wrong and I'm really sorry for scaring the bejesus out of you. But, most of all I'm sorry for jeopardizing our friendship."

Ali moved forward in complete silence, checking my 'bagged lunch', as I called the unit of blood. She followed the tubing to my arm and slightly adjusted the flow.

"The major is concerned about the amount of venom that may have been on that stinger, Chip. Apparently, the venom had crystallized on the blade and when he looked at it under the microscope in the lab they seemed to hold to the possibility that when we pulled out the blade, we may have left some crystals in the wound. That's why we're administering the anti-venom. And now we need to flush the wound. So come on, my sweet friend, I'll make sure it's done right." With that she turned the wheelchair and took me to the soak room. On the way, she leaned down, kissed me on my cheek and whispered, "Accepted."

The shindig was gathering steam when Ali rolled me into the reception room. The Major walked up and asked how I was doing. I responded fine and Ali told him that she left the contents of the flush with the lab tech and they would be out in a few minutes with the results. Apparently, the lab tech was to test the saline flush water that was pushed into my arm with a syringe and captured in a stainless steel pan, for trace amounts of the venom. This would indicate to the doctor if any further contamination existed or if any crystals were lodged in the wound.

"What's in the box?" Ali asked as 'My Way' made it to where we were sitting.

"We've arranged a little peace offering to thank the medical staff for all you've done for us *and* to apologize for the ruckus this afternoon."

"Well," Ali said, "Sharon and I are the only ones that know about that satchel under the bed so I wouldn't say anything if I were you. Just a word to the wise." she said.

'My Way' nodded with recognition and thanks. I got the feeling that 'My Way' does not apologize well.

"What did you think of 'Bull Dog's present?" he asked. And, without waiting for an answer, "He sure went through a lot to get that stuff flown in from Bangkok."

She looked at us like we were crazy.

"What in the world are you talking about?" she asked.

"You haven't been to your hootch yet this afternoon?" he asked "And you're actually talking to this dog?" he said, pointing at me, chuckling.

"He gave me a heart-felt apology with no excuses. That's all I ask for, is honesty in a friendship." she said, squeezing my arm and smiling at me.

Wow! I thought. *She really is a friend!* To this point in life, I really didn't have much experience in relationships. I had dated my high school sweetheart since the tenth grade, going steady and breaking up on a quarterly basis! So, handling or understanding the fair sex was definitely not one of my strong points.

"What's in my house, Chip?" she asked.

"It's a surprise," I said. "Go see."

With that she hopped up and ran out. I wheeled over to the box and took out the eight-track tape and placed it in my wheelchair. When I wheeled back to where 'My Way' was sitting and talking to another nurse, he turned and said, "Bad news, the *Old Man* is bringing the media to our shindig to meet you. He said that he had no choice. The good news is, I set the record straight with the events earlier today so they've got the straight poop! And you need to go put a nightgown on over those shorts."

Lieutenant DeGraff sitting with 'My Way' said, "I'll get him one - he'll need some help with that IV." So she left and 'My Way' continued.

"Now, they only know you as 'Bull Dog', an Air Force CCT. You don't have a name tag or a uniform, so no one other than your TDY knows who the hell you are and they went on a three-day pass to Bangkok today, compliments of Colonel Brown! So, you're a CCT attached to the 5th Special Operations Group out of Kontum, Vietnam, got it?"

"Where?" I asked.

"Kontum. K-O-N-T-U-M." he replied.

"Fifth Special Operations Group, Kontum," I replied.

"Correct. Now the rest is going to be classified and the correct way to handle that is, 'I'm sorry folks, I really can't answer that.' Got it?" he asked.

"Got it." I threw back.

"Now, they're pretty damn insistent. Some of 'em even went to view the body. The Colonel and I gave in far too much 'cause MACV (Military Assistance Command - Vietnam) told us to cooperate. But they (MACV) don't know about our mission here. Hell, when they put two and two together and realize that we're not supposed to be here, all hell may break loose. But you're okay as a TDY for the command post, they're aware of your presence. That way, if push comes to shove, MACV can divulge your name, okay?"

"Alright, sir," I said, not having a problem with *anything* at this point - the pills I had been given during the wound flush had kicked in.

"Ali returned and took the handles of my wheelchair and pushed me back toward my room. 'My Way's new nurse friend dropped a nightgown on my lap as she passed, returning to the Captain, still in dress greens. (I imagine the Colonel suggested he remain in them so that he could represent authority to the press.) Ali still said nothing. I figured she was going to help me with my IV so I could put the nightgown on. When she got me to my room, she sat in my lap and kissed me. Whoa! It shocked me. I was caught off guard, but I must say I executed a quick recovery, returning the kiss. When we broke for air, she spoke in a low voice, fingering my chest.

"For a Special Forces asshole, you sure are kind!"

"Yeah, but don't let my secret out," I returned.

"Dodger' drove me over and told me how you had 'Bagman' find him. All that for me! I thought it was great how he bartered with that BX manager" she continued, still working on my chest. "I love it! At least now we (speaking of the nurses) can enjoy a little of the comforts of home."

"And here," I said, handing her the eight-track tape.

She looked at me and gave me another kiss, just like the first one. *Go - Hey, Go - Hey, Go - Go - Go!* (That's our old high school football cheer.)

"Now" she said, "lets get you dressed," We slipped the bag through the arm of the gown and slipped it over my head. "There. You look pitiful. Maybe they won't hound you. The doctor said he'll only give 'em five minutes. Then we're back here to tuck you in."

The Major walked in, "Okay, Bull Dog, no need to worry - the wound is clean. I'll let you out in the morning. I'd do it tonight, but the vultures (speaking of the press) aren't leaving 'till tomorrow. It's sure a bad time for them to be here. The *Old Man* is very concerned about an attack on us tonight."

'My Way' had slipped in behind the doctor, "We were able to get two teams between us and the village. Their orders are to eliminate anyone found to be a possible threat. They'll post just outside the vil and wait. Hell, the Colonel wanted to bomb the vil tonight, but MACV wouldn't let him."

"Do we expect any casualties tonight, Captain?" Ali asked, knowing that she would be running the shop, so to speak.

"None that you'll be able to help" he said with his mechanical look. "Come on folks, the Colonels are here with their medals and guests."

The evening was controlled by 'My Way' and went without a hitch. When the press left, we broke out the ham sandwiches and pigged out!

Ali headed back to get ready for duty and the doctor wheeled me to my room. "How's it feeling?" nodding to my arm.

"Okay. Kinda throbs when my heart beats though."

The doctor gave me a shot and helped me into bed. "You'll rest well tonight. Get a good breakfast and drink a lot of fluids tomorrow. I'll put you back up for duty about noon tomorrow."

"Aye, aye, Sir" I kidded. I was asleep within fifteen minutes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

0500 hours I met Team Red Rock in the chow hall. The shit on a shingle (SOS) was hot and the coffee tasted good for a change. The mission was still on hold. It had been overcast and scud layers under the ceiling delivered light rain throughout the night. We only had thirty minutes until the chow hall opened up to the base personnel. 'My Way' had an update, and 'The Kid' was to brief us on intel changes and updates.

During 'My Way's' update, he explained that NVA activity in Cambodia was increasing. Lon Nol and his strengthened military, with the assistance of U.S. air crews, had dented the communist NVA forces operating in Cambodia. "Our Yards are in place and will assist in movement through the target area. 'Kid'," the Captain said, turning the briefing over to 'The Kid'.

'The Kid' began briefing the latest intelligence. A high point of the briefing included the possibility of additional military forces at the airfield if the mission is delayed. 'My Way' took over and asked for Team progress.

"Team One" 'Cajun' briefed that all armament necessary for their team was in place. "Recon photos indicated patrol boats docked on the Mekong. We'll lob a few rounds into the boat yard from the public works building prior to detonation of the primary target. We will continue to lob in the direction of the palace and government buildings, but they will fall short - just too far. The industrial area is our target. But we may over-shoot. Your call, 'My Way'. We have an 0200 TOT (Time on Target).

'My Way' responded "Empty your mortar rounds at will. Collateral damage and civilian casualties are not issues."

"Team Two" 'Pop' briefed. 'Cajun', 'Flame' and 'Bagman' have assembled all satchels, five and ten second with timers, napalm liners. Chief and I will arrive at target and await till 0200 TOT firing by Team One at their signal. We will breach the perimeter fence, mortar the ammo dump, then move on toward the tarmac, taking out the fuel storage tanks on the way. Team Three will rendezvous and sweep. Yards will meet us on the perimeter road for transport to laager area LZ (pointing to our rendezvous point at the railway station).

"Team Three" 'The Kid' briefed. "Still waiting for five pop-bangers from 'Cajun'," speaking of the slap packs. Cajun handed them to him. "Arms are in place! Civilian terminal recon photos indicate static guards. We will replace the guards and secure the terminal, donning their uniforms. Once Team Four rendezvous, we will proceed along the tarmac destroying fuel and aircraft. 0200 TOT we will be in uniform by TOT!"

"Team Four" 'My Way' briefed. "All weapons and commo gear in place. We will follow Team Three into terminal. Military targets only. Airfield is closed during 1700 hours through 0500 hours. After teaming up with Three, we will proceed. Go on tarmac to military area and ammo dump via ramp vehicles. Leave VC on ramp. All number two's will carry AK-47s, no ammo."

"Team Five" 'Snake' briefed. "Ammo in place. We'll concentrate on tarmac aircraft. TOT 0200 or signal from One. If no signal by 0205 hours, we will initiate

signal. We will rendezvous on perimeter road with Team Two and proceed to LZ to rendezvous with Teams One, Three and Four."

Team Red Rock was ready.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The steady drone of the engines were the only sounds in the cargo bay of the C-130. It was dark except for a red light which enabled our eyes to adjust to the black night. Night vision was a must if we hoped to survive the jump into complete blackness. My thoughts turned to the sound of the engines. I hummed a mimicking tone. It seemed to be in tune with my voice no matter where on the spectrum, I was. I hummed the first five notes to 'Row, Row, Row your Boat'. The engines seemed to compliment the notes. I began singing, low, to myself.

*"Row, Row, Row Your Boat,
Gently Down the Stream
Merrily, Merrily, Merrily, Merrily,
Life is But a Dream."*

I sang it again, thinking of a long time ago!

It was sunrise. The small wooden motor boat was pushing us across Lake Tsalapopka. The hum of the motor seemed to match my voice. I sat in the middle seat, Dad was driving in the rear, and Uncle Claude sat in the bow of the boat, scouting out the secret bass hole.

"Ahhhhh" I hummed. Yep, I thought, it matched my voice. The cool morning air was blowing in my face. I really liked coming to Moonrise Fish Camp. It had everything a kid could ever want. There were row boats, a dock for fishing, Uncle Claude brought his ski boat, the live-bait house with all the live shiners and the little store for candy and my favorite soda pop, Dr. Pepper. And sometimes, Dad would let me go with them bass fishing!

That's just where we were heading this brisk early morning. Dad woke me up for sweet rolls and milk. That was my favorite breakfast. I really liked the kind with white icing and cherry jelly in the middle. My next favorite was jelly rolls. But what was most memorable about those pre-dawn breakfasts was the smell of coffee. I would sure be glad when I was old enough to drink that stuff!

We would have to be quiet so as to not wake up my sister, Brenda, and little brother, Chris. They would want to come, but they just weren't old enough. I finished eating first and went out to the porch to get Dad's fishing gear. I grabbed the big tackle box - we didn't need my little one when we had Dads. It had everything in it! I especially liked the lures with all the hooks. I couldn't carry the fishing poles when we took Dad's tackle box. It took both my hands to carry the big box down to the boat. By the time I got there, Dad and Claude were on their way with the bait and the fishing poles. I looked at the rowboat next to our motor boat and wondered if a water moccasin was under it. Mom told us kids not to play with the boats until they checked them for 'Snake's. No harm in peeking, though. I got on my hands and knees and peeked under the overturned bow.

"All clear?" I heard Dad ask.

"Yep, no snakes" I announced proudly.

Dad rolled it over and I took the oars and put them on our boat. We pushed the boat into the water. Five pulls on the starter rope and we were off.

I continued to hum in the boat, thinking of different songs to try, but the one that seemed to work the best was Row, Row, Row Your Boat. I sang it under my breath till we reached the fishing hole.

We stopped short of the lily pads lining the shore. It was my job to row along the shore line, nice and slow while Dad and Claude 'worked the pads' as they put it. We'd start with lures. I put my oars in place and started rowing the boat. Slow and easy, not making noise. Noise would scare the bass away, so I had to be especially careful. It was hard work, but it was sure worth it for several reasons. First, I liked listening to Dad and Claude talk. They would discuss strategy, where the fish might be hiding, tell jokes and talk about work. I worked with Dad sometimes on the week ends, cleaning up or holding the chalk-line, so I understood some of what they said. I felt like one of the big guys when I was with them. Another reason the work was worth it was the fish fry we'd have if they caught enough bass. I wasn't particularly fond of the fish, but I loved Uncle Claudes hush puppies! And the other reason was my other job if they caught the bass: I got to fish for the pan fish, the brim and perch!

"Let's try up by Ferris Island, Gene" Claude said to Dad. They reeled in their lures as I set the oars in the boat and we were off. The motor humming as the boat sped across the lake.

*"Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream,
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream!"*

I stopped and heard 'The Kid' singing along with me. I must have been singing louder than I thought. I looked at 'The Kid' and joined back in.

The web seating along the sides of the Hercules aircraft cargo area was surprisingly comfortable. Team Red Rock sat on one side of the bay with the Sappers across from us. 'My Way' had given me an orientation of the AK-47. It was surprisingly less complicated than the M-16, but heavier. This made our ammo supply much heavier than usual. "But I'd rather have it than not" the Captain told me.

I stood up and checked the commo rack. I looked at the transponder. We would need it twice. The first time I would use it to bring in the C-130 for a low level drop of our additional ammo and weapons. I wouldn't need it again until we were ready to be extracted from the PZ (pick-up zone). I walked up to the flight deck with the transponder in hand. The engineer was seated in back of the pilots. I handed it to him without a word. He wrote down the frequency and dialed it into one of their radios. He looked around his console and moved some switches, then he gave me the thumbs up. I returned to my seat and sat, staring toward no where.

"Ten minutes!" the flight engineer announced. We all stood and safety checked one another. One slap on the shoulder indicated all safe. No words were spoken. I motioned for my number two to stand. I safety checked his harness. All safe.

"Five minutes!"

The Load Master was checking the munitions pallet when the five minute notice was given. I felt the aircraft begin its descent. The Load Master walked to the rear and pushed the release button for the rear cargo ramp. The rear deck of the C-130 began to move down, opening to the night. There was nothing out there. No sign of a war existed. The air was damp and thick. The haze and fog engulfed everything in sight. It was as if the whole world disappeared while we were flying. I squinted my eyes, trying to see through the haze for an indication of the earth below. I knew that, during free-fall, disorientation could happen quickly without a visual reference. I thought about the C-130 as a reference point and remembered it was dark green with no visible markings or lighting. It would disappear from sight seconds after we jump. The green light illuminated, indicating that we were over our exit point. 'Pop' was first out. 'My Way' would be last. I watched with my number two in front of me. Three steps and 'Pop' was out of sight. Pablo and a munitions pack as his number two was next. I tapped my number two three times on the shoulder and we exited. The wind spun us immediately in circles, we began to tumble onto our right side. Number two forgot to tuck his hands. His arms were flailing wildly, trying to right us. Three, I should pull. But I can't. We're out of control, tumbling toward earth! My right arm jabbing with pain as the pressure of the fall and relative wind push against us. Was my number two panicking? As I reached for my knife, number two looked at me. My hand was on the knife handle. His hands tucked. I took the knife from my shoulder sheath. *One more time*, I thought.

My arms spread like an eagles wings, trying to right us. Five. We snapped to position. Pull. The canopy snapped above us. We were flying, but to where? I decided to keep my knife in my hand. It was evident that number two was terrified. As long as he controlled himself and didn't go into hysterics, I wouldn't need to kill him. He understood that it was his responsibility to assist me in locating the ground.

Our LZ was a large, open river bottom area along the Mekong River, on the north side of Phenom Penh. Where was 'Pop' and Pablo, I wondered? Were they below me? I didn't see any canopy lights. I scanned the skies above. I could make out a single silhouette above. I wondered if he could see me. And I wondered who it was. I continued my scanning, looking for a horizon through the haze. Then, we looked down toward the earth, somewhere below. We were floating as if in a dream, in a void, with only the sounds of the canopy snapping on occasion and the rush of the wind in my ears. Not even the drone of the C-130's engines were within earshot any longer. We were alone - in an unfriendly country, with my enemy strapped to my chest, falling to earth. If I were asleep, I would consider this a nightmare. Unfortunately, I was living this nightmare!

Grey. Everything was dark grey. Something seemed to be moving below, like a cloud. Dark to light grey, moving slowly below. Land! The resolution of the land was changing. Then I remembered Mac's lessons as we flew night missions. "At night, resolution of the grays is key to differentiating between fields and trees. Ambient light will reflect off of the flat surface of the fields better than forested areas." And with that, he pointed out the subtle differences. "See," he said, "The trees seem to absorb any light from the moon or reflected from other sources, making forested areas darker." We

descended in the Bird Dog, and as we descended I noticed that we had greater visual acuity. The grays seemed to take form.

I kept sweeping the Cambodian countryside for the visual clues Mac had taught me about. But I could only see light and dark patches below. Then I noticed a glow to my right, something on the horizon. It seemed like a lighter spot in the dark grey haze. I looked at number two. He was busy scanning. His hand pointed to our left. I looked in that direction and saw a light, possibly a fire on the ground. I realized that the Mekong would be impossible to locate from the air. I turned the canopy away from the fire. I looked up to try and locate the silhouette above. I found him flying a spiral, attempting to lose altitude quicker. I could see that it was Pablo. He signaled me to follow him. We turned in behind him. I could only see the canopy light when he descended below, but I could maintain a visual on him as long as I stayed close enough - formation style. We followed Pablo, continuing to scan the surface below. The ground resolution was coming into focus now. I could see the area Pablo was shooting for, so I started working my pattern to land. The air was still, so it was simply a matter of preference which direction to land. I chose to follow Pablo, just to stay close. I figured, if anyone was waiting, two AK's are better than one. Pablo was down. As I turned final for landing, I noticed that Pablo was out of his chute and gathering it together. I flared. My number two tucked his legs and rolled, causing me to fall over him. He was climbing on top of me, swinging at me. When I fell, I dropped my knife on the dark, damp ground, unable to fight back because the canopy cord had wrapped around one arm during the fall. The canopy fell on us. I was only able to swing my right arm, but the pain was unbearable from the two-day old wound. I felt helpless. Nguyen was attempting to get my AK-47. I rolled on it only to feel his fist pounding the back of my head. Then he stopped.

"You okay, Highway?"

It was Pablo. I looked at my number two on the ground. His neck was wet with something dark. I knew then that I owed my life to Pablo.

I snapped out of my harness and we wrapped Nguyen in the canopy.

"The others," Pablo said. "The gooks must have planned this, the way your number two rolled on you."

So, we watched the sky for the others. 'Pop' was next, following our canopy lights. He was about twenty yards to our left, just turning final. I ran toward him, and Pablo located 'Haystack' to assist down. 'Pop's number two didn't see me coming. As soon as his feet touched ground, he rolled. I was there and on top of him immediately. 'Pop' got out of his chute and kicked his prisoner in the head, knocking him unconscious. I looked toward the skies. Another chute going over top of us. 'Pop' pointed to his number two, signaling for me to stay with him. He ran off to the descending canopy. The bodies hit the ground and rolled. *Those assholes* I thought. 'Pop' was right there.

'Cowboy' brought his number two to my location. 'Pop' said, "keep their harnesses on, Highway'. We'll tie them together." He sat his number two on the ground by kicking him behind his knees.

'Haystack' was dragging his number two across the ground.

"Dead?" I asked.

"Naw, the little shit tried to roll me out," he said, "but I wasn't about to fall for that. I saw your problem and decided to get him when he picked up his legs to roll. I pulled out my knife on final and when he picked up his legs I knocked him out with the handle!"

The rest of the team was working their way in. I grabbed my transponder and turned it on. 'My Way' took a final count. 'The Kid' and I lost our number twos. That left ten: eight conscious and two unconscious. We spread out at fifteen yard intervals into a circle and waited for the cargo drop. It seemed like an eternity! Then the drone of the engines off our three o'clock position. I had relocated the transponder about fifty yards from us. We saw the silhouette of the big, dark bird and heard a popping sound. The cargo chute was pulling the cargo off of the ramp. The skid hit the ground with a smash. 'Pop' and I stayed with the NVA soldiers dressed as sappers, just as we were while the other team members recovered the weapons and commo gear.

'Pop' started clipping the prisoners together with D-rings. He then tied their hands behind their backs. 'Haystack' brought the AKs and put one each over their necks and on their backs.

'Pop' signaled me to get my gear. I grabbed the commo pack and recovered the transponder. I turned on the radios to confirm that they all powered up. Then I turned all of the equipment off. I carried the commo gear, twenty grenades, and twenty magazines. We decided that the rocket launchers and mortars could be muled by the NVA sappers. After burying the chutes, 'My Way' took a visual inventory and started talking without talking. 'Flame' took point. I was number five and 'My Way' was six. It was 2315 hours. Two hours and forty-five minutes to target. We dropped the two NVA bodies in the Mekong and continued toward the capitol city of Cambodia.

Night movements were dangerous. The countryside was alive with predators. Not only the human kind, but the four legged kind that growled and the venomous vipers hunted at night. Taking the route south along the Mekong River insured us finding our crossing point. But we knew that we would also run the risk of jumping a tiger at his nightly watering hole.

Movement through this countryside was much faster than in Thailand or Vietnam.

The war had not escalated to the point of booby traps and mines in Cambodia. The Communists primary use of this country was simply to transport weapons from China to North Vietnam. It was, however, the intention of the Chinese and Ho Chi Mihn to gain control of the southeastern corner of this continent to include Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and the Vietnam.

Although we could negotiate the terrain free from fear of the dreaded punji's and land mines, we seemed to be held back by the prisoners. Hooked together, hands tied behind their back, they were stumbling with every other step. 'My Way' stopped us to confer with 'Pop'. I watched them break the sappers up in twos. They also tied their hands in front instead of behind them. This, they reasoned, would give the prisoners a little more balance. Off again.

This time 'Snake' took point. Pablo stayed with the prisoners. They were well aware that, at his hand, two of their comrades had lost their lives, brutally! We stopped

every forty-five minutes. We weren't scheduled to rendezvous with the Yard's truck at the river road until 0100 hours. That would give us one hour to get into place.

We took a quick five minute break while 'My Way' checked his map. I wasn't used to the feel of the thin material the NVA used in their uniforms. I suppose that it allowed for the unrestricted flow of air to keep your body cooler due to the dark material.

"I can't stress enough, men, that, if by chance you are captured in those uniforms, your fate will be entirely in the hands of your captors," the General had briefed. "Your country can not acknowledge and will not acknowledge your presence in Cambodia. This mission is an illegal act of aggression in both the world courts and by the order of the U.S. Congress." He continued with the name of a congressional order, something 'Church', he called it. "What's he mean 'can not and will not acknowledge our presence'?" I asked 'Pop' after the briefing. "It means if we're caught, a dog in a VC camp would have a better chance living than us!" "But the VC eat dogs!" I said. "Exactly!"

Damned that recruiter!

I was checking my commo pack when I noticed some activity up by 'Snake'. One of the prisoners was running passed him toward the river. 'Snake' took off after him. But it was too dark and the sapper quickly disappeared. 'Snake' returned empty handed. Nine sappers. 'My Way' signaled us on.

The night was so quiet. The only sound was the geckos, small tree lizards, chirping in the distance. They fell silent as we approached them. The river was to our left. I was just thinking that we'd been pretty fortunate not to run across any of the predators or even signs of them when the ferocious roar of a tiger filled the air. It sent shivers up my spine. We all stopped and took a position behind cover, weapons ready. The sound of growls was coming from our eleven o'clock position. 'Snake' and 'Haystack' disappeared toward the sounds. They returned a few minutes later with a bloody harness. 'My Way' studied it and I dug a hole. He put it in and I covered it up. Pretty gruesome is all 'Haystack' would say. 'Bagman' took point and we continued. 'My Way' checked his watch - 2345 hours. A road was paralleling us to our right. The river took a bend to the right and buildings came into view. 'The Kid' moved up on 'Bagman' and took the point position. We found cover and waited for 'The Kid' to return. The minutes seemed so long, we waited in silence. Mosquitoes swarmed my face. Slapping them did no good. Repellent wasn't effective. They were in my nose and ears. There was a steady buzz and tickling feeling as they sought dinner. And I had gotten some fresh stuff for them the day before.

'The Kid' was back. 'My Way' moved up to him. I followed. It was my job to keep the communication gear ready for 'My Way's' use. So I was to be his "naggin' ol' lady" as one instructor put it. Master Sergeant Cox told me to stay on 'My Way' like stink on shit! Well, I guessed that meant stay close, not only for his use of the commo gear, but, I figured, in a bind I wanted to be with him or 'Pop'! 'My Way' moved us out in teams. Three and Four went in the first truck the Yards had acquired. That was me - Team Four. Teams two and five loaded in the back of a bus. And Team One was loaded in a small panel truck. When we got in the truck I started unharnessing the *real* sappers.

It was evident that they didn't like us dressed in the NVA sapper uniforms. 'The Kid' told them to stay seated or 'Super Cop' would have to send them to their maker. Hate was in their eyes. But un-noticed, seated across from one of the sappers, a Yard was taunting one of them. The sapper suddenly flew across the bed of the truck toward the Yard. The point of a machete blade came out of the sappers back. The sapper shook uncontrollably and then slumped over. "Damned" 'My Way' said. "Eight!" 'The Kid' and 'Super Cop' unsheathed their knives and smiled at the sappers, daring them to do something.

"Keep him in the truck," 'My Way' said to the Yards, pointing to the dead sapper. "We'll dump him on the countryside." The truck sped over the bridge on the north end of the city. It smelled like a vegetable delivery truck. And they certainly didn't replace the shocks! The axle was probably welded to the frame! The streets were deserted. The few times I was able to catch a glance through the holes in the tarp, I didn't see any other vehicles. I glanced at my watch - 0145 hours.

The airfield was located at the north end of the city. The Yards were basing out of a home two blocks from the airport entrance. That was our immediate destination. But first a drive-by of the terminal so our CIA operative could assess the terminal entrance. A slow recon of the terminal revealed two guards standing by the entrance, smoking and talking. The distraction at 0200 should adequately occupy the guards attention while 'Cowboy' and 'My Way' drag the men to the truck.

In preparation for the raid, the Yards pulled up in this truck every morning for the last three mornings at 0150 and unloaded boxes of vegetables on the siding. The guards would always be offered a vegetable box of their choice to watch the cargo until another truck arrived. That truck would pick up the vegetables and transport them to market. So, the guards were trained to come to the truck. Today, however, when the guards come to the truck to get their bribe, they'll find their eggplant a little tough.

We all unloaded except for the Yards, 'The Kid', 'Cowboy' and 'My Way'. 'Super Cop' and I would work our way to the terminal with the sappers at 0157 hours. It was time we left our watches at the Yard's base as instructed, "No evidence of U.S. involvement."

The truck pulled up to the terminal. 'My Way', 'Cowboy' and 'The Kid' were waiting in the back of the truck, waiting for the guards to approach for their cache. The Yards exited the truck and walked up to the guards. The holes in the canvas of the truck allowed the three team members a clear recon - all was go. The Yards invited the two Cambodian Army guards to the rear of the truck. 'My Way' looked at his watch. 0200. He took it off, as did the others. The guards were an arms reach from the back of the truck. An explosion filled the air. The guards reeled on their feet, scanning the city. Two Green Berets exited the truck, knives drawn. The guards, pointing in a southerly direction at a fireball illuminating the central area of the city, never saw them coming. Their death was silent but swift. With their throats cut, they were unable to alert any other guard who may be in the area. As the guards slumped to the ground, their assassins caught their bodies and threw them in the rear of the van. They were then stripped of their clothing. 'Cowboy' and 'The Kid' put the army uniforms on over their sapper garb. They waited.

The panel van pulled up to the public works building. The compound was small, but would provide adequate cover for a temporary mortar position. The Yards gave the signal. The rear doors of the panel truck burst open. 'Cajun' and Pablo jumped out with the mortar tube and mortar rounds in hand. Each had four satchels slung over their shoulder. The wooden gate to the water works/power station was violated with several short bursts from the deadly AK-47 Pablo was carrying. As they advanced through the gate, a caretaker came out of the building, hands in the air, yelling. 'Cajun' signaled him out of the compound. The Cambodian public works employee gladly obliged, keeping his hands up and running out of the splintered gate. It took only seconds to set up the mortar. First toward the river. High and shallow would keep the rounds relatively close. Every three seconds a new round was dropped in the tube. Swoosh! 'Cajun' adjusted an inch right, Pablo dropped another round...Swoosh! They heard the first explosion. Swoosh! A second explosion. The rounds were fired before 'Cajun' grabbed the mortar and started for the van, leaving his satchels with Pablo. Pablo slapped the side of the first pack to activate the timer on the detonator. Using the strap, he slung the satchel to a corner of the compound in the middle of a group of transformers. Slap. He threw the second in the building. Those were set with fifteen second timers. Pablo left five satchels throughout the compound. That should make a good diversion, he thought as he joined the others in the van. The patrol boats were docked on the Mekong, about a kilometer west of what was the public works station. As the van sped toward the docks, new explosions rocked the city toward the north end of town. 'Cajun' and Pablo knew that Team Number Two, 'Pop' and 'Chief', was on target.

Due to the close proximity of their target to our initial point where the Yards picked them up, Teams Two and Five needed to lagger for twenty minutes.

The bus was parked inconspicuously with three other buses. This gave 'Haystack' and 'Flame' the opportunity to free the NVA sappers of their restraints. 'Bagman' handed the sapper closest to him a pair of wire-cutters, showing him how they worked. The sapper acknowledged with a nod of his head. Teams Two and Five were originally slotted six sappers, but the loss of four since leaving the C-130 required 'My Way' to reassign the NVA's. Now Team Two would have two sappers and Team Five would have no sappers. It was 'My Way's' contention that Team five would have their hands full with the heavy return fire in the military compound. The Team took off their watches, stepped out of the bus, and buried them. Team Two moved to the front of the bus, prepared to exit. The bus moved to the ammo dump perimeter fence, slowing to allow Team Two out. Then the bus continued to the main gate of the military compound. 'Flame' prepared the LAW. That was the only U.S. built weapons used in Operation Red rock.

The sapper quickly worked a hole in the first fence surrounding the ammo dump. 'Chief' took point, waving slowly through the dark, toward where aerial photos indicated the ammo dump was located. As they stepped quietly through this void area, the sappers decided it was their best opportunity to attempt an escape. They could see the lighted area ahead. They bolted to the right of 'Chief'. 'Pop' and 'Chief' knew they couldn't open fire. The escaping prisoners were about 120 yards to their two o'clock, when a flash, followed by an explosion, threw one of the NVA's body's in pieces through the air. 'Pop'

and 'Chief' froze. They were in a mine field. A search light was turned on about three hundred yards at their one o'clock position. The other NVA dropped to the ground, howling in pain. 'Pop' set up the mortar. Estimating their range, he adjusted the deadly weapon. Swoosh! Five seconds later...boom. The round had fallen to the left.

"Adjust right 010!" 'Chief' called. Swoosh! When the round hit, it appeared to have fallen in the ammo storage area, but there was only a single explosion. Within seconds, secondary explosions began shaking the earth. As the explosions illuminated the area, Red Rock Team Two could see the munitions stored on pallets just laying on the ground. 'Pop' continued to adjust right. Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Over twenty mortar rounds devastated the open and vulnerable ammo storage area. 'Pop' removed his knife and began moving forward, slowly, slicing the ground in front of him, checking for land mines. 'Chief' was trailing. Before they got to the second fence, he had successfully negotiated three additional mines. 'Chief' wondered how many they had passed before realizing the threat around them.

'Pop' looked toward the ammo dump. The explosions continued, hurling balls of debris and fire through the humid, musty air. The munitions pallets had been stored too close to one another. The blasts were causing a domino effect, destroying the whole compound. 'Pop' pulled the second fence high enough for 'Chief' to slide under. 'Chief' returned the favor. Armed with satchels of plastiques, grenades and AK-47's, Team Two and the crossbow, crouched in the shadows, reconning the area for possible targets.

The Second NVA sapper was silent now. 'Pop' knew by the sound of the explosion that the deadly mine would throw shrapnel in all directions and anyone standing within ten yards would be ripped with small pieces of razor-like metal. It would be an agonizing death. But death was inevitable! As they sat in the shadows, they heard machine gun fire at their ten o'clock position. They moved quickly toward the sound of war when the explosions lit up the military compound. They noticed large fuel tanks between their present position and the flight line where they would rendezvous with the others.

The bus rounded the corner to the main gate of the military compound on the north end of the airport. After dropping off Team Two, 'Haystack' and 'Snake' kicked out the windshield of the bus. 'Snake' took the wheel and dropped the Yards behind a group of buildings where they had stored a second truck. 'Haystack' set up the .50 calibre machine gun in the front of the bus, pointing out of where the windshield used to be. 'Flame' loaded the rocket launcher. As they approached the front gate, they heard an explosion to their right rear. *Team Two* they thought. 'Haystack' bore down on the guard shack with the mighty machine gun. Four guards exited the shack with weapons in hand. M-16s, 'Haystack' noticed as he opened fire, mowing down all four men in less than two seconds. 'Flame' pulled the trigger on the Chinese rocket launcher. Varoom! A bright flash in the dead of night temporarily blinded 'Snake'. Disciplined, he kept his course, and was soon through the flames where the guard shack used to be.

The military compound was a cramped area. All the buildings were so close that a satchel set between the buildings would devastate two buildings, especially with the napalm liner in the plastique satchel.

'Bagman' exited the rear of the bus with eight satchels. These were the five second units. On a run, he would sling a satchel between every other barracks building. The bus stopped at the head of the street, lined on both sides with buildings. 'Bagman' was behind the units to the right. 'Flame' aimed the next rocket and prepared to fire. Boom! To the right - the first satchel exploded. Varoom! A rocket was propelling toward the third building. 'Haystack' was to mow down any survivor of the explosions. Boom! Varoom! Between the explosions, screams filled the air. There was movement at the doors of the buildings not yet hit. Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. Hot casings from the 50 calibre were flying as bodies were thrown to the ground by the massive bullets being hurled at them. Many victims were still in their sleeping clothes. Varoom! 'Flame' was unforgivingly accurate with his weapon. Boom! Another satchel. The whole block was in flames as 'Snake' pulled forward. 'Flame' exchanged the rocket launcher for an AK and began firing out of the left side window at the figures appearing in the doors, trying to escape. Many bodies at the doors were in flames, running through the night to their death.

'Haystack' continued to the right front. The bus cleared the rows of buildings and slowed to pick up 'Bagman'. Four satchels exploded and five rockets spent, yet not one known bullet was fired at Team Five from this elite Cambodian unit. 'Snake' spun the bus toward the military tarmac.

The Soviet and Chinese built aircraft were in the air, patrolling twenty-five clicks east of Phenom Penh. There were two flights. Flight One consisted of four Soviet built migs, and Flight Two, holding one mile behind the lead flight, were small Chinese prop driven fighters. The pilots had maintained radio silence since departing their home field. The haze and low ceiling caused concern among the two flight leaders. It would be impossible to detect any American aircraft in these conditions. Intelligence reports indicated that US aircraft were being used to aid the Cambodian efforts of Lon Nol to rid his country of the Communist threat.

Humph, the Flight Commander thought. He sure as hell didn't want to go against one of those new F-111's that the US was bringing into the A.O. (area of operation). They were neither ready nor armed for an air to air conflict. Intelligence reports further indicated that Phenom Penh was ripe for an attack. This could increase AAA (anti-aircraft artillery). *Come on*, he thought. *We're sitting ducks up here*. He looked at his watch - 0155. *Maybe we'd best make our run on Phenom Penh*, he thought. *Hell yes, it's time*. With wing and light signals to his flight, the MIG turned toward Phenom Penh. Flight Two followed at a notably lower altitude.

The sound of the AK-47 bullets smashing steel and glass at the entrance to the terminal alerted the small contingency of the elite palace guards stationed outside the air terminal. As they exited the shack and started toward the terminal, explosions began erupting from the ammo dump to their north, just across the airfield. Then additional explosions at their military compound. "An attack!" The young officer in charge spat out orders, sending half of the platoon toward the tarmac while he led the other into the terminal. As they approached the terminal, there was more firing. Suddenly, the door burst open in front of them and two Cambodian Army (CA's) soldiers came out at a run.

The young officer shouted asking what was going on in the terminal. But the soldiers didn't answer. The young officer wasn't accustomed to such insolence, but then again, these were only lowly Cambodian regulars. They were nowhere near as disciplined as his elite Palace Guard soldiers. The two soldiers finally stopped. *It's about time*, the young officer thought. But that would be his last thought as 'The Kid' and 'Cowboy' opened fire on the elite guard platoon. The Cambodian elite guards never returned a shot at Team Three.

Team Four sped passed Team Two, toward the tarmac. 'My Way' signaled for the NVA sappers we had brought with us to take point and continued at a full run. The sappers rounded the guard shack as the other half of the elite Cambodian platoon was returning to help their platoon leader. The sappers were about fifteen yards in front of me and 'My Way' when they ran into the Cambodian guards. Instinctively, the sappers raised their weapons to eliminate those Cambodian enemies. The guards also raised their M-16s at the sight of NVA sappers. But the guards had ammunition and the sappers only had empty magazines in their AK 47s. As the guards mowed down the two sappers, 'The Kid' and 'Cowboy' caught up to us while the guards were concentrating on the threat a few feet in front of them. 'Cowboy' and 'My Way' tossed two grenades falling at the feet of the elite, but now dead guards. We continued to the tarmac where lines of aircraft awaited our deadly cargo.

The Flight Commander was first to notice the fire balls in what would be the north side of Phnom Penh. Huge strings of 'Flame' shot into the air. The overcast skies kept the flight of MIGs at 4,000 feet; and the small, slower fighters at 2,000 feet. The aircraft had only enough munitions for the strafing runs. The first would be from the east. Bank right. The second run from the north bank left and exit. Taz lead his devils to the attack altitude of 500 feet. This would avoid most of the AAA still in place after Team Red Rock took out the initial position.

"But I can do it, I tell you!" Pablo exclaimed from the back of the van.

"No way wild man. There's no way you can hold that mortar tube and fire it at those patrol boats...forget it. You'll kill us both!" The master firearm maker supplied to Red Rock by the CIA answered, as he was scoping out the boat yard and docking facility. The north end of the city looked and sounded as if that end of the world no longer existed. It was then that he saw the crazy assassin drop the round in the tube. 'Cajun' dove for mother earth as the sound of the mortar round leaving the tube reached him, Swoosh! He expected the round to fall at Pablo's feet and blow all of them to bits, but to his surprise the round struck its target, a patrol boat docked at the boatworks.

"Here," Pablo threw a mortar round to 'Cajun'. "It's easier if you load!"

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

"Watch this," he aimed into the city, elevated just slightly over the roof tops. Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The deadly duo laid twenty rounds to various parts of the city before mounting their van with the astonished Yards and heading for their rendezvous point with the truck.

The huge petroleum tanks posed quite a problem as 'Chief' and 'Pop' reconnoitered

the area. The satchels they were carrying only had a five second timer. This didn't give the Team enough time to clear the blast area. As 'Chief' was considering his options, 'Pop' tapped him on his shoulder "Whattya think?" 'Pop' asked.

"I think we need to get south of these damn tanks so I can blow the hell out of 'em," 'Chief' replied, showing 'Pop' the explosive arrows and crossbow. "I can hit at 150 yards, easy," 'Chief' said as they began moving toward the terminal area. Explosions continued to their rear, coming from the ammo dump. Fires roared across the runway at the military compound, and now there was gun fire coming from the terminal area. Across town, balls of fire swirled skyward. 'Chief' pointed the crossbow, slightly elevated, toward the fuel tanks. 'Pop' could barely hear the bow string snap as the arrow flew skyward. There were two explosions almost simultaneously. Boom! Boom! as the first tank exploded. The shock wave knocked both men back. Then a wave of searing heat followed. A second arrow flew. A second explosion was muffled compared to the first, but the shock wave was equally as powerful.

The MIGs sped across the tree tops toward the billowing 'Flame's. A second fireball shot into the skies. *It looked almost like a small atomic blast*, Taz thought as the flight approached the airfield. To the right was the ammo and fuel dump, already in flames. Target acquisition was easy. The flight of four moved into an echelon right formation. Taz switched the weapons arm switches to the armed position. The explosions and fire provided light for the AO which helped in target recognition. The flight of four would start releasing at the fuel storage area and continue to the ammunition storage area, both already in flames. Three seconds after bombs away, flight lead initiated the risky right turn in the echelon right formation. The MIGs should make their second run along the tarmac and then depart the AO before the smaller Chinese fighters make their first run.

The sound of the fighters streaking across the airfield caught our attention. We had just made it to the tarmac where the military aircraft were parked. We realized that in less than a minute the fighters would be dropping CBU's (cluster bomb units) or napalm on our location. The confrontation with the ground Cambodian palace guard unit put us behind schedule. Fires of the burning aircraft were to be the course markers for the fighters second run. But we had not yet set any satchels. 'My Way' and 'The Kid' slapped the detonators of two satchels and tossed them under two F-4s. We all turned and ran toward the rear of the Quonset-style hangars in hopes of getting out of the MIGs track. The explosions on the north end of the airfield alerted us that within seconds the MIGs would be inbound to our location. We took cover in a drainage ditch and laid as flat as possible until both flights finished their run. 'My Way' would then assess the damage.

"Cluster bombs should be used, Sir," was Taz's answer to the General during the briefing. The General's concern centered around the condition of the airfield, primarily the tarmac, after bombing runs. "A cratered runway or tarmac would be counter to our efforts. The Communists infiltration into Cambodia was already far reaching. For that reason, when Lon Nol decides to accept the support which the U.S. will offer him in

replacing the aircraft destroyed during the Communist raid on Phnom Penh, resupply must be accomplished immediately, in anticipation of our success in convincing Premier Nol of his dependence on the U.S. We have assembled a small air force in Saigon standing by to relocate to Phnom Penh. We have also in place, tankers in the Gulf of Thailand, prepared to enter the Port of Sihanoukville. This serves two purposes. Primarily the tankers are escorted by a naval armada, prepared to secure the port. As you know, this port had been the point of debarkation for the military supplies utilized by the communists in South Vietnam. Second, we are prepared to convoy refuelers off one of the transports to utilize in lieu of the large petroleum tanks we intend to destroy. Tactical bladders will be set up in place of the tanks. With this in mind, Taz, what load do you propose?"

"CBU's," Taz continued, "will afford maximum damage with minimum effect on the tarmac. This is due to the fact that the CBU's are air bursts, exploding below 100 feet AGL (above ground level), each bomb sending hundreds of small explosives to earth, damaging the aircraft on the tarmac. The fighters are a composite material of magnesium, a flammable material utilized in the process to make a light metal for the jet fighters. When hit by the CBU's, the damage to the magnesium skins would include skin fires, which will eventually reach the fuel tanks and destroy the aircraft. The other option is napalm, but it is my opinion that the integrity of the tarmac would be compromised beyond repair with napalm."

I sure hoped that the General decided on CBU's! I thought as I lay in the drainage ditch. Due to our proximity to the tarmac, napalm would definitely take us out! As I looked at 'The Kid' lying next to me, I felt as if we were both praying for the multiple explosions of CBU's as opposed to the flaming roar of napalm. We laid silent and still, death and destruction surrounding us. The two explosions on the tarmac took their toll. The aircraft had been parked too tight to effectively prevent multiple hits from a single blast. The two satchels took out six F-4's. Boy, those F-4 jocks will be pissed off when they come to work in the morning!

The course for the MIG flight was now well marked! Both flights made their pass, dropping CBU's and disappearing into the night.

'Super Cop' took point and led us back toward the tarmac. We stood between the hangars, assessing the damage. The rows of aircraft were in total disarray. The flightline was ablaze. A line of American built T-28's were in flames with the tails still standing as a headstone, marking the graveyard of dead war machines. The bus with a machine gun blasting and grenades flying continued to destroy any aircraft not already destroyed by Taz and his Air American devils.

"Over there!" 'Bagman' yelled at 'Snake' as the bus sped down the flightline, pointing to a large jet liner sitting in its own parking area, separate from all the military aircraft. 'Snake' veered to the right heading for the Air Cambodian jet liner. 'Haystack' continued spraying the parked helicopters and aircraft with a hail of machine gun bullets while 'Flame' pitched grenades at the aircraft on the opposite side of the bus. The bus skidded to a halt. 'Bagman' grabbed two satchels and threw one to the rear and one under

the cockpit of the jetliner.

"Go! Go! Go!" yelled 'Bagman', running to the door of the already moving bus. 'Snake' certainly didn't need anyone to tell him to get the hell away from the deadly satchels. Never in his life had he seen such deadly charges as the napalm/C-4 cocktails Team Red Rock was feeding the unsuspecting army. 'Snake' was awe struck that thirteen men could infiltrate the capitol of a country, completely devastate a small but fierce military force, and leave without a hostile shot being fired.

The bus turned the corner of the flightline as a huge explosion lit the AO. The large airliner had been hit and exploded, throwing the tail section about fifty feet into the air. "Holy shit!" 'My Way' exclaimed at the site. "We weren't supposed to hit the civilian aircraft!"

The bus continued to our location, coming to a halt. Team Five joined us.

"Can that thing make it back across?" 'My Way' asked.

"Hell," 'Snake' replied, "I'm gonna use it for a New York City taxi 'Haystack' here will be my money collector!"

'Haystack' took a pose, 'John Wayne-ing' the heavy machine gun. "Your money or your life!" he said in practicing for his new job.

"Head count!"

"Nine team, four gooks!" 'Cowboy' announced.

"Let two of the gooks go." 'My Way' said to 'The Kid'.

'The Kid' snapped out orders and the NVA sappers took off across the tarmac.

"Mount up men. Let's go get 'Pop'."

Through the explosions and roar of fire, the sound of an AK-47 rung out two rows over. Pablo and 'Pop' appeared through the smoke, moving cautiously toward Team Red Rock.

"I got the suckers that attacked this place," 'Chief' said with a smile, entering the bus.

"Put the last two sappers by the rear door, 'Snake' let 'em out as we pass the military compound," 'My Way' ordered.

The bus sped through the dark toward the military compound. As the smell of napalm and burning flesh filled the air, we knew the final count would be heavy. The bus slowed and the NVA sappers jumped out at 'The Kid's' orders. Bullets began hitting the bus.

"Shit! 'Snake'! Go! Go! Go!" 'Pop' yelled.

The bus pulled ahead. 'Cowboy' and 'Chief' took aim at the sappers. The sappers began moving in spasms, then slumped to the ground, the Cambodian soldiers were still pumping them full of lead, thus diverting fire from us. The bus passed the remnants of the guard shack, and was left at the lagger point where the Yards were waiting. Team Red Rock loaded in the cargo section of the large truck. The Yards had one more step.

The railway station seemed deserted as the panel van stopped in front. Two NVA sappers slipped from the rear. One slithered to the south side of the building. The other to the north of the building. As the sappers performed a visual sweep of the railroad siding, they noticed three Cambodian guards sitting on the siding. Smoke from their

raunchy cigarettes filled the dead air. It was obvious that they were on break because two others stood guard, watching the city to the north and south burst into flames.

The sapper thrust the knife into the back of the guard with deadly accuracy, entering the heart from the rear, turning the knife to insure the heart was destroyed. There was no sound alerting the other soldiers of the enemy attack. Dropping the body of the dead soldier to the ground, the sapper released a short burst from the AK-47 into the sitting soldiers. Hearing the gunshots on the siding, the railway personnel ran to the loading door at the rear to see what was happening. The second sapper entered the station unnoticed, throwing a satchel at the feet of the civilian workers and ducking back out the door. The explosion then splintered wood and pieces of bloody, flaming flesh onto the wood sidings. The sappers quickly secured the station, insuring no survivors could identify the Americans dressed in the NVA uniforms. Team One had completed their mission.

The truck stopped behind the panel van. The Yard exited the van, motioning us into the station. Villagers began gathering in the street, keeping distance between themselves and the invading soldiers.

"Head count thirteen!" 'Cowboy' proclaimed.

"Munitions," 'My Way' said, and the weapons were placed on the floor of the railway station for a quick visual inventory: two rocket launchers; eight rockets; two mortar tubes; four mortar rounds; twelve satchels; one fifty calibre; 500 (two cases) machine gun rounds; eighty grenades; each man still had nineteen AK magazines.

'My Way' reassigned the weapons and munitions, 'Flame'- rocket launcher, 'Cowboy' - rockets, 'Kid' and 'Bagman' - satchels, 'Haystack' - 50 and 'Chief', keep your arrows. 'Super Cop', 50 ammo, load up! 'Pop', blow the rest."

We all took our six grenades and assigned weapons. 'Pop' kept a satchel and two grenades. Piled the mortars on the tracks, slapped the satchel and pulled the ping on the grenades and hauled ass! The large cargo truck sped away from the station through the streets of the torn city. The commo pack was sitting in the corner of the cargo bed. *Damn!* I thought, *We did it! And we're all here! Shit hot!* I took my position next to my commo rack. *In less than an hour we would be at the PZ (pick up zone) and out of here,* I thought with an anxious heart. It was then that 'My Way' spoiled my thoughts.

"It's not over yet, men. Many things could happen and I need you with me so get the hell outta dreamland and get back here with the Team! PZ security. Team One - east 100 meters. Team Two - tree line to west. Team Three - north 100 meters. Team Four - south 100 meters. Team Five - point zero. 'Highway', you choose point zero."

Point zero was the proposed position for the chopper. When he was on final, I would mark his LZ with a magnesium grenade. It burns white hot and is unmistakable as a night marker. Once we were in position, the others would disburse to their locations. But before entering point zero, a ground recon of the PZ must be performed.

As the Yards drove us out of the city, 'Pop' pulled back the tarp on the rear of the truck. We looked upon a city ablaze. Pockets of flames and an eerie orange glow scattered across the city.

Suddenly, we heard the sound of brakes grinding the truck to a halt. We sat

quietly in the dark. The PZ laid two clicks to the east of us. We heard the sound of doors opening. The driver got out first. His door closed, just a split second before the passenger door closed.

The truck tarp on the sides of the vehicle was fairly new so we didn't have "peep holes" to assess our location. The night was eerily quiet. We didn't even hear the sounds of insects, and that was strange because the drop off point was along rice paddies northeast of Phenom Penh. There should have been frogs and geckoes chirping everywhere. 'My Way' spoke to 'Pop' without speaking again. He signaled 'Haystack' to begin speaking loudly. But, before 'Haystack' understood 'My Way's' instructions, the metallic sound of a round entering a chamber came from outside the truck. 'My Way' and 'Pop', already alerted to the situation, signaled Team Red Rock to the cargo floor. We quickly moved to the floor as 'Haystack' and 'Cowboy' started talking and laughing. 'Pop' was near the rear of the vehicle with the rear tarp pulled open. No sound from outside. 'Pop' threw two grenades toward the front of the truck.

The Yards saw the deadly spheres in flight and jumped to the ground, dropping their weapons and covering their heads. 'Pop' rolled out of the truck to the ground with 'My Way' right behind him, AK's in the ready. I lay flat on my stomach, confused.

What's going on? The grenades didn't explode. Duds I guess. Thank goodness!

Seconds later, 'Pop' and 'My Way' appeared at the rear of the truck with their prisoners.

"Kid!" 'My Way' called. 'The Kid' was first out and the rest of us followed. 'Pop' posted us around the AO on both sides of the road in the ditches. 'The Kid' was interrogating the Yards. They were both on their knees with their hands tied behind them. Known for their fierce fighting, the Yards' only weakness is the thought of torture if captured. For this reason, in the middle of battle, if it is decided by the Yards that a good chance of being overrun existed, they would disappear in the jungles. Now, they were under the threat of torture. 'The Kid' continued, but the Yards refused to speak. Pablo walked out of the ditch and toward the Yards.

"Kid!" Pablo yelled. "Let me loosen their tongues for you." with that, he pulled his knife from his sheath. Without hesitation, he thrust the blade through the throat of the first Yard he got to. He held the Yard up by his hair while the other watched in shock as Pablo twisted the blade in the throat of his dying comrade. I would later find out that this technique kept the victim from making any sound. The second Yard began talking to 'The Kid', glancing at Pablo to insure he kept his distance. Pablo continued to hold the now dead Yard by his hair, eyes bulging and head turned toward him.

'The Kid' turned to 'My Way', face flushed. "It's bad, 'My Way'," he began. "Their orders were to kill us and bury us in a grave that they dug in the field," pointing to the field to our left.

"Who?" 'My Way' asked.

"The 'Chief' of their tribe gave the orders." 'The Kid' answered. "I can only speculate from there."

"No one must know," 'My Way' echoed the General's orders. "Where are we?"

"About twelve miles north of the city. Our target would be about twenty clicks

east/southeast, about four o'clock" he said, pointing. "as the crow flies."

Ah Shit! I thought as my heart sank. A total illness fell over me. My body started shaking and nausea set in.

"Well, there's no hurry to get to a PZ where there is no chopper. We'll rest. That grave should provide some cover while we rest for a couple of hours." *We'll need our wits to get outta this one. Trouble is, once we're out - then what? The last thing anyone wants to see is us walk outta the bush with this tale!*

"Same assignments. Alternate one hour shut-eye in your teams: 'Highway', to the grave with your gear. 'Pop', you and 'Super Cop' hide this thing up in those trees," motioning to the truck. "Kid, bring the Yard with us, and," pointing to the dead Yard, "throw him in the cargo bed, Pablo!"

I really needed a drink of water. I went to the truck and got my commo gear and the canteen belts with six canteens of water, As I was exiting the truck, the Yard said something to 'The Kid', pointing to the canteens.

"Poisoned," 'The Kid' said.

"Anyone drink from those?" 'My Way' asked.

"They were under my commo gear, 'My Way'. I don't think anyone knew about them!"

'My Way' motioned us to the new command center. "'Flame', 'Cajun', quick recon before posting." With that order we were off to our 'grave'.

'The Kid' put the Yard in the point position just in case of booby traps. We arrived at the mass grave site unruffled. The hole was fifteen by fifteen and the dirt was piled on the west and north ends to keep the pile of loose dirt less visual from the road. The Yard was first in the hole, stamping all around the ground insuring that there were no booby traps as 'The Kid' kept firing orders at him. 'My Way' signaled all clear and we entered the grave site.

I set up the commo gear and turned on the radios. At this range, it would be difficult to contact any other station on UHF or VHF. The original plan would have had at least one CH-53 Jolly Green airborne in the AO awaiting our call, but as it was, there was probably no aircraft awaiting our call. But I had to try.

"Papa Tango Two One, this is Red Rock, over." Shhhhhhhhhhh.
Nothing but static. "Papa Tango Two One, this is Red Rock, over." Nothing.

"HF is our only option and the sooner the better," I advised 'My Way'. "The sunrise will activate the ionosphere and degrade transmission and reception. That's in less than two hours, 'My Way'."

"Go for it." he said.

At that, I grabbed the small whip antennas out of the side pocket of the pack and put them together. I handed them to 'The Kid' and told him to plant them in the dirt about twenty feet apart. I then grabbed the long wire and hooked up the coax. I jumped up on the mound by 'The Kid' and secured them to the top of the whips. Back in our new command post, the work began. 'Pop' had since returned and the recon team gave an all clear. 'My Way' and 'Pop' were plotting out strategy, while I looked for a friendly ear. The MARS station at NKP was closed at night, so I knew that was out. I thoup'

of the Beach Girl equipment back in TF "Alpha", but it wouldn't be ready for two weeks. I rolled a common airways station in the frequency window and hopped out of the hole to shorten the antenna to correspond with the frequency range. I keyed the mikes and a tuning tone came over the speaker. All the heads in the center turned toward the speaker.

"MAC aircraft calling Clark airways, say call sign over," the speakers crackled. Smiles came across all of our faces as hope sparked from the sound in the speakers.

"Who the hell is that 'Highway'?" 'Pop' asked.

"Philippines" I answered. What the hell can the Philippines do for us?"

"Radio relay to an Airborne Command Post. I figure if we get an ABC on our side, we can get something in here to get us! What's the plan, sir?" I asked.

"We've got a problem, 'My Way' replied. We don't have map coordinates for this PZ. Hell, we don't even have a map! Too risky to take one, the Colonel said."

We all looked at each other, knowing that he was involved in the set up!

"Well, lets see what we can do." I keyed the mike.

"Clark airways. This is Red Rock, over."

We waited for the radio operator on the other end to answer. Nothing.

"Clark airways, Clark airways, this is Red Rock. Red Rock. Emergency, over."

We waited. The speaker came alive.

"Red Rock, this is MAC 60178, over."

"60178 This is Red Rock. Can you relay a message to Clark for us? over."

"Roger, Red Rock. Shoot!"

"Okay, fellahs. Hold on to your seats. We're a tactical ground unit located approximately 250 miles northwest of Saigon and need a ride outta here real bad!"

"Hold on Red Rock. Let me grab my map and talk to Clark."

"Clark airways. This is MAC 60178 request."

"60178 Clark. Go ahead."

They were both loud and clear and as they conversed I explained to the team that, although the aircraft could hear us, we didn't have a powerful enough signal or the skips (radio signals bouncing off the ionosphere to earth and back up and back down, etc.) weren't bouncing properly to talk to Clark ourselves.

"Red Rock, this is 60178, over."

"60178 Red Rock, go."

"Roger boys. Clark advises they have negative contact with you and to relay any traffic through us, over."

"Roger that 178" (I abbreviated his call sign for communications brevity, learning that in tech school.) *I'd sure as hell like to find that recruiter!*

"I say again, we're a tactical ground unit located about 250 miles northwest of Saigon and need a ride real bad. If possible, we need to talk to or relay that message to an Airborne Command Post, over."

"Red Rock, this is 178. Are you sure of that position being northwest, over."

"You'll never know how sure I am, over."

"But that's - hang on" silence in the air..."that's where we aren't!"

"Roger that 178. We are where we aren't, if you know what I mean, over!"

Then a new voice came on the air, "Red Rock, this is Moonbeam, over."

"Moonbeam, this is Red Rock, over."

"Red Rock, this is Moonbeam. Authenticate Charlie Lima Over."

"Shit" I said out loud but not over the mike. We don't even have a map, much less authentication tables. "Gather round guys," I said to the Team, "it's trivia time. Moonbeam, this is Red Rock. You might find this hard to believe, but we don't have authentication tables due to our present location, if you know what I mean, but we are real and we are in a hell of a bind, over."

Silence, again. Moonbeam was the Airborne Command Post, a converted C-135, complete with battle staff. They were capable of mounting any kind of operation to include a full nuclear attack. I hoped they had a resolution to our problem.

"Red Rock, say call sign of your control, over."

I had been in the TOC that afternoon and saw the call sign for TF "Alpha" operations center. *Damn, what was it? Shit! This is a hellofa time to have a brain fart,* I thought. I looked around for help.

"TF "Alpha's" call sign for today, anyone remember it?"

"Something to do with rain," "The Kid" said.

Then I remembered "Thunderhead, over."

"Stand by."

"We might have to answer some trivia questions about the U.S., so hang on," I said, nervous as hell.

"It may not be a good idea to call TF "Alpha", 'Pop' said.

"I don't know how cooperative they'll be at trying to get us out," 'My Way' said. "But it's possible, even probable that they don't know. It may only be the Colonel. I think we should chance it!" We waited.

The TOC was always quiet at three a.m. There were normally two duty personnel, an officer and an NCO. Captain Rogers and Tech Sergeant Taylor were playing chess and drinking coffee, trying to keep awake. Taylor and the Captain. They had been a duty crew for the past three months and not once had Sergeant Taylor won a game. "In three moves...checkmate," Tech Sergeant Taylor declared. The Captain was pondering his move when the radio operator called Taylor to the communications window. The telecommunications center was co-located with the Command Center but, for security purposes, a wall separated the two.

"I need to patch this through to your console, Sergeant Taylor," the Airman First Class advised as he flipped a switch.

"Moonbeam, this is Thunderhead," the radio operator called.

The speaker in the Command Post crackled to life. "Thunderhead, this is Moonbeam with priority traffic. Stand by."

"Thunderhead, this is Moonbeam, authenticate Sierra Echo, over."

"Bravo November," the Captain called to the radio operator as he looked in his authentication tables.

"Moonbeam, this is Thunderhead. I authenticate Bravo. Authenticate Lima Whiskey, over."

"I authenticate Juliette, over," Moonbeam replied.

"Moonbeam this is Thunderhead, standing by for priority traffic."

"Thunderhead, this is Moonbeam, message follows"

"Bravo Lima Papa November"

"Charlie Hotel Echo Lima"

"Bravo November Papa Sierra"

"Charlie Delta Foxtrot Tango"

The coded message continued for what seemed a long time. The ABC operator then ended with, "Read back, over."

Tech Sergeant Taylor began reading the message back as the Captain and Sergeant unlocked their safes to obtain the set of decoding documents. It took only minutes to decode the message. After reading the message, the Tech Sergeant woke the operations center runner to wake Colonel Brown. The runner reminded him that the Colonel was in Bangkok. He checked the Colonel's schedule, "Won't be back till 1100 hours this morning, sir! Duty Officer to maintain command."

Well, the Captain thought as he read the message again.

"Tactical ground force alienated from parent unit. Call sign

Red Rock. Request air transport. Location questionable.

Red Rock unable to authenticate."

The Captain grabbed the mike from the console. "Moonbeam, this is Thunderhead. Roger, Stand by for traffic in fifteen, over."

"Roger Thunderhead. This is Moonbeam, standing by."

"Whatta we do? Those are our boys out there. Where the hell are they, anyhow? If we tell Moonbeam that we'll task a chopper to get 'em, he'll go off the air and we'll never find 'em. But, if we tell them that we don't know where our own unit is, well, that General on Moonbeam is gonna come down hard on our head!" the Captain reasoned.

"Hell, sir," the Sergeant began, "Don't get rattled. We'll just ask for their new PZ coordinates and leave it at that. The Master Sergeant said that they were alienated! Let's work with that!"

The Team prepared their message for Moonbeam to transmit to Team Red Rock. It read as follows:

"Obtain new PZ coordinates, status and locator frequency.

Advise Red Rock schedule pick up at 1600 hours. "That

should give us plenty of time to task a Jolly Green to pick

'em up."

They encoded the message and sent it back to Moonbeam.

The radio continued to crackle with flight information on several aircraft crossing the Pacific. We all listened intently for Moonbeam. Then it came.

"Red Rock, this is Moonbeam, over"

"Yes!" I yelled. "Moonbeam, this is Red Rock. Go ahead, over."

"Red Rock, this is Moonbeam, stand by for authentication."

"Shit!" I said. "What's wrong with these dumb asses! We told them that we can't

authenticate!"

"Settle down hot shot," Pop' said. "Let's give 'em a chance. They may have one smart officer on that aircraft," he said, smiling at 'My Way'.

"Red Rock, this is Moonbeam. Say middle name of first American President in military terms, over."

"What?" I said in a low voice.

"What was George Washington's middle name?" Pop' asked out loud in the comm center. "Anybody know?"

"George 'We're Screwed' Washington," Pablo offered.

"The Kid' popped in, "I don't think he had a middle name and, even if he did, I think that they (he said pointing to the sky) don't think he has one. A middle name or lack of in military terms is either MI for 'middle initial' or NML, 'no middle initial'. I'd bet my life on NML."

"You are," Pop' said solemnly.

"Is that it? NMI?" I asked.

"Well, if it ain't, then 'we're screwed' is right," Pablo popped back in.

"Moonbeam, this is Red Rock. I authenticate November Mike India, over."

The airways went silent. We all sat in the grave site, waiting.

"Red Rock, this is Moonbeam. Thunderhead requests current coordinates, unit status and locator frequency, over."

'My Way' took the mike, "Moonbeam, this is Red Rock. Unit strength maintained from mission start, locator frequency on file on Command Locator Board, and we don't have current coordinates but if S&R (search and rescue) will utilize old coordinate, our combat controller will bring 'em in to present location, over."

"Roger, stand by." Moonbeam replied.

"Red Rock, this is Moonbeam. Maintain present position until sixteen hundred hours plus one for pick up."

"Yesssss!" went the cheer from around our grave.

"Moonbeam, Red Rock, Roger, will maintain 1600 plus one. Thanks a lot, out."

"Get that antenna down and secure this PZ. We got a chopper on the way". 'My Way' spat out orders to the Team members not on perimeter guard. "Four hour shifts - get some shut-eye until your shift."

With that, I jumped up and pulled down the antennas secured them and pulled out the transponder. I checked my VHF and UHF for the tactical control frequencies to insure I was ready. Then I shut down the radios to conserve the batteries. The HF radio carries a heavy drain on available power. We only had 55% left on battery number one and two batteries left.

"You sleep first 'Highway'. I'll take the next shift. At 1530 hours we'll go to receive only and monitor traffic," 'My Way' commanded. "Pop', I only want four heads out there. It's too flat to provide security. Get everyone else in here to rest."

I laid down and waited. I was waiting for my adrenaline to neutralize. I knew I was tired when we got here! But now my eyes were wide open in several ways. I laid, thinking of the Yards attempt to kill us. I thought about the double-cross by Colonel

Brown and I wondered who was on duty at Thunderhead to authorize and arrange for the aircraft to pick us up. I was scared. The freshly dug dirt had a musty, rotten smell to it. I thought of the VC girl I killed. I wondered if I could do something like that again. Was I really becoming a machine, working mechanically without thinking?

"What's the third step, 'My Way'?" I asked out of the blue.

"What were the first two?" he answered with a question.

"Revenge and mechanical response," I responded.

He looked at me. "Before you can take a life in close quarters, and I mean close, eye-to-eye with the enemy, you have to be angry. If you're not angry, seeking revenge for something, you can't live with the sight and smell of death. The smell and feel of the enemy's warm blood or body parts on your person will drive you insane. I think Shakespeare had a good handle on it in his tragedies. Any sane man would become insane. That's why revenge is necessary for you to maintain your sanity, such as it is in the Nam. Mechanical response is necessary to survive. If you had taken a split second to think about what to do with that VC woman, everyone in that building would be dead or crippled right now. Automatic response is what we tried to drill into you in all the training you went through. If you're given an order and want to take time to think it over, well, it may be over, *forever!* That's the problem with Air Force discipline. We've all been very concerned about working with Combat Controllers. Air Force enlisted types like to think of themselves as being smarter than the grunts. I see it all the time. An NCO gives his Airman a job to do and he always asks a question. Rarely does he just go do it! They want to impress you with their knowledge. There's no time here. If you stop to think about it, you die. It's that simple. Now, that doesn't really bother me, but in a team, if you die, you'll probably take others with you. So, mechanical response is necessary to survive. So, now whattya have: revenge which leads to sanity; mechanical response which breed survival. The third naturally follows those in combat and if I'm not wrong, you're going to find out what that is very soon."

"You're not gonna tell me, are you? What if you die tomorrow? I won't sleep until I know," I said in jest.

"Sleep on it, Bull Dog," he said.

"Highway," I returned.

"Yeah, yeah."

Sleep was not easy, but eventually I fell asleep, sitting in the corner of our grave site. It was a restless sleep in the damp dirt. Four hours went quickly. 'My Way' called me back from wherever I was.

"Highway! Highway!"

I started stirring and realized it was 'My Way's' turn.

"I'm okay," I said.

"Hit it," My Way said, as I stood and stretched, peering out of the hole for the first time, looking around our PZ.

"Doesn't look like river bottom to me," I said, half asleep. I gave a big but silent yawn, just in time for 'Flame' to jump in and scare the crap outta me.

"A little jumpy this morning, 'Highway'?"

"Humph!" I exclaimed. "Just getting around to my watch," as I saw 'My Way' claim the corner I had slept in. 'The Kid' swapped out his corner for the north perimeter. Watching, waiting, hoping! *Why do we have to wait until 1600 hours? We just gutted the capital of Cambodia and these command post assholes want us to sit here and wait! Wait for what?* I walked over and turned on the VHF to scan frequencies and see if I could hear anyone operating in the area.

"They're not looking for us," 'My Way' said as if he were reading my mind.

"Why do you think that?"

"They're busy cleaning up, licking their wounds and figuring out what the hell happened. I imagine the U.S. is already on top of it and offering military support, both in the air and on the ground," 'My Way' answered.

"Yes," I argued, "but I would think that we would be flying aircraft in as we speak. Those F-4s on the tarmac weren't Cambodian. They were U.S. Mac told me that earlier in the month, the U.S. was aiding Cambodia in clearing a mountain pass of Chicoms (Chinese Communists). That means that we'll be anxious as hell to get in and assess the damage to our aircraft and crews."

"The crews were housed in the hotel downtown where the journalists are kept so we only took out our own aircraft and half of those were down for maintenance, I understand. They had been down for weeks. We purposely didn't ship them the parts to repair the aircraft."

"What else do you know that we should?" I asked.

"A lot, but you don't have the need to know!"

"Ah," I said. "There's that 'need to know' line of shit I was told about in tech school and training. Now let's look at this from my point of view, 'My Way'. Here I am, sitting in a grave that was meant for me, waiting for a chopper that may not be, with a bunch of war criminals, in a place where we're not supposed be! We don't have a map 'cause we didn't *need to know* where we were. We don't have authentication tables 'cause we *don't need* to talk to anyone. We don't have our two Yards 'cause we *didn't need* to live. And now I don't have a *need to know* everything that has happened, is happening, or is yet to happen? I don't have a *need*. You're wrong. I have a *need* and that *need* to know bullshit you can save for the admin types back home!" I think 'My Way' got the message.

"If something happens with the chopper, Bull Dog, I *promise*, I'll talk to you about your yearning need!"

"Fair enough," I said, and with that I picked up the commo gear and began toward the other end of the Command Center (grave!). With headsets, I began cycling frequencies on the VHF radio. For about fifteen minutes I searched one frequency at a time. No traffic. That didn't surprise me. Most aircraft inbound would fly in under radio silence to avoid ground D.F. (direction finding). The NVA were very good using the old equipment supplied by the Chinese. They simply triangulated on radio signals from three separate locations and where the lines cross is the approximate location of the aircraft. They then knew which ground unit with anti-aircraft weapons to alert. Then they waited. And the unsuspecting aircraft would cross the waiting AO and all hell would break lose.

We lost aircraft throughout the war due to disregard of radio silence.

Any stations which had a broken silence or had unreadable signals, I noted for future reference. Then I went to Uniform (UHF) and cycled through the frequencies. Not much there either. I pulled out the transponder to insure that it was still in operating order. Everything checked out. We were ready. Now, we just wait, and hope.

The chopper was on final to the command pad. Dodger was ready to get out and stretch. It had been a long two days. The Colonel had called him in out of the blue yesterday and told him to get the chopper ready for a trip to Bangkok. *Damn!* he thought at the time, *I just got back from there!*

"What's up, Sir?" he asked.

"Gonna go listen to the game," the Colonel said. "I've been invited to the embassy. Seems they've got a comm-link set up."

He hadn't realized it, but Super Bowl time was here. "I'll be damned," he said. "I forgot all about it. Who you cheering for?" he asked.

"Who the hell do you think?" the Colonel said as he walked out of his office to the Command Post.

Dodger took that as a dismissal and went about getting ready. He knew that when the Colonel got it in him to go, you didn't dally. Especially this late in the day. He passed 'My Way' in the hall, "How's Bull Dog?" he asked.

"He's fine. Looks like we'll be outta pocket for a few days. If you want to see him, you'd best hurry," he advised Dodger, pointing to the TOC.

"Hey Killer!" he yelled across the TOC at seeing Bull Dog. Now, you have to understand, the Tactical Operations Center for TF "Alpha" was a top secret area. The Duty Officers were very serious about their sacred duty, especially since these CIA officers had taken control of the TOC for the past three hours! To say it was as quiet as a library would be an understatement. So, when Dodger offered his verbal salutations, everyone turned and looked at him. They were all very aware of the matter with the Black Widow two days before. Most had taken a sight seeing tour of the body before it was moved. They wondered how this disciplined killing machine would accept the insolent manner of the cocky Warrant Officer.

"Hey, Shit Head!" Bull Dog said without looking up from the message he was writing. The staff just stood, waiting, watching the exchange like a tennis match. Heads following the action.

"Where you headed? 'My Way' says ya'll are out of pocket for a few."

"That's none of your business, Warrant Officer!" one of the CIA weenies said, not expecting a challenge due to his status.

"Why not?" he asked the CIA officer, who looked at him in disbelief. As if to say *because I said so*, but sizing Dodger, he realized that this chopper pilot wasn't about to take that. "Because you don't have a need to know," was the reply.

"Yes I do," Dodger arched his back, raised his eyebrows and continued. "I have an *absolute* need to know."

"State your need!" the official said.

"I need to know 'cause if he ain't coming back, I want the key to the beer cooler. There's twenty cases of Coors in that baby, asshole!"

'Bull Dog' looked up at the CIA agent and smiled and said, "Some friend, eh?"

Bull Dog walked over to him and handed him an envelope. "The key's in here with my black book of phone numbers." Bull Dog told him, turning Dodger out of the Command Post and walking out with him.

"I'll bet they frown when they screw," Dodger said on his way out, loud enough for the agent to hear his remark.

When they were out of ear shot Bull Dog pointed to the envelope and told him that he had put the key inside, enjoy. "But," he said, "I also put the PZ coordinates, transponder frequency, and the VHF frequency which they would be monitoring, in the letter, *just in case*. Please don't lose it," Bull Dog said, "We may need you."

"You sound serious."

"Listen, we'll both be in a hell of a bind if the old man or those guys know that I gave this to you, so don't let them know. We should be back tomorrow evening. If not, send the Calvary!" I said, patting Dodger on the back.

"No sweat, Buddy. I'll do anything for that cold stash. By the way, speaking of the Colonel, we're off to Bangkok to listen to the game. We'll be back tomorrow so don't worry, I'll see to it."

"What game?" Bull Dog asked.

"Super Bowl I guess. The Colonel didn't really say. We're headed to the Embassy. They've got a comm-link. Now, that's good duty. They've got a hell of a bar and the company's great too! Hell, I was going to ask if you could go, you know, as a reward for the Black Widow and her little army."

"What army?" he asked.

"They didn't tell you? Oh, I guess not. Hell, Bull Dog. 'My Way' sent two teams out the night of the shooting. Apparently her old man wanted blood for his 'innocent' daughter's death. He came here and demanded the killer. The *Old Man* kicked him off the base and told him that none of his villagers were welcome here. He told me that he should have shot him (the VC's father) on the spot. Well, last night the team intercepted twenty VC coming out of the village. Their bodies are out in front of the main gate, standing in boxes, waiting to be picked up. Word is there's gonna be a sweep of the vil tonight. A clean-up if you know what I mean!"

"Damn Dodger! They were gonna kill me?!"

"Naw, they were just gonna kill!"

'My Way' pulled up in the jeep. Bull Dog hopped in the front and he took the back seat.

"How 'bout a ride to my limo?" he asked.

'My Way' sped over to the chopper and dropped him off.

Dodger had forgotten about the strange events and obvious change in Bull Dog's behavior the day before. The Colonel didn't say two words on the flight back. Usually, he would ask to take controls and log a little stick time, but he seemed awfully

preoccupied. When Dodger tried to strike up a conversation with the Colonel by asking if his team won the game, his response was simply, "the boys sure kicked ass". Then he just sat silent and had been since. Little did he know that it wasn't the Super Bowl that Colonel Brown was listening to. It was the communications monitoring station run by the CIA - listening to Cambodia.

Upon touching down on the helipad, the Colonel un-strapped his shoulder harness and headed for the TOC, the turbine and rotor blades still turning. *Strange*, Dodger thought as he went through his shut down procedure. Then, as he walked into the TOC to close out his flight to Bangkok, the Colonel was talking to the Duty Officer. He heard the Colonel ask for the crew from mid-shift on the double. *Someone screwed up, that's for sure.*

Tech Sergeant Taylor was the first to arrive, "Who the hell initiated this request for a jolly into Cambodia!?" the Colonel was fuming.

"Captain Rogers and I did this morning, Sir."

"On whose authority?" the Colonel blasted back.

"On yours, sir." The Tech Sergeant went around the control panel and picked up the letter authorizing the OIC (Officer On Duty) to make any command decisions in the Colonel's absence.

The Colonel snatched the authorization from the Sergeant and pitched it into 'file 13' ('file 13' is the file where all important military files go, the trash can). Captain Rogers walked in as the letter disappeared into the trash.

"Okay gentlemen. I'm only going to go through this one time. First cancel the pick-up by the Jolly. Second, destroy the messages relating to the request for pick up. Third, forget it ever happened." The Colonel left the TOC for his office.

Damned those guys, the Colonel thought. *All thirteen alive and a capital city destroyed.* He had tried to tell the General that a few Yards were absolutely no match for those guys. Even caught off guard some would most likely survive the ambush, and then what? That's when it was decided that a few survivors surely wouldn't be able to get back in country. But, they hadn't counted on a full "Team Red Rock" with commo gear and a stockpile of weapons! "Shit!" the Colonel yelled in frustration. He vehemently opposed the "no one must know" policy of the President. *These were good, loyal men. Surely they could be trusted*, he thought. But, the grapevine carried a message loud and clear about this new President. He trusted no one! *What dark secrets did the President have that molded him into such a dark person*, the Colonel wondered. But, here they were, in an obvious crisis. Too many, outside the small circle, know about the mission into Cambodia. But Bill Colby, the man General Haig called 'Mr. Peepers', was adamant about the viability of his plan. *'Mr. Peepers', now there was a piece of work*, the Colonel thought. To look at him, you would never know that during World War II he made several parachute jumps behind the German lines to coordinate operations with the French Underground. He was a shy man, of slight build. "Quite deceptive," the Colonel quietly said shaking his head, thinking of the Phoenix Program which Colby headed. Phoenix had been responsible for the kidnapping, torture and assassinations of a large part of the VietCong political underground. *He did look like Mr. Peepers from the television*

program, the Colonel chuckled at the thought of truck and walked up to the guards. The holes in the canvas of the truck allowed the three team members a clear recon - all was go. The Yards invited the two Cambodian Army guards to the rear of the truck. 'My Way' looked at his watch. 0200. He took it off, as did the others. The guards were an arms reach from the back of the truck. An explosion filled the air. The guards reeled on their feet, scanning the city. Two Green Berets exited the truck, knives-drawn. The guards, pointing in a southerly direction at a fireball illuminating the central area of the city, never saw them coming. Their death was silent but swift. With their throats cut, they were unable to alert any other guard who may be in the area. As the guards slumped to the ground, their assassins caught their bodies and threw them in the rear of the van. They were then stripped of their clothing. 'Cowboy' and 'The Kid' put the army uniforms on over their sapper garb. They waited.

The panel van pulled up to the public works building. The compound was small, but would provide adequate cover for a temporary mortar position. The Yards gave the signal. The rear doors of the panel truck burst open. 'Cajun' and Pablo jumped out with the mortar tube and mortar rounds in hand. Each had four satchels slung over their shoulder. The wooden gate to the water works/power station was violated with several short bursts from the deadly AK-47 Pablo was carrying. As they advanced through the gate, a caretaker came out of the building, hands in the air, yelling. 'Cajun' signaled him out of the compound. The Cambodian public works employee gladly obliged, keeping his hands up and running out of the splintered gate. It took only seconds to set up the mortar. First toward the river. High and shallow would keep the rounds relatively close. Every three seconds a new round was dropped in the tube. Swoosh! 'Cajun' adjusted an inch right, Pablo dropped another round...Swoosh! They heard the first explosion. Swoosh! ory. Everyone understood now that Team Red Rock was doomed before they left.

"No way!" Dodger spat out. "No way in hell can we sit and let those assholes leave our guys out there!" But his hands were tied. Without coordinates, he couldn't get there. Besides, the Huey only carried a little more than two hours of fuel. That would give him a range of 250 miles, but it was about 500 miles one way from NKP to central Cambodia. Saddened at the thought of another lost friend and infuriated at the knowledge that they died because his government refused them, he left the Command Post.

Back in his office, the Colonel sat at his desk, reviewing his performance in the TOC. He was pleased, and Dodger's remarks were the icing on the cake. Without the vital info of PZ coordinates and frequencies, there was no way to find Team Red Rock. He opened his center drawer and pulled the mission briefing sheet Bull Dog had given him the day before. He lit his lighter and held the flame under the sheet which had the vital mission information. He slowly moved the flame toward the briefing sheet. "No one must know, Mr. President".

Dodger walked across the compound toward his hootch. He stopped often, picking up rocks by the handful and pretending to skip them across water. But there was no water, only hard, dried mud.

"Why so blue?" came a familiar voice from behind. He toyed with telling Lydia

what was bothering him. But, he decided against it. No need infecting the whole base he thought. "Just heard about an ol' friend, lost in the jungles," he replied.

"Oh, I'm sorry Dodger. Anyone I know?"

"Naw, no one you would know."

"Want some company? I can skip a hell of a rock," she said, trying to cheer him up.

"No, Lydia. Thanks. I just want to be alone," he said. She left him to sulk. It was 1100 hours and he was ready for a drink. He remembered the envelope Bull Dog had given him, now where did he put it. Being in a hurry to get ready to fly the Colonel, he had dropped it between the pilot seat and console in Michele, but he had also forgotten that he put it there. He began looking in the hootch. He looked everywhere but couldn't find it. Two hours later, he decided he needed to refuel before it got too late, so he went to the chopper to shuttle it over to the fuel point. Refueling was an arduous job. He preferred the hot refueling available on other bases. Here he had to shut down and let the refueling tech do his work. As he sat in the aircraft, filling out his flight log from the morning flight, he noticed an envelope between the seat and console. "Bingo!" he yelled out, startling the refueler. He opened the letter and fished out the key. Holding it up, and turning it he said sadly, "Bull Dog, I wish you were here." He put the Huey back on the command pad and went into the TF "A" comm center. Master Sergeant Cox was there with his crew finishing the tests of all the new equipment.

"Hey, Sergeant Cox," Dodger said as he walked in. "Bull Dog said I was welcome to a few cold ones while he was gone," holding up the key, showing the Master Sergeant his authorization to get in.

"Yea, he said you could have his if he *didn't* make it back as I recall," Master Sergeant Cox rebuked him, "and he's not due back for two more days."

Now, Dodger's usual demeanor was carefree and cocky. When Master Sergeant Cox challenged him, he said, "Okay" and turned to leave.

"Hey, wait a minute, Dodger. Sure you can have a few cold ones. It's a little early, but what the hell. This is our last full day here. Com'on boys. Lets cheer up ol' Dodger here or he said it would be a nauseating ride back to Utapao!" The cold beer was passed around and tops popped. "Hell, since we're drinking Bull Dog's ration here, we may as well drink to 'ol Bull Dog, whatta ya say?"

"To bull Dog and his buddies in Red Rock." Master Sergeant Cox offered and everyone except Dodger recanted, "To Bull Dog and Red Rock".

Dodger couldn't speak. He was now *beyond* the verge of tears. He shook his head and put his face in his hands, leaning with elbows on his knees. He was sad and furious. He had not experienced this before.

"Hey, hey, com'on Dodger," Master Sergeant Cox offered. "What is it? What can we do to help? Someone back home?"

"It's bullshit! That's what it is! Pure bullshit!"

"What's bullshit?" Master Sergeant Cox and the others were confused.

"They didn't tell you?"

"Tell us what?" Cox asked.

"Hell Bobby. The spooks dropped Bull Dog and the Team into Cambodia last night. Who the hell knows why. And now, Red Rock can't get out! We don't know where they are to airlift them out!"

"Are you sure about this Dodger?"

"Hell yes! I was just in the TOC with the Colonel when we had to cancel the Jolly to pick 'em up.

"In Cambodia? But we ain't in Cambodia!"

"You're right! We ain't, but they sure as hell are. They got a hold of Moonbeam last night or early this morning and called their position 200 miles northwest of Saigon - thirteen strong and needing a ride."

"Holy shit!" Bobby put down his beer and left the center.

"What's this shit about not going in after my man?" Master Sergeant Cox confronted the Colonel in his office. Sergeant Cox noticed a smoldering pile of ashes in the Colonel's ashtray.

"We don't know where the hell they are, Bobby. We're trying everything we can to get their PZ location and frequencies but we're up against a stone wall with these spooks we're dealing with. I'm in it personally, though, and I'll keep you advised."

"What can we do?" Sergeant Cox asked.

"Nothin' really. It's outta our hands. I've already sent it upstairs."

Master Sergeant Cox didn't like to be stonewalled. "Damn it Colonel. Tatum's my man and I have every right to know what the hell's going on here. And don't give me any of that 'outta our hands' crap. My man's in Cambodia, and I'm gonna get him out!" With that, Sergeant Cox turned and left the Colonel's office.

The Colonel was fuming. He had never in his eighteen years of military service experienced such insolence from an NCO. Just who the hell did this Air Force Master Sergeant think he was dealing with?! This was much bigger than *either* of them!

Master Sergeant Cox came back into the Comm Center, obviously worked up. "Gimme that beer," he said to Dodger, who was sulking at Cox's desk. Dodger handed Bobby the beer he had left on the desk earlier. Master Sergeant Cox chugged it down, crushing the can on the desk and sat down, gears turning in this head.

"Flagler," he called to a Staff Sergeant, sipping on a beer on the other side of the room. "Can you get that console up?" pointing to the Bench Girl HF radio console Flagler was sitting at.

"Sure. Tatum left the dialing instructions right here to power it up."

"Then do it!" Cox commanded. "And get on the Bench Girl net. Several stations are operating. If we can find out how Tatum communicated with Moonbeam last night, we can talk to him. Once we establish communications with him, we'll want the other stations to triangulate. That'll put us in the ball park. That transponder he has can pull any aircraft over and give us coordinates. So lets get to it!"

Dodger hadn't seen so much action in a while. And these guys were good. He looked around the room at the state of the art equipment. "If we can't find 'em," Master Sergeant Cox continued, "well, he can't be found."

"Bobby, Moonbeam operates through Yakota, Andersen, and Clark airways. Let's

start there. You want to do it over the phone or over the air?" Sergeant Flagler asked.

"The airways - land lines are too tough outta here!" MSgt. Cox exclaimed.

Flagler began his work. To get any information from the airways stations, authentication was challenged first. The last call went to Clark. There he found the HF frequency which Red Rock relayed their messages and request for Moonbeam.

"Okay, now we know which HF frequency they're operating on. Now we wait. Tatum doesn't have much power and a long transmission can kill battery life. All the airway stations are awaiting their call."

"Tim," MSgt. Cox said to Staff Sergeant Flagler, using his first name, "You keep all the airways stations on back up frequencies. You can monitor four frequencies on that baby, so do it. It's," looking at his watch, "1415 hours. They should be up and on the air soon."

Dodger was feeling good about the efforts of the Air Force to get their man back. He had enough time to get to the showers, change out of the flying suit into something comfortable and get back by 1600 hours. Checking his pockets as he stripped for a shower, Dodger found the opened envelope Bull Dog had given him. He opened it and read the note. "Ah shit!" he said out loud. He put his sweaty clothes back on and ran for the TOC. Out of breath, he handed the note to Master Sergeant Cox. Cox read the letter from Tatum:

"Dodger,

I hope you don't have to open this. 'My Way' had a gut feeling that the PZ info and mission data would be lost. I hope the hell not. Anyhow, here it is."

PZ coordinates, frequencies for the transponder, VHF, UHF and HF radios were all included in the note.

"We're in Cambodia," the note continued. "The spooks are setting us up to fall, according to 'My Way'. So if you find you need to use this, it means that the Colonel is part of the set up. I gave the mission brief directly to him. If you get Master Sergeant Cox involved and let him know about Brown's deceit, he'll work around channels to get us."

"Thanks! Have a cold one on me!"

"Chip"

Master Sergeant Cox sat at his desk, staring at the note. He folded it, thinking. "Okay, we've got to do this outta here." He was still thinking out loud, "Now, we need a Jolly because of the location. I wonder where they are. C'mon Dodger, can you plot this on the map for me?"

"You bet!" Dodger exclaimed as he walked down the hall to the TOC map. Dodger plotted and put his finger on the area. About fifteen miles northeast of Phenom

Penh."

They looked at one another.

"They're in deep!" Dodger said to Master Sergeant Cox. "There's a lot of triple A (anti-air artillery) in there. The NVA is heavy south of Phenom Penh, but I don't know about northeast. I can check into it quietly."

"Do that and let me know."

They were practically whispering, standing at the map, looking at the area northeast of Phenom Penh.

Tech Sergeant Taylor was just coming on duty for the swing shift, 1600 hours to 2400 hours. He walked up behind the two.

"Do they know where Red Rock is yet?"

The two looked at each other, wondering whether he could be trusted.

"What could we do if we had the PZ coordinates and frequencies, Jim?" Master Sergeant Cox asked Tech Sergeant Jim Taylor.

"Well, Bobby, that Jolly Green is in Saigon. There are probably Jollies on missions along the border as we speak. It would be easy enough to divert a Jolly to the PZ, but we have to do it through their command post."

"No way to go around the C.P.?" Dodger asked.

"Well, there's always a way - you guys know that. But it's academic if we don't have Red Rock's info."

"Indulge me Jim. How would you do it?"

"Well, I would need the comm center to monitor and find the aircraft already airborne. Then, I would simply issue a new mission. But the Cambodian/South Vietnam border is too far to receive transmissions."

"I listen to 'em every day." Dodger offered. "At 10,000 feet you can hear everyone, including gooks! So, you'd just go up on their operating frequency and divert them to the new PZ."

"How do they know you're for real?" Master Sergeant Cox asked.

"By authenticating out of these," Tech Sergeant Taylor picked up the command post authentication tables for diverting aircraft. "And, if I thought you knew Red Rocks info, I'd give 'em to you for a couple of hours."

Master Sergeant Cox took the letter out of his pant's pocket and handed it to the NCIOC of the command post.

As Tech Sergeant Taylor read the note, he began shaking his head. "You know," he began, "if 'My Way' and his team get outta there, that Colonel's life isn't worth spit!" He handed the pilot the authentication tables and walked up to the NCO currently on duty. TSgt Taylor returned to Dodger and said, "Kick the tires and light the fires, Chief," speaking to the Chief Warrant Officer, "we're wasting time." The three left TF "Alpha" together. It was 1615 hours.

CHAPTER NINE

At 1500 hours, I turned the VHF radio on. Nine members of the team had relocated to the grave site to listen to our progress. When contact was established with the inbound aircraft, the Team would disburse to their perimeter watch locations.

1530 hours - no contact. I continued attempting to contact on VHF.

1545 hours - no contact. We were getting concerned.

1600 hours - no contact.

1615 hours - no contact.

1630 hours - no contact.

Moonbeam advised us to maintain until 1600 hours +1, so we continued to wait.

The chopper was airborne within minutes. Tech Sergeant Taylor had grabbed the Command Post Frequency lists to begin their search. At 5,000 feet, air to air was fairly easy. Any aircraft not under radio silence could answer a call. But Dodger had a better idea. He tuned his UHF to 121.5, the emergency frequency, and started his search. "Any aircraft this frequency, this is Dodger 22 over."

"Mustang 16, over."

"Roger, 16. I'm in a heck of a position. I'm a UH-1 and we need a Jolly real bad. Have you heard any on your normal frequencies?"

The Jolly Greens were distinctive. They always had a high pitch vibrating tone in their transmissions.

"Negative 22, but we'll see what we can find. What's up?"

"Bull Dog's gone down across the fence. Need a Jolly that's already airborne and close to the fence west or northwest of Sin City, over." Sin City was the nickname for Saigon.

"Roger. See what I can do, out."

"Dodger 22, this is Mac 60178 on guard, over." Mac 60178 was a C-141 Air Force Cargo aircraft.

"60178, this is Dodger. Go ahead."

"Roger Dodger. Try 128.3, sounded like some slow boys there earlier."

"Thanks 178, will do. Out."

Dodger changed the frequency in the window of the VHF radio to 128.3 and Tech Sergeant Taylor began, "Any aircraft this frequency. This is Dodger 22 with emergency traffic, over." They waited. Nothing!

"What's your altitude?" TSgt. Taylor asked.

"6,500 feet and climbing," Dodger answered. "Give me a couple of minutes and I'll have you at 8,000 feet."

They waited. Then Taylor tried again, "Any aircraft this frequency. This is Dodger 22 with emergency traffic, over."

"Dodger 22. This is King 16, over." King is the call sign for Air Force Search and Rescue C-130's. So, when Sergeant Taylor heard the call sign, he knew that he had hit a gold mine.

"16, this is Dodger 22. We have troops down across the fence. We need a Jolly with aux (meaning auxiliary fuel to make the round trip). I have coordinates and will patch you through to Thunderhead for authorization, over."

"Roger 22, Stand by."

"How you gonna do that, Sgt. Taylor?" Dodger asked.

Holding up the authentication tables, TSgt. Jim Taylor simply stated, "You're looking at 'Thunderhead'!"

"*Shit hot*" Dodger thought as they waited.

A new voice came over the radio from King 16. "Dodger 22, this is King 06, over."

Now things were going to get shaky. King 06 is the call sign of the Commander for Air Force Search and Rescue. *Shit*, Taylor thought when he heard the call sign. Taylor didn't answer the call.

"Hey Jim, King 06 wants you," Master Sergeant Cox said thinking maybe Taylor didn't hear.

"I know, but now we've got a problem. 06 is the Air Force Search and Rescue Commander!" He'll send us to Leavenworth if he figures out what we're doing!"

Dodger heard 06 call again while Taylor and Cox were talking back and forth over the intercom. So he decided to stall, "06, this is Dodger 22. You're broken. Stand by. We're going to get some altitude and try to improve reception, over."

"Roger 22. King 06 standing by."

The Brigadier General stood, stretching at his console located on the flight deck of the rescue C-130. He had the special console constructed to his specifications. This was the first flight with his state of the art equipment, and it was ready just in time. The crews were put on alert just 24 hours prior to this flight due to movement of aircraft into Phenom Penh's Pochentong Airport. They were tasked for one King mission each day for three days. Aircraft based at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon were to be shuttled into Cambodia over the next three days. The General had never been to Phenom Penh and decided it would be him to go down in the unit history as the first in.

"Bill," the General called to the pilot, Colonel Bill Coates. "What kind of aircraft do you make Dodger 22 out to be?"

"Not sure, sir. Possibly a command chopper. If they're going up to 10,000 feet, we'll know soon enough. That air's so thin, that chopper will be popping louder than those Howitzers down there."

"What's our present position?"

"About forty miles north east of Pochentong, Sir. Well, stay up and circle the area for about two more hours, according to the brief. Then land at Pochentong. RON and hit it again tomorrow at 10:00 hours."

"Try to get Sam on the HF and find out if they've got any CH-53's they can cut lose to us."

"Roger Sir."

"King 06, this is Dodger 22, over."

"22 this is 06. You're loud and clear here. Say altitude and aircraft type, over."

"06 this is 22. We're a UH-1 at 9,500 feet and its beating us to death!"

The C-130 crew chuckled at the Huey pilot's frankness. Little did they know how concerned the Huey crew was. By putting an aircraft over the fence, their military careers were not only in jeopardy, but it could land their asses in Leavenworth! They didn't know that King 06 was less than 25 miles from Team Red Rock.

"Roger 06, this is 22, you're five by here." (five by five is military jargon for 'loud and clear'.) "Any luck with a Jolly? over."

"We're talking to Jolly Ops at this time, 22. Say coordinates for PZ, over."

"He's trying to trap us!" TSgt Taylor said, almost hysterical.

"Hold on there Jim," MSgt. Cox said, trying to settle him down. "I've worked with these boys plenty and they're not that kind. If they can do it, they will. Now give 'em the PZ coordinates."

Taylor didn't like it. He shook his head, no.

"06, this is Dodger 22. Coordinates follow: Bravo, November, One, Zero, Six, Six, Three, Five. Read back, over"

"22, This is 06. I read back, Bravo, November, One, Zero, Six, Six, Three, Five, over."

"Roger, 06. Read back is correct, Stand by."

Dodger knew that the rescue aircraft would pull out a map with search grids corresponding to the Bravo November search area. They then had to find the grid areas 10 and 63. When they found those, they would zero in on the PZ by locating the six line and the five line and where they intersect is the PZ.

King aircraft operations in this AO carried a special team to perform extractions, if necessary, or to air drop into the PZ and help the ground troops or downed aviators if necessary. The young Captain was elated when he was picked to command the Combat Control Team. These CCT's were the first to be used on King aircraft and this was only their fourth team mission.

The Captain was already on the map when the call giving coordinates came. In less than two minutes, he had the PZ pinpointed.

Whoa! he thought. "Excuse me, Sir, but that PZ is about four minutes west of our location," showing the location to the General.

"How 'bout it Bill. Do a little recon and see what we have."

"Roger that, Sir. Hang on." The C-130 was at 35,000 feet. The large aircraft banked left and started a rapid descent. It was the pilots' intention to do his recon at 10,000 feet and, if they encountered no hostile fire, they would descend to 2,500 feet for a visual of the PZ and surrounding area.

"Dodger 22. This is King 06."

"Shit," Taylor said. "We're dead!"

"06, This is 22. Go ahead sir."

"Roger 22. You're in luck. We're about 04 from that location at this time and will recon for CH-53. If PZ is okay, Jolly Ops advises pick up in 20 mikes, over." (A mike is a minute.)

"Yahoo!" the gruffy Master Sergeant yelled. "Them's my boys up there!" Dodger

was almost in tears, he was so happy. Chills were running all over his body. He was choked up and couldn't reply. Master Sergeant Cox took the mike.

"06, this is 22. Take care of those boys. One of 'em is mine and I'm one of you," meaning they were Air Force, also.

"22. 06. What the hell's he doing down there with grunts?" the General asked, knowing that most non-flying Air Force personnel were kept out of ground missions.

"He's a CCT, Sir," Master Sergeant Cox answered.

The seven man CCT team on board listening over the speaker gave the C-C-T grunt, yelling it twice. The General and crew all looked back at the Air Force Special Forces and smiled with a thumbs up.

"Well, 22. Stand by for Duke 06"

"Damn," Taylor said, finally relieved that they were back on solid ground and legal. "Another 06 - that's a lot of command up there." He looked in his Comm-SEC call sign book and saw that Duke 06 was the static call sign for Combat Control Team One Commander.

"22, this is Duke 06. Do you have frequencies and call signs for our chicks? Over."

"Roger 06. Call sign is Red Rock, victor is 125.6 and transponder is 1213 November."

"Roger, victor 125.6, Tango 1213 November, Red Rock. Stand by."

The flight engineer was monitoring the radio call and changed the VHF to 125.6 and prepped the new DF radar unit for the 1213 transponder code.

"Radio six Captain," he called back to the CCT Commander. The Commander switched his radio console switch to radio #6.

It was 1705 hours. We had tried everything to contact anyone on VHF or UHF. It was time to set up the HF long wire antenna again and try an HF station. I hated to do that because I knew how much juice it would take out of our batteries.

"Pop', can you set the long wire up like we had it last night?" I asked. 'Pop' knew we weren't having much luck.

"Sure, 'Highway'. Pass it over."

As I gathered the components, the VHF crackled.

"Red Rock, this is Duke 06, over."

Chills went up our spine in disbelief. 'My Way' tripped over legs as he attempted to get to the radio. I grabbed the mike and handed it to our Commander.

"Duke, this is Red Rock, over."

"Red Rock, this is 06. Set Tango now, over."

I grabbed the transponder and climbed out of the grave to the top of the mound and set it down. I waited, listening for the chopper. The familiar shape of a C-130 was off in the distance to the east. I continued to scan the horizon in all directions for our ride.

The speaker crackled below, "Red Rock, this is Duke 06. I have your Tango. Two, Six Five at One Zero." (That meant that we were on an azimuth of 265 degrees,

ten miles away. By subtracting 180 degrees, I would know where to look - 85 degrees.) I took out my lensetic compass and shot 85 degrees. I saw the C-130 still inbound. I considered dropping a smoke grenade to mark the PZ, but decided against it due to the possibility of enemy patrols in the area and if the C-130 was our extracting aircraft, we were in trouble. The LZ was chosen for a helicopter, not a fixed wing requiring a runway!

"It's a C-130!" I called down to the Team in the grave.

"How the hell they gonna get us?" Pablo asked.

'My Way' was quick to answer, "Probably a recon aircraft checking out the area before they put Jolly's in here."

"Tell them no smoke. Stand by for Fox Trot," I yelled down to 'My Way'.

"What's that mean?" 'The Kid' asked, yelling back up at me.

"Smoke's too chancy to use in marking the LZ. Fox Trot is a mirror flashing at the aircraft. Pretty easy to do with the sun." I looked around, "Shit! Never Mind, 'My Way'. The sun's behind me. I can't flash. I'll control him in. Give me that mike." 'Pop' gladly relinquished the mike.

"06 - This is Red Rock. Stand by for tactical locator, over."

"What's that?" the pilot asked the co-pilot over the intercom.

His pilot just shrugged his shoulders at a loss. The CCT Commander answered the pilot's question.

"The CCT is going to control you over the LZ when your recon is complete. You just advise that you're base for final when you identify the corridor you want and he'll put you right over the LZ. Like an ILS. He'll call 'mark PZ' when you're overhead. Start your descending spiral at that time and watch for them," the CCT Captain said to the flight deck.

"That's easy enough," the pilot said, looking at the co-pilot. "Hell," the co-pilot said, "I wish we could use that all the time. It'd make it easy for us."

"You sure it'll work?" the General asked the Captain.

"It did at Keesler in school, Sir. We've never done it out here."

The flight officers looked at one another in doubt.

I pulled a whip antenna up and stuck it in the ground, pointing skyward in front of me. I took the second whip and put my fist around the first antenna and pointed the second like an arrow at the C-130. These gave me a glide path and course to reference to. The C-130 DF radar also had the transponder to keep on course. I followed the C-130 on a 360 degree turn around the LZ about ten miles out. Distance was tough for me - he could have been 100 miles out, I had no visual reference for distance, but he had given me a ten mile call before he turned and started his high recon.

"Red Rock, this is King 06 turning base, over."

"King 06, this is Red Rock final. Do not acknowledge any further transmissions. Turn left to 235."

The aircraft responded with an immediate turn. I was attempting to bring him in line with the antenna. The aircraft leveled out. "Begin descent above glide path left of course. Turn right ten degrees above glide path correcting, turn left five degrees. Above

glide path. Slow descent. Correcting nicely. Turn left two degrees on course. Turn left three degrees." Crap, he went through it, I thought. "Slightly left of course. Turn right two degrees." The wings tipped slightly and leveled on course on glide path. "Falling below glide path. Slightly below glide path. On course." I could see the props turning as the Hercules aircraft was in full view of the team, headed straight at us. "On course."

The roar of the four turbine engines filled the air. They were at about 1,000 feet. I called the LZ.

"06. This is Red Rock Mark.....now" as he roared overhead. The wings tipped to the left as he descended and circled the PZ. The flight engineer marked the LZ on his console. We could see the pilot wave as they circled the LZ.

"Red Rock. This is King 06. We have you in sight. Stand by for 'sitrep' (a situation report meant that the possibility of hostile ground forces existed in the area).

"How was that, Sir?" the CCT Captain asked the aircraft commander.

"It scares the hell out of me," the Colonel said. "Soon, you won't need us. Those controllers will talk to the autopilot and land these things! That's not job security, fellas!"

The General had his unit historian with them to take photos and record the mission. "Another first," the General said to the crew. "We're first to use the Combat Controller in combat to locate the PZ. What's it called, I mean, the maneuver we just did."

"VOC, Sir. Visual Operations Control."

"Well, I like the hell out of it. Get the name of that trooper down there! We've got to put him in the ABO!"

"Sir, communications security won't allow him to give his name over the air," the Colonel reminded the General.

"Well hell. I'm not picky - his tactical call will do!"

The Captain called down to the PZ, "Red Rock, this is Duke 06. Say your tactical, over."

I looked at 'My Way', and he nodded an approval.

"06, this is Red Rock. Tact call is Bull Dog, over."

"Well, Bull Dog," a new voice was on the air now. "Hell of a job on that Victor Oscar Charlie. You have an inbound thirty minutes out, over."

The General had the Major snapping pictures of him at his console, talking to Red Rock.

"Sir, may I speak with Bull Dog a moment. We have a situation report for them and it's not real good," the CCT Commander asked the General.

"What's up?" the General asked.

"Well, it seems the high recon indicated troop movement on the north road along the Mekong, looking like a convoy. That's about five miles from Red Rock's location. Additional ground forces smaller strength, crossing west to east, six miles west of current location. That 53 best be ready to lay some lead!"

The Captain passed the info to 'My Way'. He then asked to speak with me.

"Bull Dog, this is Duke 06. We're the Command element for CCT with Team

One on board. Are you the same trooper that landed in U Tapao in Mac's aircraft?"

"That's a roger 06."

"And you're the same trooper that iced the 'Black Widow'?"

I looked at My Way, "You're outta here tomorrow for Oklahoma City - go ahead!"

"That's a roger, Sir!"

The crew at the C-130 had heard of the rogue combat controller not assigned to a team. Rumors were spreading about who he really was. Some said a ghost, others said he was a killer from New York City given a choice - Vietnam or the electric chair! He was actually a scared kid with only one mission - to find that damned recruiter when I get home!

"Well, Bull Dog. You've got a home with the First, anytime you want. When you get back, drinks are on us!"

"Roger 06, appreciate it. Hope to see you in a few."

The pilot took the yoke and turned the aircraft toward Phenom Penh. Before leaving the PZ, the unit photographer wanted a picture of Red Rock. He put the zoom lens on and asked for one more time around. The Colonel turned and the Major started clicking away. He began to zoom in on the dark figures in the LZ. Light was leaving fast. The shadows must be playing tricks, he thought. He could have sworn that the PZ had NVA sappers in it. Naw, he thought, just the poor light and shadows.

"So, Bull Dog's for real, eh?" the squad NCO stated as Team One talked about the VOC approach. "Do you think he really iced the 'Black Widow'?"

"Well, somebody did and thank goodness. She should have died a slow death for what she did to Slater! He never hurt anyone!" One of the team members said.

"Yeah, but at least, true or not, CCT gets the credit!" the Captain said.

"He didn't sound like a ghost! Where did you hear that one?"

"From the Yards" the Sergeant answered. "They're real superstitious you know. Their communication is better than anything we have. Hell, we never heard of this guy before two or three weeks ago and the Yards have him as some spirit that's come to get even with the VC for stealing spirits from the dead. That's why the chief has sided his men with us. We can't walk around Ton Son Nhut without a Yard following us. They think the spirit of Bull Dog will appear to his brethren to take names and kick ass!"

"Well, I heard that we've got some CCT's in country from the Third, and Fourth MOBS out of Oklahoma," one of the Airmen First Class said. "I've got a friend that I was stationed with at Tinker and when I got my orders here, I called him. He said that he would be at NKP for two months. He should still be there. NKP's where they nabbed the bitch, (speaking of the Black Widow) isn't it?" Airman First Class Bob Burgess asked his NCOIC.

"Yeah, we'll be at NKP in three days. We're gonna jump in and pick up some repaired rigs to take back to Tan Son Nhut. You'll have time to see your buddy. Did you guys go through training and qualification together?" the Sergeant asked.

"Yep. We met at Keesler and split up at Tinker. I just finished the TAC module and they sent me here. Tatum stayed at Tinker. They didn't want us both together. I

guess they thought we were a bad influence on each other!"

"What's his name?"

"Tatum, Chip Tatum. He's an Airman First Class too. They only had four CCT's at Tinker. They're probably all at NKP on the TDY. It'll be good to see him!"

"Buckle up for landing," the intercom crackled. "Warm bed, hot food, bath with soap, and women!" came the voice from the pilot's seat.

"The General didn't approve of the last remark, but his crew were all bachelors, himself excepted.

The C-130 circled the PZ once more before leaving. 'My Way' called the team together. The sitrep was disturbing news. But, the ground troops would bivouac for the night and we'd be long gone before they get to our location. The convoy was another story. But, we weren't on a main artery so the convoy would probably take a right at the "Y" in the road and miss us completely. We had a PZ to prep for a night extraction, dusk was coming quickly. 'My Way' disbursed the perimeter assignments and I gathered the commo gear in preparation for extraction. I put the rack on my back and sat in the grave, waiting for the CH-53's first call inbound.

CHAPTER TEN

Dodger landed the chopper on the command pad and told his two passengers to get those authentication tables back to the TOC before they were missed. As they entered the command post, Captain Rogers signaled for Tech Sergeant Taylor to come over. The NCO from day shift was glad to see his NCOIC back to relieve him. He departed immediately. TSgt. Taylor put the tables in the safe and closed it. Whew! he thought.

"Where'd you go so quick?" the Captain asked.

"Had to call a friend," he said smiling as Master Sergeant Cox walked in, smiling like a Cheshire cat.

"Shit hot!" Cox said.

"Yep, we did it!" Taylor answered, shaking each others hands.

"Did what?" the Captain asked.

"Should we?" Taylor asked Cox.

"Why not. They should be airborne by now," Cox replied.

"Well sir, we found the PZ location and frequencies for Red Rock."

"Good going! Where were they?"

"Dodger had them and didn't know it," Cox replied, pointing to Dodger as he walked in the command post.

"Yep," Dodger said. "Bull Dog gave me a copy of the mission brief just in case the original got lost!"

"Funny how the *Old Man* lost the original, eh?"

"No," Cox jumped right in. "Not funny, criminal! And I'm about to go and confront him about it. Who has the note from Tatum?" Cox asked.

Taylor unfolded it and handed it to his new friend and ally.

"Confront who?" the Colonel's voice came from behind Dodger. "And what the hell we're you doing way up there?" the Colonel asked Dodger, pointing to the air.

"Me first" Master Sergeant Cox said to Dodger.

"My Way' was concerned about the integrity of the mission and briefing sheets. He said that you got the original briefing sheet on your own orders. Did you?" Master Sergeant Cox was obviously challenging the Colonel in front of his men. The Colonel didn't answer. "I asked you a question, Colonel."

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Sergeant," the Colonel said.

"That's what 'My Way' thought you would say. He went in the suspicious mode when you insisted Tatum give you the only copy of the mission brief. So they made a second copy and left it with a trusted friend not directly connected with the mission!"

"They can't do that!" the Colonel exclaimed. "They'll go to the brig if they've done such a thing! Maybe worse!"

"And what can be worse than being left for dead?" Cox retorted, throwing the letter Bull Dog had left Dodger.

"You're way outta your league and authority, Cox," the Colonel said with a red, angry face. "And you're in something that you have no business in."

Cox smiled at the Colonel. "You know, Colonel, I'd frag your ass for what you

did to those boys. God knows somebody ought to. But I think I'll leave the job to of Pablo or 'Flame'. They'd be pissed if they got back and you weren't around!"

"That's pretty brave talk for an over-the-hill Sergeant on his way out!" the Colonel said to MSgt. Cox. "But, unfortunately, even if we called for a pick up of Red Rock, they'd be over-run tonight or in the morning before we could get there to get them. Sometimes the lives of a few are worth the sacrifice for the lives of many, Sergeant. You need to see the whole picture and not worry about thirteen soldiers who vowed to give their life for their country. Well, they're about to! And, as much as I dislike the idea of having to forsake those boys, I have to. Orders from the Commander-in-Chief himself."

"You can do this and look at your self in the mirror?" Cox asked.

"Sergeant, I can even see myself with my new shiny star in that mirror when this is over. And believe me, its over for them!" the Colonel stated as a matter of fact.

"Well, then let me be the first to apologize, Sir," Dodger interjected.

"What the hell are you talking about, Dodger?" the Colonel asked, agitated.

"We really screwed up, Sergeant Cox," Dodger said, looking directly at Master Sergeant Cox. "If I'd known of the Colonel's promotion being contingent on his murder of thirteen American soldiers, I never would have done it!"

"Done what?" the Colonel asked.

Dodger ignored the Colonel as he continued talking. "Damn, I'm sure sorry that there won't be a promotion party now. Hell, we could have combined the promotion party with a wake for Bull Dog and the boys. But, not now. We sure blew the hell outta that, didn't we Sergeant Cox?"

"I'd never thought!" Sergeant Cox began, "Shit, Colonel. I guess we really screwed up your plans, didn't we?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" the Colonel asked either man.

"The CH-53," Dodger answered.

"Yeah, we ordered a Jolly in there two hours ago. Hell. Team Red Rock's probably about thirty minutes out of Ton Son Nhut by now!"

"Yep, and they'll be jumpin' in here tomorrow to pay their respects, I'm sure," Dodger said, as he was walking out of the command post with Master Sergeant Cox, laughing at their victory.

"Sergeant Taylor!" the Colonel yelled, fuming at this point. "What do you know, about this?"

"Well, Sir. King 06 ordered the Jolly himself."

"Captain, get me King operations in Ton Son Nhut."

"Sergeant, get a replacement in here and pack your gear. I want you off this base in thirty minutes. Have Dodger pack his gear too. I'll have a replacement aircraft here in twenty minutes, and you two are outta here!"

"Tell Dodger yourself, Colonel. I'm not yours any more," Jim Taylor said as he walked out of the command post for the last time.

"Captain, do you have King Ops yet?"

"Negative, Sir. I'll keep trying to get a line out. Sir, is that true?"

"It's none of your concern, Captain. Do you understand? I don't mean to sound

callous, but I have my orders Captain, and now you have your orders - I want King Ops now! Pull a line for flash traffic now!"

The Colonel took TSgt. Taylor's position behind the command console, waiting for King Operations.

"Sir, King Ops on two."

The Colonel picked up line two.

"This is Thunderhead. I have emergency traffic for your Command Post."

The voice on the other side of the phone asked the Colonel to stand by for the command console.

"Thunderhead, this is King Ops. State your traffic."

"You ordered a CH-53 into Cambodia to pick up Team Red Rock, what's the status of the pick up?"

"Stand by. Authenticate Charlie Sierra."

"I authenticate Echo. Now what's the damn status?"

"The Jolly is ten minutes to ETA, Thunderhead. Why?"

"Abort the mission. We have reason to believe that Team Red Rock is a platoon of NVA sappers waiting for your Jolly. Sappers hit Phenom Penh last night and intelligence leads us to believe the sappers have stolen comm gear and authenticating tables from American aircraft that were parked on Poncheton Airport."

TF "Alpha" is the intelligence gatherer and dissemination unit for Southeast Asia. So when TF "Alpha" disseminates information, the Command Posts listen.

"Sir. This is King Ops. We're trying to abort via HF but can't raise 'em. We'll keep on it though."

"You better do better than 'keep on it' soldier, or you'll have a dead air crew and destroyed aircraft. Keep us posted!" the Colonel ordered. "We'll stand by on the line!" the Colonel demanded.

We were waiting faithfully for our chopper, unaware of the events back at NKP.

The radio crackled, "Red Rock, this is Casper Two Eight, over."

"I jumped back into the grave and answered the call, "Casper Two Eight, this is Red Rock, over."

"Roger, Red Rock. Tracking inbound on your signal, estimating fifteen mikes, over."

"Two Eight, This is Red Rock, Roger. Will control to ground when we have visual, over."

"Red Rock, this is Casper Two Eight, roger that. Say number of passengers, over."

"Is he coming?" I asked 'My Way', pointing to the Yard.

"Damn right he is," 'My Way' answered.

I say, "One Four Papa Alpha Xray, over."

"Roger, Red Rock. We'll be standing by for your visual."

The radio fell silent. 'My Way' signaled to the perimeter fifteen minutes to pick up. Everyone was already alert. The signal only caused the anxiety in all of us to rise three levels. Dusk was closing in fast. In thirty minutes, it would be dark. The sun was

settling to our backs as we scanned the eastern horizon for the silhouette of the CH-53. I wondered as I stood in the grave, looking to the east, why it was called a Jolly Green. Did it have anything to do with the elated feeling one would have when the big chopper came into sight?

"There," 'Pop' said, pointing one o'clock low. I adjusted my vision slightly right and saw the outline, dark against the gradually greying sky.

"Casper Two Eight, this is Red Rock. Turn right three degrees and continue. Do not acknowledge transmissions." I really had a tough time with directing while I was facing the aircraft. On a radar screen it was simple, but every thing was backwards in the field, trying to bring the aircraft to you. "Just think the way you act, Tatum!" one instructor said on a field exercise in Dalonaga, Georgia.

"That's easy for you to say, but I have to think and talk in reverse at the same time! That's hard!" I told him.

"Okay, Two Eight." I brought my mind back to the moment, "correcting nicely - we're at your 11:30 and three miles. Will pop green."

"Okay, 'Flame'," I yelled as 'Flame' popped two smoke canisters and tossed them in the middle of the perimeter area.

The chopper's nose raised and tail dropped slightly as it began to slow 150 feet above the trees about one and one half miles from us. Then the radio came alive again.

"Red Rock, this is Two Eight. Authenticate Lima Quebec, over."

"Two Eight, this is Red Rock. Unable, Sir. We don't have tactical tables due to our location, over," I said, hoping they would accept that answer, seeing we were where we were.

The aircraft continued toward us. Less than 1/2 mile. I could see the gun barrels poking out of openings on the side. SOP (standard operating procedure) I said to myself, remembering the door guns on Dodger's Huey and the cover we laid down on landing.

"Red Rock. This is Two Eight. I have your smoke. Stand by for recon." The pilot intended to fly the area over to look for emergency routes, enemy activity and possible alternative landing areas. Good pilot, I thought.

"Okay, men. You heard King Ops. It's possible that Red Rock is a group of sappers and they're suckering us in on U.S. equipment," the Air Force Major said as the lumbering helicopter responded to the right turn the co-pilot initiated a second before. "Gunner, lock and load," the pilot said as he pulled out his binoculars to check the LZ while out of small arms range. "Okay, Jack," the pilot said to his co-pilot, "a little closer." The co-pilot eased the aircraft left, toward the smoke.

The pilot was scanning the LZ when he saw dark spots sitting still about one hundred meters from the smoke. "There's two!" he said. "Can't quite make 'em out though. There's a couple more north side of LZ. Chief, whatta ya see?"

The Crew Chief on the left side 50 calibre machine gun couldn't make out much, but he sure didn't like night extractions.

"Can't make out much, Sir, but we don't need to be careless. Let's take it slow and keep our asses instead of hauling ass in there like Audi Murphy would."

"Roger that, Chief," the pilot acknowledged.

"Okay Jack, a little closer."

The aircraft rolled left a little bit.

"Looks okay to me boys. Lets get 'em. Chief, lay down fire and keep your eyes on the LZ."

The Chief let loose in the fields and trees. If any NVA were looking for us, they certainly knew where to look now. But the machine gun fire signaled their willingness to clear their landing zone. The nose pointed toward smoke and pitched up to slow the forward air speed and settle to the ground.

"Okay boys. Eyes sharp," the pilot just completed his instruction when the Crew Chief shouted the signal, "Hostile! Hostile! Hostile!"

The Crew Chief had a clear view of the men stooping on the south side of the LZ. One of them stood. Something was wrong. Oh shit! he thought, and swung the large calibre machine gun toward the sappers and let a burst fly. The sapper was immediately thrown backwards off his feet. Pieces of the ground were flying into the air as he yelled his warning over the intercom.

"Down! Down! Down!" 'My Way' yelled to his team, as machine gun fire started riddling the ground. He saw a line of fire work its way toward 'Cajun' and Pablo. One of them was standing. The trail went directly toward the soldiers and threw one back. 'My Way' swung his AK around and started firing at the large helicopter.

"Cease fire! Cease fire! Friendly! Friendly! Friendly!" I yelled into the mike to a deaf ear. The Jolly was obviously going to use us as target practice, as the pilot began turning the helicopter in a 360 degree turn while hovering in the center of the LZ, machine guns blaring. The rest of the team began to return fire. Pablo slapped a satchel and heaved it toward the large killing machine. As he threw it, he saw another man thrown off his feet. The satchel fell well short at the killing machine, but he figured the explosion would make the pilots think that rockets or mortars were being fired at them. The satchel exploded, sending a shock wave that rocked the helicopter from side to side and back. The aircraft recovered and bound upward. We ceased fire.

I just stood in the grave, stunned. The Jolly nosed down and flew away, guns blaring, but they were too far away for any accuracy.

'My Way' yelled, "'Cajun?'"

"Down, 'My Way'! So's 'Super Cop'," Pablo yelled back.

"Bring 'em!" 'Cowboy' grabbed 'Super Cop' and Pablo brought in 'Cajun'. They laid the men in the grave as 'Pop' checked them for vitals. He shook his head. 'Pop' reached in 'Cajun's shirt and pulled out a plastic package filled with a yellow gel. 'Cowboy' did the same with 'Super Cop', spreading it over their bodies. 'My Way' pulled a St. Christopher's medal out of his shirt. He bowed his head, as did the rest of the Team. We stood silent over our fallen comrades. 'My Way' gave the sign of the cross. Without hesitation, 'My Way' said, pointing, "'Bagman! Point!" With that, we began east toward the trees. 'Pop' stayed behind. As I looked back at the grave, all I could see was two columns of black smoke billowing skyward.

What happened? I thought to myself as we got to the truck.

"Kid, you drive. Put the Yard up front with you. Tell him I've got a bullet aimed

at his stomach if he makes one wrong move, I'll shoot. Then tell him how miserable a gut wound is, and how long he'll suffer before he dies. Load up, men." 'My Way' said, signaling toward the cargo bed.

The truck was heading back toward Phnom Penh. 'My Way' and 'Pop' decided that we were safe enough traveling at night. However, without a map, the best we could do was keep in an easterly direction. Eventually, we would get to Vietnam. At some point, we would need to get out of the sapper uniforms. The Yard was vaguely familiar with the main roads, which helped. After we had driven a few miles, 'The Kid' stopped. "My Way', the Yard says that this turn to the left is a pretty solid road. But, he doesn't know how far it goes."

"What direction is it?"

"The Kid' pulled out his compass. It was an easterly road.

"East."

"Take it!"

The truck swung left and we were headed down a dark, but improved road.

'Pop' and 'My Way' continued stratagizing and planning our escape from Cambodia and the transition into South Vietnam. It was concluded that we were safer in the sapper uniform than in village clothes. The NVA were concentrated along the Cambodia border utilizing this area as a resupply and recuperation area. I sat and stared out of the rear of the truck, watching dust fly behind us, lit only by the tail lights of the old vehicle. The dust seemed to disappear into the immense, black hole behind us. I thought of 'Cajun' and 'Super Cop'. I thought about the Air Force helicopter, right at our fingertips. Why had they fired on us? Didn't they know? Surely, if they had our coordinates, someone spoke with Thunderhead and they told them who we were. I was confused. I was tired. I was scared. I wanted to turn on the radio to monitor the frequencies, but 'My Way' wanted the batteries saved. I hooked up the hand generator and began cranking the handle, hoping to restore a portion of the batteries power, staring out of the truck, into the darkness. I saw 'Pop' kick the poisoned canteens out of the truck.

"King Ops, this is Casper Two Eight, emergency," the pilot waited for a response on guard (a guard frequency is used only for emergencies). The co-pilot was busy trying to access the damage to the CH-53.

"Chief!" the co-pilot called, "What's the damage back there?"

The Chief was still firing at the LZ when he heard someone talking over the intercom.

"What?" he said curtly.

"Damage, Chief. What's the damage back there?"

The Chief turned toward the Load Master/Door Gunner. He was sitting on the floor, holding his leg. Blood was spurting again. The bulkhead of the aircraft tore his leg.

"Shit, Sir! Stiles is hit. Looks bad. I'll get back to you!"

The co-pilot continued monitoring the gauges. They were losing hydraulic pressure, not fast, but at a noticeable rate.

"Hydraulic pressure's falling, Stiles is hit. I think an engine's damaged. Can't tell.

The gauges were hit," he said, pointing to a bank of shattered gauges. The Pilot-in-Command acknowledged as he continued his radio calls.

"Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. This is Casper Two Eight, Emergency. Does anyone copy? Over."

"Casper Two Eight. This is Wildcat One Five, over."

"One Five, this is Two Eight. Can you see if you can raise King Ops on guard for us, over."

"Roger Two Eight. Stand by."

"King Ops. This is Wildcat One Five, Relay, over."

"Wildcat One Five, this is King Ops, go ahead."

"Roger, Ops, Casper Two eight, what's the problem?"

"Advise King Ops that Red Rock LZ was Charlie. We've sustained hydraulic and possible engine damage. One crew member hit pretty bad, over."

The F-4 relayed the message to King Ops, who, in turn, notified Thunderhead that their intelligence was on target.

The Colonel was elated.

"Okay Captain, get that sortie cleared to target, right now!"

The Captain called the Comm Center and gave them the authorization to put two F-4s over the Red Rock LZ and escort the crippled helicopter back.

Mustang flight received the clearance from Thunderhead to enter Cambodian air space. Their orders were clear. Drop ordinance and escort Casper Two Eight to base. The flight leader contacted Casper Two Eight and intercepted the crippled helicopter only fifteen miles from the target. The chopper pilot passed on the transponder frequency to locate the LZ.

One fighter maintained course over Two Eight while the other streaked toward the signal. The target was easily spotted, it was marked with two columns of smoke. He made his bombing run. As he pulled up, he saw the familiar wall of fire behind him. His second run would parallel the first to insure coverage of the total target. The signal was still being sent from the target area.

The pilot lined up the F-4 for his second run. He dropped the second napalm bomb from a significantly higher altitude. The signal stopped. "Bingo!" he said, as he turned to join his wingman.

The sound of the F-4 streaking over head startled me. I could see the fires in his exhaust, then an explosion and a wall of fire rose behind us seconds later. The F-4 dropped his second load and another wall of fire rose. We knew that the bombs were on target, but they missed their prey.

I looked at 'Pop' and asked, "Napalm?" He nodded acknowledgement and turned to 'My Way'. They just looked at one another. Our thoughts were the same. Insurance to the Nixon administration's policy, *"No one must ever know"*.

I heard 'Pop' say in a low voice, "The son of a bitch!"

Thunderhead received the call minutes after the bombing. "Target accomplished, transponder signal destroyed. No survivors." The Colonel returned to his office, secured his desk and safe. He then walked out of TF "Alpha". Mission accomplished. He was

thinking of his new star.

The truck ground to a halt in the middle of the road. 'The Kid' didn't pull off to the side, but then why should he? We had been traveling for over an hour without passing another vehicle.

"Hey 'My Way'," 'The Kid' called.

'My Way' hopped out and walked up to the window, "What's up?"

"Gas. We've only got a quarter tank. It won't last long."

"Drive till she dies." And with that, 'My Way' hopped back in the back and we were off.

"So, what's the plan?" I asked. Everyone looked at me. "What? Did I say something wrong?"

"Naw," 'Pop' said. "We're all thinking it. We just don't want to hear the answer."

"Well," 'My Way' began, "after careful planning, this is what 'Pop' and I came up with. We'll drive till we can't and then we'll walk."

I sat, looking at him. "Hell of a plan! Four years at West Point and that's what you learned? I'd get a better answer if I asked you 'How's the cow?!'" The rest of the Team laughed at the question asked of cadets at West Point by upper-classmen. The response is a memorized message about the cow's looks, use and demeanor. When 'My Way' didn't answer, I began saying, "moo". Soon, we were all "mooing" at 'My Way'. He sat smiling and shaking his head. Less than thirty minutes later, we were walking. The laughter was over.

'My Way' decided to keep to the road. We were well within the NVA occupied area. Dressed as sappers with Chicom weapons, at night we would easily pass off as the real thing. 'The Kid' was now on point in case we were challenged. His diction was faultless and his knowledge of the NVA structure along the Cambodian border, if the intelligence he was given was correct, should allow us to traverse the occupied area without problems. The night was black. I'd never been on a night mission in Southeast Asia. The visibility was about 20-25 feet. We walked single-file down the road. I noticed if I dallied at all, then 'My Way', who was in front of me, would turn grey and disappear.

"Damn 'Highway'," Pablo said, "get a stride and keep with it. Your gonna wear us out back here!"

Wear them out!? I thought. *They should try carrying this commo gear.* I had a rack on my back that had to weigh eighty pounds, and they were only packing satchels and ammo! Well, I guess the rockets and rocket launcher had to get to 'Flame' and 'Chief'.

But I was used to carrying a heavy load. In junior high school my mother decided that I needed to learn to play a musical instrument. Now, I already played a guitar, but I guess that didn't count. So, she required me to sign up for band. The instrument of choice was a trumpet. Our seventh grade band class had about thirty students in it and seventeen of us chose the trumpet. I wonder if Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass was around back then to influence our mothers decision as to what instrument we would play? Two weeks into band, the band teacher, Mr. Fendiesen asked who would like to volunteer

for a special brass instrument. I was about five feet tall and ninety pounds at the time, and I figured he was looking for someone to play the trombone. I really like the way the trombone could slide between notes. So I volunteered. He took me to the instrument room. We walked over to a big, silver funnel. He picked it up and handed it to me. It was about three feet in diameter. Then, he picked up a large circular piece of silver colored tubes with three valves. I followed him to the top row of the bandstand and watched as he assembled the mammoth instrument. He then told us the story of the man who invented the instrument, John Philip Sousa. I was the new sousaphone player - some people called it the tuba. It's weight was about 45 pounds and had a mouth piece as big as my face. For the next six years, I would carry the weight of a sousaphone on my shoulders, marching in parades miles long, football games, we even played at the Cotton Bowl.

So the weight and straps pulling on my shoulders from the commo gear gave me a sense of belonging. As crazy as it may sound to those of you who have never been away from familiar surroundings and in an actual combat situation, anything that reminds you of home, no matter how trivial it may sound, tends to comfort a young man or woman. It may be a bag of cookies from home, a hometown newspaper or even a feeling of *deja vu*, which sparks a memory of home. And that memory of home tends to soothe and settle the soul. And so it was, feeling the straps of the commo gear, pulling at my shoulders, and the added weight on my back pushing down on my knees. I thought of our high school theme song, "Dixie", chosen after the namesake of our school, Dixie Hollins. That helped me with a cadence to my walk to keep stride with the seasoned soldiers I was with. But I sure wished I was back in the land of cotton instead of the land of rice!

I wondered how far we had traveled and how far we would have to go until we could meet U.S. Forces. Then I wondered how in the hell 'My Way' planned on getting us out of the damned sapper uniforms! We had no watches, no maps, no idea where we were, but we did know that we were west of South Vietnam. We also knew that it was less than 200 miles to Saigon. *Not much knowledge for such an educated group of men*, I thought! We had been traveling for hours.

I really needed a break, but was afraid to say anything. I knew that the cover of darkness added to our ability to evade detection of our true identity. So, I said nothing. Finally 'My Way' called a break. He sent 'Snake' and 'Cowboy' into the bush to find a lager point. 'Cowboy' returned minutes later to lead us to our resting spot. The weight of the commo pack off of my shoulders caused blood to rush to places it hadn't been for hours. It felt great! Now I was real thirsty and hungry. But that wasn't in the cards. The Yards had poisoned the water, so we threw away the canteens. We didn't bother to pack any rations because of the promise of a rapid extraction. *How could our own military screw up this bad*, I asked myself. I was probably the only member of the team that didn't accept that we were what the administration considered a one-way mission. They not only had no intention of recovering Team Red Rock from Cambodia, but the Nixon administration had given orders to insure that the team didn't make it out! I would later learn from 'My Way' and 'Pop' why President Nixon, Mr. Kissinger, and General

Haig could not afford for the events of this mission to ever be known.

"My Way, vehicle coming." 'Haystack' called back to us. This was the only traffic we had encountered all night. 'Pop' and 'My Way' repositioned themselves close to the road so that they could see the truck pass going west toward where we had just been. They all saw the cargo. A platoon of NVA regulars. Probably being moved to a new location north. We had passed a road a couple of miles back which headed north.

'My Way' returned. "Okay men. Looks like we're in the thick of it. No one talks, no one laughs. We'll travel a little more tonight. We need about four hours - a couple before daybreak and a couple after. Then we'll move out. 'Highway', your gear needs to go before we break out in the morning. Make sure no one can use it! Any questions?"

"That's crazy, 'My Way'!" I said. "Why would we destroy the only way we have to get a rescue team in here to get us?"

"Because there is no one to rescue us. By now, as far as the military is concerned, Team Red Rock is a sapper unit trying to entice U.S. aircraft into a rescue mission and then shoot the rescue team down when they arrive. No one will answer. And, if they do, they'll probably send air in to annihilate us! So I've answered your question. Never, and I mean never, question me again, 'Highway'. Do you understand?"

"Shit!" I said, looking at the ground, both in submission and feeling defeated, as if there was no way out. "I'm sorry, 'My Way'." He didn't answer. He just moved over to the road. "Kid, point. Move out Red Rock!"

Traffic was picking up on the dirt road. 'My Way' took it as an indication that dawn was coming. We had traveled for what seemed forever, diving into the bush when a vehicle appeared. "Pablo, find a hole in the bush for us."

Pablo left at 'My Way's' orders as we settled into the foliage, just off the road side. Pablo had found a clearing about one hundred feet off the road and about two hundred feet in from a low, wet area. At night it was hard to tell whether it was a rice paddy or cane field of some sort. The ground was moist where we were, however. I laid my back on my commo gear, knowing that in a few hours it would be in pieces. "Now 'Highway'," 'Pop' said, referring to the gear. I wanted to ask why now instead of just before we go but thought better of it!

I dialed new frequencies in the windows, then I pulled each of the three radios out of the small rack and laid them on the ground. I smacked them with my rifle butt. The ground was so moist that the rotten leaves and branches gave way under the blows, which negated the full impact. 'Snake' brought one of his knives over and ripped the casings open, slamming the blade through the top of the radios. 'Pop' pitched a "whiskey Pete" to me. I piled them up and popped the top and stood back. The 3,000 degree grenade melted the pile of metal and plastic. Now I knew why now. The smoke from the grenade could be seen with first light. But now, only the glow of the whiskey pete (WP) could give up our position. But the Team gathered around the melting gear to block the glow. The gear was gone. And now the need for a commo man was also. I had nothing to offer the team. I felt as if I was a liability. I cowered against a tree, wondering what was next. 'My Way' shook me. With his finger on my mouth, telling me to move

quietly. Without looking around, I grabbed my satchel of grenades, ammo pouch and AK-47. I knelt behind 'My Way' as we crept through the woods. No sounds from the movement was being made. Ten to twenty minutes later we were clear. A patrol had passed on the road. We were paralleling the road but in the bush. Traffic was brisk on the road. We could hear the truck traffic, but were deep enough not to worry about any visual contact.

'The Kid' stopped. 'My Way' moved forward to scout the problem. "Rice paddy to road," 'The Kid' said, pointing at the large, open area in front of us. It was probably a mile to the other side and cover. The road was built between two large paddies. Our only sensible option was to go straight across the paddies. There was no traffic on the road.

"Let's go." 'My Way' ordered. 'The Kid' was out first. The rest followed, but instead of one behind the other, we moved in a column, side-by-side as if we were a NVA patrol. The eleven of us were spread across the paddies about the length of a football field. We began moving forward. 'The Kid' was closest to the road. 'Snake' was furthest from the road. The rest of us spaced ourselves in between. I was scared shitless! *This will never work!* We continued to move forward. The sound of a truck coming down the road slapped in my ears like a hammer hitting me. The troops in the back yelled at us. 'The Kid' yelled something back and the first few of the Team raised their rifles, signaling an acknowledgement. We continued across. The water was low. Just above the ankle. It was still the dry season. I could imagine what wet season would do to this place! More trucks and the same fanfare as before. *Heck, I thought. If it works, keep with it!* What a relief it was getting into the bush. But less than fifty yards later, we were back at an open field again. No water in this one. It looked like cane. We spread out and it began again. I wasn't as nervous this time. But that isn't to say I wasn't still scared out of my pants! The cane was knee high. *The light green color is really pretty in this place,* I thought. I looked toward the road and lifted my rifle at a truck of soldiers, teasing us because we were walking and they were riding. As I turned my head to the front, I saw a soldier come out of the tree line in front of us. It was about a quarter mile away. Then another, and another until they formed a sweeping line that was longer than ours. 'The Kid' began an angle movement which would move us to the left of the patrol in front of us. We moved even farther left, leaving a substantial gap between 'The Kid' and the Team. Hoping that the enemy platoon would not realize that we weren't Vietnamese. The Yard was with 'The Kid', his hands tied behind his back. Yards and Vietnamese were enemies from birth, so this would add credibility to our patrol. And 'My Way' hoped that the enemy would concentrate on taunting the Yard and allow the rest of the Team past, unnoticed. It worked. *Damn those guys are great strategists,* I thought. 'My Way' decided to keep heading to the left, deeper into the bush and away from the heavily patrolled road. Our angle kept increasing, and by the time we were astride the NVA platoon, 'The Kid' was fifty yards from them. We then turned north to stay away from the road. Any confrontation with the enemy needed to be deep in the bush where the Green Beret are on their own terms. I thought about my childhood hero, "Swamp Fox". I could see how he used swamps as his greatest ally. Deep in the

bush, we were invisible to the enemy, moving unchallenged through the thicket. We continued for about two hours past dusk. Then we stopped for our four hours sleep. I was beat!

"Highway' first hour, 'Snake', 'Pop', and 'Chief', the rest of you down."

I took my position to the east side of the area. I wondered how in the world I would tell when an hour was up? To me, every sixty seconds seemed like an hour! I decided I'd stay watch until I started nodding out. A time passed as I scanned the jungle. The sounds of nocturnal life were everywhere. I wondered if a three-step would visit us. Something was moving behind me. I felt 'Snake's' hand on my shoulder.

"Why didn't you get me?"

"Hell, 'Snake'," I said, looking at my wrist and tapping it, "I guess my watch stopped!" I shuffled over to 'Snake's' spot and sacked out.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Day three of Operation Red Rock began slowly. 'Pop' and 'Chief' had gone hunting. They came back with some water and bananas. I was glad it was dark. I really didn't want to see the color of the water. The chlorinating tablet made the water taste awful. But, at least the bacteria wouldn't have a chance to wreak havoc on our bodies. The bananas were bitter. I assumed that they were pretty green. But it sure helped fill the deep void in my stomach. I wondered if we had just eaten dinner or breakfast! Team Red Rock was back on the move - moving closer to home and safety, and a hot meal! We moved for two hours and rested fifteen minutes, or so we estimated. We continued through the morning. Moving ever closer to our destination. I wondered how far we had traveled. I remembered when I was in ninth grade, my Uncle Charles had bet that they could walk from St. Petersburg to Weeki Wachee Springs, a distance of about eighty miles in eighteen hours. They were off early Saturday morning and completed their journey early. We had from two to three times as far to go but it shouldn't take more than three days! I figured that we were about two-thirds of the way home!

My daydreams were interrupted by a signal from 'Chief'. He had been on point all night. Another open field. 'My Way' decided to travel in file rather than the column formation we had used during daylight. The NVA didn't patrol this area at night. They were primarily concerned with day movement of supplies. The NVA in Cambodia consisted primarily of recuperating units back across the border to rest and re-supply for the next onslaught. There were also logistical support personnel in this AO. So, any troop movement at night was considered by the NVA as suspicious. Lights flickered to the north across the open field we were crossing. It was either a village or military encampment. Either way, it could mean trouble. We continued to file across the open area toward the tree line. A voice called out from ahead. 'The Kid' was two men back. He answered. The NVA soldier continued to speak to 'The Kid'. As the soldier spoke, 'The Kid' and 'Snake' moved toward him. The file continued forward, beginning to form into a column away from the village. We flanked to the right of 'The Kid' and 'Snake'. As 'The Kid' met up with the NVA soldier, he offered him a smoke, a diversion set to keep the soldier from studying the other sapper walking up behind 'The Kid'. As the NVA soldier accepted the cigarette, and 'The Kid' lit a match, 'Snake' moved quickly and quietly opening the soldiers' throat so a sound couldn't escape, softly and quietly laying the dead soldier to the ground.

We continued forward, pulling back into a file. In the bush, another voice sounded. 'The Kid' and his assassin moved quickly to him. The deadly cigarettes took another life. We continued through the jungle with no other challenges from the area around the village. These were obviously outposts. The village was probably a military encampment. The guards were too lax in their duties, and for that they died. Morning would bring trouble. We needed to move quickly out of this area. There would be no rest stops. Pablo took the lead and quickened the steps. It would be far too dangerous for the NVA to put booby traps in their resupply zone, so we felt relatively safe moving at a quickened pace.

Dawn was breaking. 'My Way' decided that we needed our strength as we broke in a new day. The water and bananas were passed around. 'The Kid' and the Yard would keep their eyes out for other edibles for this evenings' meal.

I slept hard. 'Pop' shook me. I was sweating from the wet, hot air. It was going to be a steamer. It couldn't have been past 7:00a.m. when we started to move again. As we moved through the jungled areas, we were fairly safe. The thick covering provided shielding from any patrols in the area. Day movement was particularly slower due to the visual threat. The Yard and 'The Kid' stopped on several occasions, picking fruit or digging something. I assumed it was wild yams. They were pretty abundant in the area. Dinner would be good! Our Yard was good at putting his hands behind his back as if he was bound at the sight of any NVA patrols.

'Haystack' had point. He stopped us at the edge of the jungle. We looked out across the rice paddy. It was busy with villagers, bent over planting the small starter plants. At second glance, I saw why 'Haystack' had signaled. An NVA patrol in column checking everyone for weapons in the field. A gunshot rang out as a villager fell to the ground. We remained hidden. Taking a column formation, still hidden by the jungle. I realized that I hadn't fired the AK-47 yet! I looked it over to insure I was ready. And, I was. Another gunshot, this time much closer. The soldier bent next to the body and picked up a rifle out of the water next to the dead villager. It seemed to be an old M-1, World War II vintage rifle. Probably used by the villagers to fend off a tiger or snake. At the time the NVA were finding the weapons, it was obvious that these villagers were not a threat to the communist soldiers. They just enjoyed murdering. The platoon continued toward the forest, directly into our position. The first soldier entered next to 'Chief'. He let an arrow fly out of his crossbow, directly into the NVA's ear. Without a sound, the NVA soldier fell to the ground. The rest of the dead soldier's platoon was within ten yards of the bush. 'My Way' fired first, toward the radio man. The body fell, stumbling back to the ground. The single burst had entered the soldier in the chest, and exited his back through the radio set. Communication was severed for the doomed soldier. 'My Way's' shot was the signal to open fire. I pulled my trigger and kept it pulled. My knuckles were white, I held the trigger so tight. Pap, pap, pap, pap, pap. The rifle kept firing. I hit the closest one to me, then turned my barrel toward another soldier who was bringing his rifle up to fire. He flew backwards. I emptied my magazine and quickly reloaded. The fire fight was over without a single shot from the NVA platoon.

"Get their ammo!" was all 'My Way' said as we moved out. Several of the NVA hadn't died, but were definitely on a good course to that end. As I walked up to take an ammo belt from one of the soldiers carrying an AK, my eyes met his. I caught 'Haystack' thrusting a knife in the heart of the one next to me. I drew my knife and turned it into the chest of the moaning soldier. There was surprise in his eyes as I drew upon him. I had forgotten how we were dressed. We definitely weren't fighting under the Marques of Queensberry Rules here. Any thing goes! His body shook under my hand. The twitching stopped and I withdrew my knife. I wiped the blood on his uniform and unhooked his ammo belt. I put it on and continued to the next soldier.

The Cambodian villagers stood and watched the conflict in complete confusion. Two communist platoons fighting each other. How crazy these communists were, the Chief must have been thinking. We walked past the villagers without a word. As a wave of death, we disappeared into the jungle. There would be trouble for those villagers. When the bodies of the dead soldiers were discovered the village may be torched by the communists. As I looked back, I saw the villagers chopping down at the dead soldiers with their machetes. I stopped and asked 'My Way', "Why? Did they hate the soldiers that much?"

'My Way' shook his head and simply stated, "They're chopping up the bodies to bury them across the paddies. That way their bodies won't be found and the village will be safe. We left some AK's and ammo for them. That way, the Chicons will assume they are friendly. Those American weapons they had will get them killed, as you saw."

What a miserable war, I thought as we continued. You just don't know who to trust! Or what anyone's next move will be. Hell, we can't trust our own government! This is *so* confusing! *But someday, somehow, someone will know what went on over here*, I thought as we moved back in file to traverse the thickets. I dropped the partially expended third magazine and reloaded with a fresh load.

We moved slowly eastward, closer to home, closer to the safe haven called South Vietnam. It was finally time to rest. 'My Way' sat next to me and 'Pop'. He pulled some papers out of his shirt. I watched as he retrieved a map! The commo man is normally posted with the platoon leader. So, when 'My Way' shot the commo man, he was quite sure who their leader was. And he was dead on! The map showed the whole AO (area of operation). Now, we had to figure out what the hell it said!

"Kid!" I called and pointed to 'My Way's' map. It was written in Chinese! 'The Kid' labored with the names and markings hand-written on the map. It was very crude, not at all like the tactical terrain maps we were used to. We were camped at the edge of another paddy. We maintained our cover just inside the thicket. 'Bagman' was on point, just waiting for the signal to continue. 'The Kid' studied the map to no avail. But, now that we had it, we would be more conscious of the terrain in order to position ourselves on the map.

'The Kid', 'My Way', and 'Pop' studied the features north of the road we thought was to our south. They estimated that we were within fifteen miles of the South Vietnam border. But, where exactly presented a problem because large enemy supply areas lay in front of us. That meant patrols and security! "Move out!" 'My Way' commanded, keeping me behind him. "Easy on that trigger Bull Dog. You're gonna break it," he said smiling.

"Highway'," I said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he returned.

I felt better hearing his pun. It meant that he felt better about our position, I think!

'Bagman' led us out into the paddy. We moved to a column. The black smoke trail of a flight of F-4's appeared high in the sky. The F-4's were east of us, flying in a northwest direction. I counted four. They flew northwest, then turned left and headed

south, toward our position. We continued across the two miles of open fields. I pointed to my find and 'My Way' acknowledged.

The fighters continued toward us, turning slightly east, putting their course about a mile in front of us. We were about half way across the large open paddies when the sounds of anti-aircraft artillery met us. The resounding booms and plumes of smoke from the barrels were straight ahead. The tracers of large calibre machine guns from six different locations shot up from the ground toward the fighters. Then the sound reached us. We instinctively hit the deck! *Not good*, I thought. If we're them, they wouldn't have taken cover like that, so why did we?

'My Way' stood up and ordered us on, pulling out the map. "That triple 'A' ought to be on here," he said as 'Pop' joined him on the map.

"Just stand and watch," he said to us as he and 'Pop' attempted to locate the position on the map.

"Yep," 'Pop' said, "that's got to be it. It's only a battery."

"We've still got some satchels. Could probably do 'em," 'My Way' said. "'Cowboy', 'Chief', flank quarter mile to the left. 'Haystack', you and 'Flame' take two hundred yards," he continued, pointing to the right flank. "'Bagman', split the difference," he said, pointing right. Pablo, split left. We're gonna walk right in like we own the place and take 'em out. Everyone take two satchels," he said, sharing the explosions. "Gun emplacements are outside and the artillery will be in the center. The rest of you flank to my right. Let's go. There should be about thirty men at that triple 'A' sight, so keep steady."

"That's not fair," Pablo complained. "that only gives me four to do!"

"Where the hell did you go to school?" 'My Way' asked. "Four each would be forty-eight. I said thirty!"

"Well, we actually get two-and-a-half each but I figure 'Highway' there will be shooting his half man first, and put two magazines in his half-man. I figure while he's doing that, I'll get his other two!"

"Get outta here!" I said. "I don't even need your crap right now, asshole," I said, smiling. (I may have been smiling, but inside I was shaking.) The fighters continued to tease the AAA sight, circling it high above. The AAA continued to blast at the F-4 Phantoms. We moved quickly, no caution at all.

The soldiers manning the battery were busy with the F-4's. With all of the emplacements marked by skyward ordinance, we were able to attack each gun directly and accurately. As we moved into the low thicket, 'My Way' signaled me to take the machine gun to my left. The large wheel mounted machine gun was pointed skyward. Four legs were set out like a backhoe, keeping the gun in place. Four soldiers were working with the ammo and movement of the gun as it pivoted in place, adjusting toward the F-4's. I slapped the satchel and threw it toward the large gun. It fell short. I hit the ground and pulled out three grenades. Boom! The explosion spread fire everywhere. I pulled the first pin, and threw it. I heard the clank of metal as it hit the gun and fell to the ground. It exploded. I threw one farther, going over the gun. The two explosions were followed by several secondary explosions. I moved quickly toward 'My Way'. He

and 'Pop' were splitting the middle of the gun placements to get to the larger artillery piece. More explosions to my right and left. The other team members were dealing death to the enemy. 'Pop' and 'My Way' were twenty yards from the large four barrel piece of artillery. Boom! Boom! Boom! It kept on as the soldier continued to supply ammo to the large guns. It was so loud that the soldiers, wearing ear plugs, were unable to hear the smaller gun emplacement being destroyed.

I saw two satchels fly toward the large gun. I pulled a grenade and threw it toward the ammo dump in back of the weapon. 'Pop' and 'My Way' pulled back to me as we waited. The shock wave from the explosions shook the earth as we lay, covering our heads.

I always wondered what the hell my dog, Fuzzy, would do if he ever caught the car he was always chasing. Now I knew. I was the dog that caught that car! And my teeth were stuck firmly in the tire, slamming me to the ground with every revolution.

"Sweep right," was 'My Way's' command before we went in. So, I got up and started moving to the right. NVA's were moving, trying to recover. I heard more explosions. I felt the heat in my face. I heard rifle fire. I began firing as I moved. 'My Way' and 'Pop' flanked me to the left. Every movement received rounds from my AK. I saw the rounds tear through the door of a truck, almost like they were exploding into the metal. What a devastating weapon. My finger was still down on the trigger, but nothing was happening. I dropped the used magazine and replaced it with a new one, rechambered a round and started again. A truck was backing out. I turned toward it and let a burst loose toward it. The rounds started exploding into the radiator and walked up the hood to the windshield where the driver was. The truck veered left into a tree and stopped. No one moved in the truck. We continued sweeping through the site. 'Pop' threw two grenades into a revetment area. A body flew backwards, twisting to the ground. We continued to sweep.

The explosions on the ground caught the attention of the flight commander. The F-4's were keeping out of range of the AAA while they mapped their position for a not so distant offensive. Lam Son 719 would include an aerial sweep of known AAA positions within ten miles of the South Vietnam/Cambodian border. They were in luck. This one was only four miles inside Cambodia. The main thrust of the offensive, however, would be into Laos in an attempt to cut supplies being brought from China and North Vietnam to the communist troops in South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Min trail.

"Ghost Rider, this is lead. Follow me boys," the Flight Commander said as he broke radio silence. The F-4 rolled left and dove toward the billowing smoke. *They must have had a misfire he thought, so they may as well take advantage of the situation.* On the first strafing run, flight leads' canons fell short of the target. But number two was dead on. The detection of movement on the ground is difficult at the fighters strafing speed, but the pilot thought he saw the enemy scrambling to get away. Number three followed dropping a CBU "Eat shit and die, commies!" the excited pilot exclaimed over his radio as he pulled out of his run to rendezvous with one and two. Number four decided on a well placed rocket. On target. The explosion from his rocket was dead in the center of all the smoke caused by the misfired AAA. The flight circled high above

admiring their work.

The sound of the Phantoms' canons blaring was deafening. The ground all around us was flying into the air. "In coming!" 'Pop' yelled. We began running out of the battery. The F-4 was so low that I thought the exhaust from his jets would burn me. The roar of the engine's were deafening one hundred feet above me. As his nose tipped up and he kicked in his afterburners, I kept running.

"Go, go, go!" 'Pop' yelled.

There was no looking around. That was only the first run. There were four up there somewhere. The second came from a different direction, strafing on target. We were about fifty yards out of the battery when the roar of the third Phantom was followed by a large explosion and a series of explosions.

"CBU! Down!" 'My Way' yelled. We laid flat on the ground, hoping that he was on target and not long! The fourth must have fired a rocket. We never heard him, but the rockets were north to center target, toward 'Cowboy' and 'Chief'.

Our rendezvous point was three hundred yards east of the target. We arrive unscathed. I laid behind a log on the ground, not caring that downed logs were one of the favorite hiding places for the Three-Step. I didn't have any steps left so I renamed him a 'no step'! Pablo arrived next, then 'Flame' and 'Bagman', 'Haystack', 'The Kid', 'Snake', and 'Cowboy'.

"Chief?" 'Pop' asked 'Cowboy', "CBU" he said, shaking his head. 'Cowboy' had a bloody hand over his left side. 'Pop' moved in and opened his shirt.

"It's clean," he said. The shrapnel made a clean tear on his side, in and out. "Just gonna bleed a little," 'Pop' said as he cut a piece of cloth off his shirt and put it against the wound. He took a web belt and tightened it on the bandage. "Don't let it slip."

'Cowboy' nodded, wincing as 'Pop' tightened the belt. 'Pop' looked at 'My Way', "We'll leave him," referring to 'Chief'. And with that said, 'My Way' ordered 'Snake' on point. We filed out through the jungle, moving closer to home. I looked around Team Red Rock, ten men remained in tattered sapper garb. Faces smudged with carbon, dirt, and dried blood. The first paddy we came to, we took turns splashing the rancid water on our faces, washing the signs of battle off our faces. The smell of dried blood from our victims was still pasted in my nostrils with the smell of cordite. Patches of darker spots were on my chest and left leg. Probably spattered onto me from one of the explosions. We continued across the paddy. I checked my weapon, only to find it was empty. I reached for a magazine and found I was out. I called over to 'My Way', "I'm out of ammo."

"It's no wonder," 'Haystack' said. "Short bursts, Highway," 'My Way' said as he reached behind in a satchel to get a few magazines for me. He threw me three, just as a NVA platoon burst out of the tree line ahead of us. They were moving quickly toward the billowing smoke behind us. Unfortunately we were in their direct path. Their platoon leader was saying something and pointing to the smoke. We stopped and 'The Kid' moved forward, yelling back at the enemy. The enemy platoon kept moving closer. 'The Kid' was obviously trying to dissuade them from the AO. But the young officer would not hear of it. I chambered a round, in anticipation of what was to come. 'The Kid'

moved past the enemy platoon. We began moving forward. When all of a sudden 'The Kid' fell to the ground. Team Red Rock spun their weapons to point and began firing on the platoon. On fully automatic, the enemy platoon was swept off their feet in seconds. The follow-on job of insuring no one talked about their assassins was done quickly and silently. The screams of our victims quickly subsided. I had one clip left. I loaded it and tried to chamber a round. there would be more soon, I thought as we moved forward. But the rounds would not chamber. The receiver was warped from the heat, 'My Way' said as he looked at it. 'Cowboy' was moving slow, still, due to his wound and 'Flame' had taken a round directly in the chest. 'Haystack' carried 'Flame's body toward the tree line to leave him covered.

"How's the ammo?" 'My Way' asked. Between the ten of us, we had fifteen magazines. that wouldn't last long. But none of the enemy platoon was carrying an AK-47. We continued toward the tree line.

I felt naked with a bad weapon.

"Keep it till we can get another," he said.

"I'll get one of those," I said to 'My Way', pointing thirty-five yards behind us.

"Hurry!" 'My Way' said as they continued forward.

I turned and ran toward the dead NVA platoon. As I was running through the knee-high cane, I didn't see 'Pop' signal the team down. I picked up the heavy wood-stocked weapon and pulled the ammo pouch from the dead soldier. As I stood and turned, Red Rock was gone! Where the hell were they? My heart jumped. Shit! I moved quickly toward their last position, about twenty-five yards short of the trees. As I moved forward, another enemy platoon came out of the trees, firing.

"Drop it and raise your hands, and drop when I say 'now'", I heard 'My Way' say quietly. I looked down. He was laying in the cane, ten yards in front of me. I raised my hands and dropped the weapon. I noticed that these soldiers were much better equipped, carrying Chinese rocket launchers and AK's. The enemy platoon came closer, weapons trained on me. As the platoon began coming toward me, 'Bagman', who was on the right flank, almost even with 'Pop' but beyond the enemy's column, pulled the pin on a grenade and threw it behind them. The explosion caused them to turn and kneel. "Now!" I heard 'My Way' say. I hit the dirt. Gunfire ensued. A satchel was next, flying toward the unsuspecting soldiers. The blast spread napalm along the column. Screams of pain filled the air. We kept firing at the platoon. Return fire was minimal, but enough to wound 'The Kid' in his right thigh.

We moved forward cautiously. The cane hid the soldiers from a clear, visual scan. 'My Way' motioned 'Bagman' to flank in from the right and 'Haystack' in from the left. The two moved silently as we covered with sporadic gunfire. 'Haystack' fired a round down at an enemy soldier and motioned us in. We drew closer. Pablo offered 'The Kid' a shoulder to hang onto. Just as 'The Kid' stood, an NVA soldier further back in the cane field fired through the cane and hit the Kid in the stomach. The impact lifted him and threw him backwards to the ground. 'Pop' blasted the gook before he could get another shot off, but one was enough, our interpreter was gone.

We exchanged weapons and ammo with the dead soldiers. Each of us had ten

magazines and fresh weapons. We picked up our new arms and headed for the bush.

The Yard picked up 'The Kid' to carry him to the jungle to leave him. 'Pop' pulled a packet out of a satchel and squeezed the yellow gel over 'Flame's face and body. We filed away with 'Snake' on point. The snap of the W.P. grenade behind us needed no explanation. We continued through the jungle.

Ever alert, moving closer to home. 'My Way' took a quick look at his team. Seven healthy, one wounded, and one Yard. It was late afternoon. My eyes were burning. My muscles were cramped and my head throbbed with pain every time my heart beat. I hoped we could stop soon. 'My Way' kept us at a quickened rate to get us away from the trouble we left behind. The jungle closed in around us quickly. We adjusted to the north to avoid any patrols that might be coming to investigate the explosions and rifle fire. In the midst of the jungle, seeing the fatigue on our faces, 'Pop' halted us and told us to spread out and take fifteen. 'Pop' went to 'My Way', and they took out the map. The team leaders plotted what they thought would be the route of least resistance across the border and into a firebase. They decided to wait until dark and move under nights cover.

"Settle in. We're here till dark," 'My Way' said.

What a relief! I laid back flat on the ground and closed my eyes. 'Snake' remained at point. 'Haystack' took the rear as we rested. There would be no sleep though. I could only close my weary eyes. I couldn't rest them. The scenes of the day flashed on my eyelids like a drive-in movie. I wished it was a dream. I opened my eyes, hoping to see the ceiling in my bedroom, but all I saw was a blurry jungle. A face appeared between my eyes and the tops of the trees. It was 'Pop'.

"Trouble." That's all he needed to say. I rolled to my stomach as he slid toward Pablo to deliver the message. Two Soviet built tanks were working through the jungle ahead. They would have a company of soldiers with them. If I remembered correctly, that meant about sixty to eighty troops. Shit! 'Haystack' picked up the rocket launcher. 'Bagman' had picked up the rocket satchel when 'Flame' was killed. He rolled toward 'Haystack' with the rockets.

"Hit and north fifty meters - Hit and north fifty meters," 'My Way' called to us. That meant that we were to open fire, then move north fifty meters. The sound of the tank knocking over the brush in the jungle was louder and clearer. Both tanks were in sight, with foot soldiers behind. 'Haystack' sighted in the first tank. He fired. A 'Flame' shot out of the rear of the tube, just past my feet. The rocket propelled directly to the base of the turret. The impact stopped the mechanical giant in place. When the dirt and smoke cleared, the turret was cocked to the right, obviously unable to function. The next rocket fired to the right and farther back. The explosion told us it was another hit. The front of the second tank lifted and slammed back to the ground. It began to turn to the right. Another rocket was fired toward the machine, now broadside to us. The rocket hit the turret. This must have been armor piercing. The explosion on the outside was followed by secondary explosions and a ball of fire spun into the air. The launcher fired again at the first tank. The explosion was in the area of the tracts. The secondary explosions told us that the ammo inside the tank exploded. We moved quickly to the

right, leaving the launcher behind. It wasn't any use without more rockets. We waited. The troops were advancing toward our old position. We shifted right fifty meters again. We waited. There were more ground troops to our left. We shifted right again. Gunfire followed us this time. We disappeared quickly in the dense jungle. "Don't stop!" I said to myself. 'Pop' was on point. He kept us moving through the jungle. Only an occasional shot was fired behind us. We moved toward the east a little, trying to advance around the enemy troops. Bullets started popping through the trees all around us. Another tank was coming up behind us. 'Pop' stopped short of a clearing filled with a NVA encampment. The tank had us in its sights but it didn't fire! Why? Because of the compound!

We moved to the east, around the camp. Another tank was moving toward us from that direction. Bullets started popping around us again. We hit the jungle floor. The bullets were being fired from behind the tank. 'Haystack' slapped a satchel and threw it toward the tank behind us. The explosion caused the ground troops to hit the jungle floor just long enough for us to disappear into the jungle again. But there was still a tank in front of us. 'Pop' slapped a pack and heaved it into the encampment and to our rear. The explosion diverted the NVA's toward the explosion. We took out at a run through the jungle to the east. The rifle fire was farther behind now. We had moved to the east side of the compound. It was quite large. I saw a fuel depot. A compound of tanks, a motor-pool of all kinds of trucks. I looked back and saw the Yard at the rear of the team, trying to keep up. The little guy was doing a damned good job, too. But he didn't have any weapons with him! We did. The search was going on behind us on the other side of the compound. The troop movement on the compound was away from our position. 'Pop' kept going. *Feet don't fail me now!*, is all I could think.

My chest was heaving with pain as I tried to breathe. The taste of ammonia was heavy in my nostrils and throat. I used to get this taste when I ran the 880 in track, usually toward the end of the run, around the 660 mark. But I guarantee we passed the 880 mark long ago! We kept moving and not at a walk. The run was our only mode! I thought of the first rabbit I ever shot with my 410 gauge shotgun. The rabbit was running, zigging and zagging as he sped away. But I kept steady on him and waited till the right moment and "Blam! I popped him in the ass!" I yelled toward my dad and Uncle Claude who took me quail hunting with them on occasion. The difference between hunting and war was very basic. The rabbit didn't have a gun! So there was rarely time to sight down and fire in your own time! And I was sure thankful because all they could have gotten on this jack rabbit was a piece of my ass! I was ziggin' and zaggin' with my head at my waist level!

'Pop' stopped. Everyone bent over, gasping for air. We stood about sixty seconds and then 'Pop' sat. We followed his lead. "Three minutes," 'My Way' said. Three minutes! Hell! It'll take that long to stand! I was very dizzy! I wished I'd taken physical training a little more serious in Tech School and drank less beer in the Nam!

"Okay! Up!"

That was the fastest three minutes of my life. The run continued. The jungle would be swarming soon. I didn't know whether these suckers had helicopters, but if they

did, they'd sure be on us soon, too! An enemy platoon was ahead of us in a paddy. They were walking perpendicular to us from right to left. We stopped and took cover. How the hell could 'Pop' run and look at the same time I wondered. I sure did admire him. He was always so cool under duress.

"Bull Dog," he said one day when I asked what rattled him. "I guess politicians, police, and teachers."

"Why?" I asked. "Their on our side!"

"Well, they may be on our side in this war, but back home they are the biggest source of problems we have. Let me explain. Police, because they're always right, and you have no recourse. Politicians because they change the definition of right so it suits their cause or stand. And teachers because their entrusted with the education of our kids. I don't mean just schooling, but socially also. And most of 'em don't have a clue what the world is really like. Look at a typical life. Born - kindy-garden, elementary, junior high, high school, college, professional education. Let's talk about programming! And the bad thing is, you can't shoot any of 'em. No recourse! That's what rattles me most. At least out here you have a fighting chance. I wonder what the world will be like in twenty-five or thirty years when *my* kids are *my* age! It sure was true, I thought as I pondered his answer that day in the hootch. The hootch! Oh what I would give to sleep in that hard-ass cot with the air mattress! By morning the air would all leak out but that'd be okay right now! Let 'em leak! Man, those guys are sure taking their time, I thought as I looked toward 'Pop' for a signal. Nothing yet! A second column passed us, gong the same direction, then a third. But they stopped. An officer was shouting orders to them. They began toward us in file. I was already locked and loaded, so I rolled to my stomach and waited. Twenty-five yards, twenty yards. I saw 'Pop' pull out a grenade. 'Haystack' did the same. Fifteen yards. Then they stopped, turned north and swept as a column. It was then that I saw it. I got 'My Way's' attention and pointed further north in the rice paddy. An OD green parachute was flapping in the wind on the ground. His eyes brightened in acknowledgement. A pilot was down somewhere in the area. Another column of enemy soldiers passed close to us. They were prepared to sweep the jungle! We stayed at the ready. Any second now, then rifle fire to the north. The sound of choppers and rocket fire. Machine guns. Door guns. "Cobras!" The enemy troops moved out quickly toward the action. The troops were about one-quarter mile away when we crossed the paddy. A good fire-fight was ensuing to the north. The US gunships were determined to clear an LZ for the dustoff helicopter to come in and pick up the downed airman. We had to be close if US Army choppers were working the area! The tree line was only fifty yards away. We filed across with about ten yards between us. As 'Pop' got within ten yards of the tree line, a young NVA officer stepped out and called him over. It was turning to dusk and the shadows were long as the sun began setting behind us. More troops came out of the jungle behind the young officer. 'Pop' turned and signaled us to spread in a column, ignoring the NVA's remarks - whatever they were. Sappers were pretty independent so quite often they would ignore a young officer and carry on with whatever they were doing. As we spread out in a column, the officer advanced on 'Pop'. His back was to the soldier. Had he seen the knife in 'Pop's' hand,

he never would have touched 'Pop' on the shoulder. As his hand touched Pop's shoulder, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Staff Sergeant spun and opened the communist soldier's torso from his lower stomach to his lower chest. The other soldiers in his command had just sat at the edge of the tree line to wash up a few at a time in the almost dry paddy. 'My Way' fired first, hitting a NVA in the head, only thirty feet away. The rest of us fired in suit. We moved forward in rapid fire, moving down the platoon. Suddenly, return fire came from the jungle behind the dead platoon. We hit the bank at the edge of the jungle. I rolled the first soldier that 'My Way' shot on his side in front of me. Only a bloody stub remained on his shoulders. The smell of warm blood hit my nostrils, making them flare. I returned fire somewhere in the jungle. I pulled out a grenade and heaved it as hard as I could. The explosion wasn't followed by wails as a hit usually was. Mud starting popping up, and a popping sound from bullets hitting around us caused me to look to the right. Another platoon of soldiers was firing at us from about one hundred yards. 'Haystack' spun his weapon toward them, holding the trigger in full automatic, causing the soldiers to hit the deck. 'My Way' was firing to our left. I kept firing forward until I was out of ammo. I looked in the grenade pouch. I had three left, so I pulled them out and heaved them into the forest. "I'm dry!" I yelled.

"Me too!" 'Haystack' called back. One at a time, our AK's fell silent. 'My Way' looked behind us and two tanks were moving in, less than two hundred yards away.

"That's it men. We can't even go out guns blaring," he said as the soldiers on the tanks began moving in. "Stand up," he said. I was sick! I didn't think my legs could hold me, they were so shaky! The team stood up, one by one, hands raised. 'My Way', 'Pop', 'Snake', 'Cowboy', me, 'Haystack', 'Bagman', Pablo, and last was the Yard. We heard the battle to the north continue. If only they would fly over here, I hoped as our captors approached, barrels of their deadly AK's pointed directly at us.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The NVA soldiers moved quickly to disarm us. After seeing the grenade and plastique satchels, they began stripping us of our clothing. This wasn't done at request. Two held each of us while another cut the sapper uniforms from our bodies. 'Snake' had three knives taped to his legs, 'Flame' had one and Pablo had a small calibre pistol and one of the special scalpels fashioned by him and 'Sawbones'. There was nothing left on our bodies. We were completely naked. This served three purposes: it humbled you to your captor, leaving you feeling completely vulnerable; it insured them that we had no weapons hidden in our boots or under clothing somewhere; and it provided a new pair of boots to eight NVA soldiers. Our hands were bound tightly behind us with a rough hemp material. We were lined up and an NVA officer walked up to the column of his prize! Nine prisoners. But confusion was in his face. Who were these rogue assassins that killed twenty seven of this troops in this rice patty? He walked up to 'Pop', since 'Pop' looked the oldest in the group. He spoke directly in his face in Vietnamese. 'Pop' didn't answer. He stood and stared at the officer. The officer pulled out a pistol and threatened 'Pop' with it, yelling and shaking it at him. 'Pop' stood, unimpressed with the NVA officer's threats. The officer struck 'Pop' on the side of his head with the pistol. 'Pop's' legs buckled, but he maintained his balance and recovered to a full stand. He bent forward as if to fall. The NVA officer was pleased with his new found strength. He stood smiling and talking to another officer next to him, obviously a subordinate the way he was catering to the serious officer. The second officer yanked the St. Christopher medal from My Way's neck and held it up like a war prize for the rest to see. He said something, and the group laughed.

All of a sudden, 'Pop' spun around and a foot flew through the air, hitting the NVA officer on the side of the face with full force. The blow from 'Pop's' powerful leg twisted the head of the officer back, and to the left. The crunching sound of the neck breaking and the blank stare of the NVA told me our NVA captors had a new leader. The officer stumbled toward me and fell limp to the ground. A rifle butt struck 'Pop' from behind. Pablo quickly struck a blow to the chest area of a soldier in front of him, throwing the soldier backwards. The soldier landed on his back, unconscious. Pablo received a quick blow to his head with the butt of an AK. He and 'Pop' were lying on the ground, not moving. Blood was coming out of Pablo's head and a large meaty gash was pumping out the thick, red liquid. The rest of us were unable to follow their lead. We had rifles sticking in our backs. Not that I could do anything! The second in command gave an order and the soldier picked up Pablo and 'Pop'. We were motioned toward the south. Walking barefoot in the field was difficult. The small rocks and old shoots cut earlier in the year stuck into our feet. We walked about a mile until we came to a road between the fields. A cargo truck was waiting. As we lined up to get on the truck, we were all grabbed by two soldiers. The officer ripped out an order and a soldier walked up to me and slammed his rifle butt down on my right foot. The break was immediate. The pain shot through my body and caused my eyes to roll back. I was dizzy. I wanted to grab my foot to try and comfort it, but the bindings wouldn't allow it. The soldiers picked me up and threw me on top of 'Pop' and Pablo. I rolled to the side

of my friends. The rest of the team received the same except Pablo and 'Pop'. They were thrown on to the bed of the truck before the order to break our feet was given. It was an insurance policy against escape, and it was effective. A nausea I had never experienced filled my body. I tried to throw up but we hadn't had enough food or water to allow anything up. My stomach wretched with dry heaves. There was blood in my mouth. When I was thrown into the bed of the truck, I bit my cheek as my head slammed into the cargo bed. Four soldiers climbed inside the cargo bed with us as the truck turned around and headed west. We turned north only a few minutes later. The truck ground to a halt in the large compound we had passed earlier. We were picked up like pigs and thrown to the ground. The air in my lungs and stomach was knocked out of my body as I fell on 'Haystack'. I drew my legs up to my chest and laid on my back, hands tied behind me, trying to get air. I couldn't breathe. I rolled from side to side. I couldn't breathe. I was dying. Everything got hazy, then dark. I was suffocating. I couldn't breathe!

Richard Milhous Nixon, the President of the United States stood behind his desk, face reddened. His fist slamming on the antique desk of the President's, "What the ----- do you mean no one knows whether their dead or not! My instructions to those assholes were explicit! No one can ever know! Do you know what that means?! I'll spell it out! The only way they can't talk is if they're dead! You've got the whole damn Department of Defense, the CIA, and whatever else you need to be sure these men don't come back! Don't you realize what's at stake here?" Nixon asked as he came around the desk to confront General Alexander Haig. "Well, I'll spell that out too, chrissakes, Alex. If word gets out to our allies that this administration will double cross our friends, we're dead in the water! We've just gotten started here and with any luck, we'll be here for six more years. And for God's sakes, make sure Colby understands!"

The condescending tone that the President was using toward the General was tearing at Haig's insides. With a clenched and tightening jaw, Haig stood to confront this asshole.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Dr. Kissinger said, trying to settle the two down. "Mr. President, no one said that Red Rock had escaped our formidable arms. We've had several back-up plans to insure the ill fate of your team of assassins! They performed gallantly. Your plan has already turned Lon Nol to us for assistance. We already have our new air force on the ground in Phnom Penh. In February we launch ground attacks into Laos and Cambodia to weaken Giap's (General Vot Nguyen Giap) forces and destroy the supply efforts of Ho (Ho Chi Minh). Lam Son 719 will represent the beginning of total withdrawal from Vietnam and a campaign promise to the American people."

With that, Henry Kissinger turned to General Alexander Haig, "And if it cost us only a few American lives to insure the success, que sera, so be it."

"I assure you, Mr. President," Kissinger continued, "Red Rock will not survive their ordeal and most probably has not. The napalm was dropped on target and only the remains of two could be found. I will offer that those two team members were protected by a bunker. Any who were outside of the bunker would have disintegrated. We've heard nothing of the tragic heroes and will not."

The President sat on the edge of his desk. Still unsettled. "Put a team on the ground there and scour the area. I want to know that they were all there! And what about the pilots? What's their status?"

"I can do better than that!" General Haig butted in, pulling photos out of his briefcase. "These are photos taken by one of our SAR (search and rescue) aircraft which had contact with the Team the day after Phnom Penh. Here - you can count them."

The President looked at the pictures of the sappers on the ground. He looked closer. "The hell you say, these are enemy troops, not ours!"

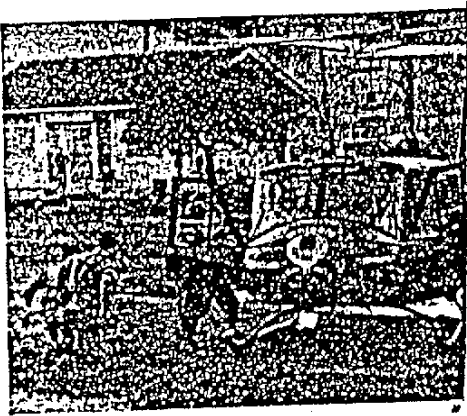
Dr. Kissinger smiled. "That is indeed Team Red Rock, Mr. President. They were outfitted as enemy sappers. They have no change of clothes, and less than ten minutes after these photos were taken, they were napalmed, trying to lure an Air Force helicopter to the landing zone. So, I am confident that your team is, how should we say, silenced! As for the air crews, they're CIA, Taz and his devils will be taken care of in time. 'Mr. Peepers' is on that," Haig said referring to William J. Colby, the CIA man that he didn't care for or trust."

The President smiled as he studied the pictures of his specialists. He began nodding his head. "They really kicked ass in there, didn't they!"

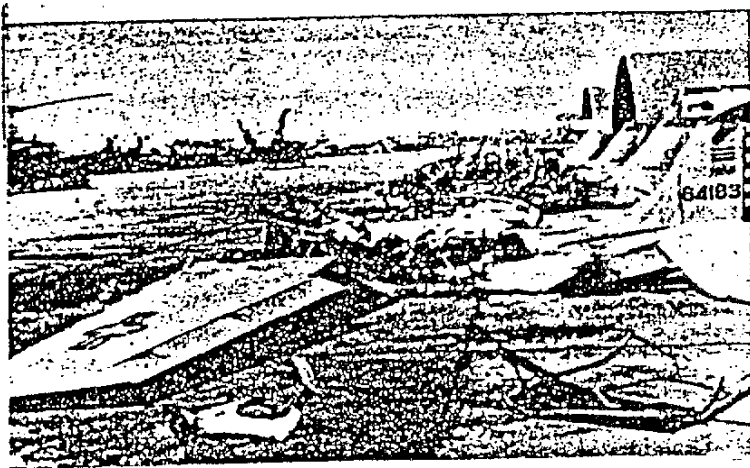
"The reviews were incredible, Mr. President." Haig said. "All of the news agencies are touting the pinpoint accuracy of the North Vietnamese raid on Phnom Penh. Do you know that Red Rock took in real sappers and left them for the Cambo's to find?! Incredible job. Wish we had more like them." Haig pulled articles written by Newsweek and Time and placed them on the President's desk.

"Imagine what we could do on a global basis with a team of terrorists and assassins like that! American bred!" the President said, forming an idea he would store for future use. He had done well. He had deceived the world. There was nothing that could stop him. Nixon picked up the magazine articles and walked to the window of *his* oval office. He looked down at the snow surrounding the White House. "Beautiful, isn't it?" he said to his advisors. "They look like clouds. Sometimes when I look out onto a snow covered lawn, I feel as if I've been given a glimpse at the future. This White House, floating above the heavens, looking down on the earth that we rule and protect. That will happen," he said, turning to the men. "I promise you, that will happen. The world is at our finger tips," as he produced his hands for them to see. He emerged himself in the articles, studying Red Rock's victory.

THE WAR IN INDOCHINA



Upping the ante: Wrecked planes in Phnom Penh and American GI on ground in Cambodia



Guerrilla War

It was a classic exercise in guerrilla strategy. "Avoid the solid, attack the hollow," Mao Tse-tung advised. And pressed on the ground and from the air last week, North Vietnamese forces faded away and the Cambodian Army triumphantly captured Pich Nil pass. Then, barely twelve hours later, the Communists struck a lightning blow. In a daring, devastating night attack on Phnom Penh's airport a few guerrillas managed to destroy practically the entire Cambodian Air Force, blew up a vast allied ammunition dump and lobbed rockets and mortar shells into the Cambodian capital itself—the first time that Phnom Penh has been shelled in the war.

The raid began at 2 a.m. with a sudden mortar and rocket barrage on the Cambodian Air Force hangars and living quarters at the north end of the airport runway. Guards and air force men panicked and two groups of young North Vietnamese sappers, each carrying an AK-47 assault rifle and satchels of explosives, dashed onto the base. One group gunned down the guards at the civil air terminal and donned their uniforms; then they blew up a large ammunition and napalm dump and exploded a charge under Air Cambodia's only jetliner.

Raiders: Another band of raiders struck from the north directly at the air force installations. Some aimed at the helipad and destroyed ten South Vietnamese helicopters; another headed for the flight line and demolished Cambodia's seven C-47 transport planes and about twelve T-28 fighter-bombers. Still another squad went straight for stacks of rockets and bombs. At the same time, in what may have been a diversionary move, a public-works station and a riverside boatyard in downtown Phnom Penh, 5 miles away, also came under attack, and rockets fell within 1 mile of Premier Lon Nol's office.

At dawn, with the airport in flames, the guerrillas melted away. Behind them they left eight of their own dead, 50 Cambodians dead and about 150 wounded civilians. Destroyed, along with the planes and hangars, was a great deal of the credibility and prestige of the Lon Nol government. By piercing the supposedly impenetrable Special Military Region around Phnom Penh, the Communists had most likely put Lon Nol in the position of having to withdraw forces from the field to protect other installations in his capital. (Indeed, in a continuing reign of terror, the Reds set off blasts at three more public facilities over the weekend.) More to the point, perhaps, the guerrillas had made it clear how much U.S. assistance Lon Nol will need to keep his enemies at bay.

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CRUMPLED ALLIED PLANES AT PHNOM-PENH'S POCHENTONG AIRPORT



CAMBODIAN TROOPS AT PICH NH PAK

Cambodia: Triumph and Terror

IT began as a time of triumph for Cambodia's beleaguered regime. South of Phnom-Penh, Cambodian officers cheered "*C'est fini!*" and lit victory cigars as troops at last broke a two-month Communist hammer lock on vital Route 4. Hours later Air Cambodge's Caravelle jetliner flagship touched down at Phnom-Penh's Pochentong Airport, a sunny complex eight miles outside the capital. As he stepped out of the Caravelle, moon-faced Premier Lon Nol seemed pleased with his two-day trip to Saigon, during which he and his South Vietnamese allies had made a start toward settling some nagging differences.

Within seven hours satisfaction gave way to shock. In a daring assault that Washington officials grudgingly rated as brilliant, Communist sappers moved mortars and rockets undetected up to the city gates. Then in four murderous hours, they destroyed the airport, the Cambodian air force (about 40 craft) and tons of precious fuel and ammunition while hitting half a dozen other targets in and around Phnom-Penh. The speed, stealth and success of the raids ominously echoed the assaults that in an earlier and darker stage of the war repeatedly ripped places like Pleiku, Bien Hoa and Saigon—and did much to erode the confidence of the U.S. public.

Walls of Flame. The Communists gutted Pochentong with scandalous ease. When the first rockets and mortar rounds came pounding in on the airfield and a nearby army camp at 2:30 a.m., some of the Cambodian guards were killed and the rest took off in fear of their lives. Then one sapper squad of about ten men simply strolled into the main terminal building while another cut its way through the barbed wire on the air-

field periphery. At their leisure, the Communists carried powerful satchel charges to nearly every building, hangar and operational aircraft on the field.

Before long, TIME Correspondent Stan Cloud reported, "great walls of orange flame leapt into the moonlit sky, and explosion after explosion sent showers of pyrotechnic sparks into the air." On the airport road, Cloud saw "panic-stricken refugees, clutching children and personal possessions, streaming away from the holocaust. In a field a few hundred yards from the airport, hundreds of them huddled in the predawn darkness while the false sunset of the fire blazed before them. They watched the sky as if it were some huge motion-picture screen."

In diversionary attacks, Communist raiders occupied a railway station and shelled a munitions factory, a pagoda, the Cambodian navy base on the Mekong and a schoolyard in the city itself. On the horizon, the glow of flames could be seen above the town of Kompong Kantuot, 15 miles from the capital but well within its so-called "defense perimeter."

In military terms, said U.S. State Department spokesmen, the damage was "minimal." Psychologically, it was a mini-Tet. Hospitals were filled with wounded; the dead were so numerous that their charred bodies were simply carted away from the airport in trucks. The official toll, admittedly incomplete, stood at 39 dead (including 26 civilians) and 170 injured (150 civilians). The military side of the airport, where the Cambodians had massed their vintage MIGs, American T-28s, French Magisters and borrowed South Vietnamese and American helicopters, was reduced to "a junkyard," as one U.S.

eyewitness described it. American and South Vietnamese aircraft were also hit.

Terrorism has been on the rise in Phnom-Penh for some time; at week's end bombs blasted a government office and the South Vietnamese ambassador's home. Said a U.S. intelligence officer: "They are going to strangle that city, and it could be done easily." Phnom-Penh's electrical power generators and waterworks are now figured to be high on the Communists' list of targets.

The strangulation process is already under way. Route 4, Phnom-Penh's link to the refinery at Kompong Som, was severed in November by 1,000 North Vietnamese entrenched in the rugged Elephant Mountains. It took more than 13,000 South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops, and considerable U.S. airpower, to dislodge them. The Communists' next highway target, it is speculated, may be Route 5, the capital's access to the rich Cambodian rice bowl.

Stealing Headlines. Despite the fireworks at Phnom-Penh, State Department and Pentagon analysts remain convinced that the Communists have no intention of seizing the capital. Rather, they see the raid as a high point in a campaign of harassment aimed at cutting off Lon Nol's contact with the countryside, disrupting vital highway traffic and undermining the authority of the Phnom-Penh regime. An attack in force on the capital, writes Lieut. Colonel Vincent R. Tocci, a Pentagon Asian expert, in the current *Armed Forces Journal*, "would quite possibly succeed. Yet it would be costly in manpower and material. And then who would rule the country?"

Coming so soon after the allies' Route 4 victory, the Phnom-Penh raid was also a public relations triumph for the

It was dark. The smell of ammonia was in my nostrils and lungs. I looked up from the earthen floor, the smell of stale urine and defecation filled the room. I rolled my head to the right and saw a pale, naked body next to me. I reached to touch the back of whoever was next to me. 'Snake' rolled over and sat up. I noticed his hands were untied.

"You okay, 'Highway'?" I tried to sit up. The room spun. I was disoriented. I pushed myself up and pulled my knees toward me. A pain shot through my body. I reached out for my foot. I felt the swollen flesh. It wasn't even in the shape of a foot. It was round, swollen on top and bottom. 'Pop' was standing and came toward me, "How're you?" I asked him.

"A couple of broken ribs, I think. I'll be okay. Don't stand. Stay sitting."

I noticed we all were still without clothing. I continued to look around our jail. 'My Way' was over with Pablo, "How's he?"

"Not good. He's lost a lot of blood," 'Pop' answered. The Yard was off alone, sitting in the shadows. I looked passed him to 'Cowboy'. I was beginning to focus and adapt to the dark. 'Bagman' was sitting up in a corner. 'Pop' handed me a ladle of water. I drank the smelly, rotten water. My mouth was crusted with dried blood where I had bitten my cheek on the inside. I swooshed the water around in my mouth and looked for a place to spit it. 'Pop' pointed to a corner. I spit toward the corner.

"That's our bathroom."

I looked harder and saw a pile of something on the dirt floor. I rinsed my mouth again and spit. The third ladle, I drank!

"What happened? The last thing I remember was getting thrown to the ground."

"That was about two or three hours ago. They pulled you in by your feet."

I felt my back and noticed for the first time that it was scraped up. 'Pop' continued, "The yard started talking to them on the way in. 'My Way' says he was wanting to talk to the person in charge. He had some information for them, so when we got in here, 'Snake' broke his neck. He's dead."

I looked in the corner where the Yard was sitting. Now that my eyes had adapted to the dark, I could see the slightly open mouth of the dead man.

"Looks like we're gonna be moved tonight. It's a little too hot here. None of us have said anything. An interpreter came in earlier, speaking English. We just gave him a dumb look. I think they're confused right now, but when a professional gets a hold of us, well, let's just say when a man's in true pain, he screams in his native tongue."

I leaned back against the wall. My head was pounding and my stomach was turning inside out. Sharp pains were shooting through my bowels.

"Best try and rest for now. It'll be a long night one way or another." 'Pop' moved over toward 'My Way' to help with Pablo.

It seemed like no time had passed when the guards pushed the door open and roused us out. It was the first time I had tried to stand since they broke my foot. It was necessary to walk on my heel. The pain still shot up my leg, but I found I could hobble to the truck. 'Pop' and Pablo were spared the foot treatment since they were unconscious. 'Pop' carried Pablo as we loaded in a different truck. Under the cover of darkness, we

left the military compound to an unknown destination. We drove north for about an hour. The terrain began to change. We could feel slight inclines in the road. The truck stopped in what seemed the middle of the jungle. When we unloaded and walked to the front of the truck, we saw that the road ended for vehicles. A path continued. We began walking, hobbling, through the jungle. I tripped on a root which was exposed and fell to my face. A guard walked over to me. I looked up as he kicked me in the side. I moved up to my knees. Another kick and some yelling. I pushed up with my hand, half standing, bent over, holding my left side with my right hand. 'Pop' was ahead of me, helping Pablo. Pablo had regained consciousness but was weak from the blood loss and probably had a cracked skull with his concussion. We said nothing. The whole trip thus far had been silent on our part. No words, only grunts of pain. A faint light appeared ahead. An officer advanced from the camp. He barked some orders and we were pushed off the path to the left. We were tripping through the jungle to the side of the compound. A row of cages stood before us, made of bamboo slats and hemp. I turned to look at the rest of the compound. I saw several huts and a central area for communal fire. A fire was burning. That must have been the light I saw. The second and third truck arrived, carrying supplies and equipment to the site. We were loaded into the eight cages. The cages were lifted onto three-foot stilts. The door of the cage was secured with a chain and lock. The floor was bamboo with two inch spaces between the pieces of bamboo. The walls were made of the same with four or five inch spacing, and the ceiling was the same as the walls. I laid on my side in the cage, my whole body ached. Total exhaustion forced me into sleep.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It must have been just before daybreak when my brain realized that my eyes were open. I don't recall waking, then opening my eyes, like I normally did. I just remember seeing the top of the cage I was held in. I turned my head from side to side. The camp was still dark. I could see a building across the compound. It could have been a sleeping hut. A smaller hut was next to it. A guard was posted at the smaller hut. A finger of smoke lifted toward the sky from the chimney of the large building. I looked at the cage to my right. It was 'Cowboy', sitting in the far corner, knees up and arms resting on them. He was looking over the compound. I looked to my left and saw 'Haystack', next to 'Haystack' was 'Pop'. A guard walked passed my cage and struck it with a stick he was carrying. It startled me. The cages were set up in a semi-circle, allowing us to see one another. I began counting the cages. There seemed to be ten in all. One cage on each end of the semi-circle was empty and the cages were sitting on the ground. It was dawn. I could see that the sky to my left was getting lighter. East, I thought. I began to sit up. As I drew my right foot near to sit up, the sharp pain reminded me of the evening before. I sat up and looked at 'Cowboy'. I began to whisper to him, but he put his finger to his lips to quiet me. He pointed to a cage to my right. I looked down the line of cages and saw each of Team Red Rock sitting up. Just passed 'Cowboy' was 'Snake', then 'My Way'. He shushed me also by putting his finger to his mouth. I got the message. No speaking, and no whispering. I continued to scan the compound. It was larger than I originally thought. The night seems to play tricks on you, but with the light of a new day, the shadows became trees, buildings, equipment, and NVA soldiers. I began counting our captors. I counted seventeen. I wondered how many more were in the buildings. I soon found out. The door of the small building opened. A figure, taller than I expected, exited the building. The guard moved quickly toward the larger building. The tall figure scanned the compound. His head stopped in the direction of the cages. He turned swiftly and went to the larger building, entering it. I looked at 'Cowboy', he returned my glance, shaking his head from side to side. I didn't know what he was thinking, but I don't believe it was good news. Two soldiers walked across the compound, each carrying a small table. Several others followed with chairs and large canvas bags full of something. The tables and chairs were set up in front of three posts, centered on the cages. The center post was about ten feet closer to us than the other two posts. The light was enough to see clearly now. I looked at my cage. I noticed brown stains on the sides and the floor. Through the slats on the bottom, I saw what seemed to be dried clay crusted on them. A soldier came out of the large building and posted himself at a long bamboo pole. It was probably a flag pole, I thought. He yelled something and soldiers exited the building and formed up in front of him. Several of the soldiers performing miscellaneous duties around the compound also joined the formation. Two civilian Cambodians carried something toward us. It looked like pails. They set a pail at the corner of each cage. I leaned forward and looked inside. Water! A ladle was sticking out of the top. The workers returned to the large building. They returned with a second pail for each cage. They set them at the same corner as the pail of water. They

retreated to the large building. A few minutes later, the two returned carrying something else.

They stopped at the table and set down a bowl of fresh fruit and bread. They set a pot of what appeared to be coffee on the table next. There was one cup. The tall figure was about half way across the compound when I noticed him walking toward us. As he drew nearer, I began to recognize the uniform of a Soviet officer. He arrived at the table, he looked over the cages, he looked over the food and drink, and he picked up a piece of fruit and tasted it. He gave a grunt of approval and sat. After pouring a cup of coffee, he broke a piece of bread, dipped it in the cup of coffee, and slurped it into his mouth.

"It is very good," he said in perfect English, holding up a second piece of bread. No one responded. He continued with his breakfast. I could smell the coffee by now and my gut was screaming for something, anything! He dismissed the two Cambo's to their duties. He turned to the formation behind him to see the flag being raised. The North Vietnamese flag laid dormant at the top of the pole.

"I would much prefer the flag of my country," he said to us as he turned and smiled. The formation broke up and the soldiers moved out to their assignments for the day. I noticed that each cage had two NVA soldiers posted to the back side. Three other soldiers attended the Soviet officer. One was an NVA officer. He wore the rank of a Major. The Soviet officer offered the Major a seat. The Major accepted and shared the bread and fruit. One of the Cams brought out another cup for the Major. He sipped the coffee, speaking Vietnamese to the Soviet officer.

The two finished their breakfast and stood. The Soviet officer began, "Gentlemen, I am your interpreter for the next few days. I am called Major Vladimir Krogensky and this is your host, Major Chau Duan." The Vietnamese Major clicked his heels together and nodded his head. "The first thing we need to do is process you into our camp. So, we will begin, one by one. Major," he said to Duan. The NVA Major snapped an order and pointed to 'Bagman' in the first cage. The guards unlocked the cage and escorted him to the Majors.

"Please be seated," offered Major Krogensky ("Krog") 'Bagman' remained standing. One of the NVA guards struck 'Bagman' behind the knees, bending him to the ground.

"The chair is much more comfortable," Krog offered. The guards put 'Bagman' on the chair and tied his hands to the arms.

"There, now. Is that not more comfortable, Sergeant!?" Krog asked, not expecting an answer. "Now then, we have a few questions. You know, Geneva convention items."

A clerk joined the Majors at the second table. He was ready to begin.

"Your name?" Krog asked.

'Bagman' sat silent.

"Do you have no name, Sergeant?" Krog asked, again not expecting an answer.

"Very well, rank?"

Nothing.

"Serial number?" Again, nothing. "If you won't provide these three items, Sergeant, I'm afraid that I will not be able to protect your Geneva Convention rights, and

Major Duan is not very pleased with you gentlemen as it is," Krog said, pointing to the bag.

The clerk began placing our sapper uniforms on the table with the Soviet made weapons. Krog moved to the table. He picked up an AK-47. "It is a beautiful weapon, no? I'm glad to see that your government has come to its senses. Now, maybe our governments can begin trade, yes? We do seem to have a problem though. You see, it is these uniforms. They do not properly represent the country you are from."

He's fishing, I thought.

"And Major Duan wants to execute you as spies! You see, we represent the government of Cambodia in this providence."

Fat chance, I thought.

"Therefore, the good major *must* see to it that justice is preserved."

At this point, Duan barked out an order. The guards behind each cage came to life. They mounted bayonets on their weapons and motioned us toward the front of our cages. I moved forward as did the others. The bayonets were then put to each side of our head. Krog said something to Duan. They seemed to be arguing about us. Krog kept pointing to us as he spoke.

"Gentlemen," Krog finally proclaimed to us, "it seems your captor wants your complete attention during these proceedings. Do not attempt to take your eyes from the proceeding or - well, - I'm sure you feel the steel tips which will persuade you to keep with us."

Two soldiers walked to the rear of 'Bagman' and turned his chair toward us. They repositioned behind 'Bagman'.

"Now Sergeant, Major Duan has given me one more chance. Then I must allow him to question you, and that will be quite unpleasant. So, one more time. What is your name?"

'Bagman' sat silent, staring beyond us at nothing.

Duan ordered two of us taken to the poles and tied up. The guards took Pablo and 'Snake'. They tied their hands together, and then they put the other end of the rope through an eye bolt on top of the pole. They pulled the rope which brought 'Snake' and Pablo's hands over their heads. They drew the rope tighter and began lifting the two off the ground. When they were about a foot off the ground, the soldiers tied off the rope. Major Duan positioned himself to the left side of 'Bagman'.

"Name." he asked imperfect English. Silence from 'Bagman'.

"Comment vous appel-vous?" asking for his name in French.

"I don't understand," Krog cut in. "You refuse simple Geneva Convention information. For what? To protect your country? Why? They have no intention of protecting you! Otherwise you would not have been captured in these!" the Soviet Major said, picking up the sapper uniforms. "It is senseless to suffer for a country which has abandoned you! These are simple questions. Name, rank and serial number, nothing else. Your own code of ethics allows for this!"

Unfortunately, he was telling the truth. The United States had attempted on three occasions to murder us, and now had no inclination to save us, even if they knew that they hadn't killed us! And our UCMJ (Uniform Code of Military Justice) did allow

name, rank and serial number. But 'My Way' wanted to avoid the admission of us being American servicemen. I wasn't quite sure, but it was 'My Way' or the highway and the highway wasn't available! I wanted to look at 'Pop' or 'My Way' but as I attempted to turn my head, the guard pushed on the bayonet. I felt the stabbing pain of the bayonet above my ear.

I looked forward, toward 'Bagman'. Duan slapped 'Bagman'. His slap didn't register on 'Bagman's' face. Major Duan's arm swung twice more. Still nothing.

"What is your name?" Duan asked. Silence followed as all the other times. I looked past 'Bagman' to 'Cowboy' and 'Snake', hanging from the posts. Duan snapped an order to one of the guards. The guard came to the table and picked up a bamboo shoot. He grabbed one of 'Bagman's' fingers and began pushing the bamboo under 'Bagman's' finger nail. 'Bagman's' face began twisting in pain, but no sound.

Then I remembered at POW school what one of our instructors said, "The VC have personnel lists as good as our own. All they need is branch of service, nationality, and your name and they can determine your unit. Hell, they can even get personal information about your family back in the States! So that was why 'My Way' didn't want us to speak. We're probably going to be killed regardless of whether we speak to these guys, so why allow them access to our families! A new finger. The pain grew in 'Bagman's' face. He was making a low, groaning sound - very strained.

"Name!" Duan said.

Krog walked toward 'Pop'. "Tell him, Captain," he said to 'Pop'. "Let him speak." 'Pop' gave no indication that he understood a single word Krog had offered.

"Needless suffering, Captain! We'll find out! We always do!" Krog turned to watch the show. The fourth fingernail was being ripped from its finger. The groans were louder. The pain tearing down 'Bagman's' strength to resist. Now his thumb nail was held for us to see. Bloody with strings of tissue dripping with blood. I closed my eyes only to feel the points of the bayonets pushing harder. I quickly opened my eyes. 'Bagman' was delirious with pain, but he made no sound which could link him to a nationality. Without asking again, Duan ordered 'Bagman' put back in his jail. The NVA untied 'Bagman' from his chair. The second that 'Bagman' was standing, his good hand moved quickly toward the face of the NVA guard, striking the tip of the guard's nose with the heel of his hand, pushing the guard's nose bone up through his brain. The guard was dead before his body hit the ground.

'Bagman's' foot swung around behind him to the legs of the second guard, sweeping him off his feet. A second blow to this guard's throat crushed his larynx, causing him to die of suffocation. He rolled and took down Major Duan with sweeping speed, striking his face. Posing above the Major, holding him down with the hair on the back of Duans head, 'Bagman' raised his hand, prepared to sink Duans nose bone into his brain. The first shot rang out. 'Bagman' spun. The second shot was fired and 'Bagman' was thrown back onto the ground, his right leg twitching. 'Bagman' was dead. Duan stood, his khaki uniform wet in his crotch. A stream of blood streaked Duan's face.

Some man I thought. Probably has never been threatened in his life. I wondered if the urine was his only problem. He turned, holding his eye and left for the larger of the two buildings.

Krog was placing his sidearm, gun barrel smoking, back in its holster. The Soviet officer turned toward us without emotion. "Very impressive. I may have to reconsider my theory of your origin. If the rest of you are this well trained, then you definitely are not a military patrol. CIA perhaps. Very interesting," Krog walked toward the building to check on his NVA interrogator. The guards left with the bodies of their fallen comrades.

With no one around, 'My Way' called out to us, "Alright men. They'll be back soon, although I think 'Bagman' got Duan in the eye with his thumb. If so, we're down to the Major. Without an interrogator, they won't be able to continue with us. Krog is our next target. Get him. Try on your way to the chair. He won't be so easy, though. His reaction was 'mechanical'. Slow, but mechanical. He's a seasoned warrior, not like his counterpart. 'Pop', because of your age they think you're our platoon leader. They won't bother you much."

Two soldiers returned and dragged 'Bagman' to the center pole. They tied his hands and pulled his body into the air, tying him off.

"Highway!" I didn't respond. I was watching what they were doing to 'Bagman'. "Bull Dog!" 'My Way' said louder and continued till I looked at him. "You may be next. You're the youngest looking and most expressive. Try to hold back your expressions!"

He was right! I was disgusted at the sight of 'Bagman's' torture. I had heard of bamboo shoots up your fingers, but never realized the total pain and extent of the torture it represented. When I was back in the States and learned of the war and how many men were killed in a particular month, the gory truth of their deaths never struck home. But now war was not foreign to me. The full impact of the miserable deaths soldiers were expected to endure was sickening. *If only they knew back home, I thought, surely they wouldn't let their son's go through this! But we are. Why?* I wondered. I looked down at my foot, swollen black and blue. I was reminded of the Cat Stevens song "Moon Shadow", "...and if I ever lose my legs, I won't moan and I won't beg. If I ever lose my legs well I won't have to walk no more," I began singing it to myself. I looked up to see Major Duan being escorted in a fresh uniform to a truck. He had a bandage over his eye. "...and if I ever lose my eyes, if my colors all run dry, if I ever lose my eyes well I won't have to see no more!" I ad-libbed Mr. Stevens song. I hoped he didn't mind. Then it struck me, Who the hell cared if he minded. I'm about to die a terrible death. I'll damned sure sing whatever words I want!

Krog came out of the building. The two guards met Krog about half way. One of the guards was pointing to the bamboo jails. I'm sure he was letting Krog know that we were talking. Then they approached the cages. Krog spoke first.

"So, you'll talk when I'm not around. Perhaps I'll simply stay away. Then we can learn your true story. Which of you is called 'Bull Dog'?"

My heart hit my stomach!

Krog scanned the cages, walking closer. He stopped at 'My Way's' cage. So, you like to talk to your men. Please continue Captain. Be assured, I will not interfere."

One of the guards smiled. He obviously spoke some English. How much did he hear? If Krog knew he was our target, I think we would have said something. Besides, 'My Way' wasn't speaking loud enough for the guards to hear him clearly - I even had a

hard time hearing him. I decided that he heard 'My Way' yell at me and that was about it.

'My Way' stared at Krog.

"Who are you? Green Beret? I think not. Perhaps CIA. I am becoming more convinced that you are not military," he said as he walked down the line of prisoners. He stopped at my cage. "But why would you bring a child with you?" the Major asked, looking back at 'My Way'. "It puzzles me. I look into your eyes and I see seasoned combat veterans, possibly even assassins." Then he turned and looked into my eyes, "But not here." He stared. I held his gaze. "Perhaps I'm wrong," he said, staring at me. "You would like to kill me, wouldn't you?" He asked, staring at me.

He was right. And I could do it. One step closer and he would be mine. I said nothing. I continued to hold his gaze. I motioned him closer with my head. A smile came across his face and his eyebrows raised. I encouraged him closer again, but he wouldn't bite. He turned to walk toward 'My Way'.

"Punta" I said in my best Spanish, loud enough for him to hear. Three years of Spanish finally paid off.

Krog spun on his heels, "Punta? A hora nosetros progressamos!"

The Soviet Major was a true linguist! He spoke fluent Spanish - unfortunately I didn't! I smiled at him as he returned to my cage. Still too far away! He repeated his words, "A hora nosetros progressamos - now we are progressing!"

He was pleased with himself, breaking the youngest of the group was his goal. But little did he think it would be so easy! He must report immediately to headquarters two items. The Spanish speaking team and one is called 'Bull Dog'. He spun and left. With a waiving motion to the Captain he said, "Gracious, Capitano!" and walked toward the large building. The guards left with him.

"Bitch!" Pop' said, almost laughing. You called him a feminine bitch in Spanish and now he thinks he has a Spanish speaking, covert team in captivity! How well versed are you in Spanish?" Pop' asked.

"I took three years in high school. But I can understand it better than I can speak it!"

"Bitch! Why bitch?"

"Cause I was so mad that he wouldn't come closer. I thought that I could throw him off and get to him!"

"Highway," 'My Way' said, "Keep away from him! Leave him to us! He's a pro and he'll hurt you or break you and he really doesn't care in which order. Got that?"

"Got it!" I answered.

"Pablo, you hear it?"

"Yeah, I'll handle him. But it'll be hard from here," Pablo said.

"If he thinks your in charge, he'll put you back in a cage. Take over and spit out commands in Spanish. That should confuse the issue! We need time! Buy us some! What other languages do we have?" 'My Way' asked.

"German," Pop' said.

"French," 'Cowboy' said.

"Kansian," 'Haystack' said.

"What?" 'My Way' asked.

"That's what we speak in Kansas," 'Haystack' said in jest.

'My Way' ignored his joke and continued in thought.

About an hour later, the Major returned to us, obviously happy with his discovery. He walked up to 'My Way' and began,

"De donde eres," (where are you from?) He stood facing 'My Way', expecting an answer.

"De donde eres, Capitano?" he repeated.

Pablo, weakened from the loss of blood and concussion, answered from his torture pole.

"Major!" Pablo began in Spanish, "Vengo de mi madre! Y usted?" (I come from my mother, and you?)

I chuckled. The Major heard. He barked out some orders and two guards attended to Pablo.

They sat Pablo in the chair 'Bagman' had been tortured in. Blood still smeared on the arms of the chair.

"You are hurt, Captain," he continued in Spanish. Let me see that you are properly cared for." The Major spat orders and one of the guards ran to the large building. He soon returned with the doctor. The doctor went right to work on Pablo. He cleansed the wound, numbed it, and stitched it closed. He told the Major that the Captain had lost much blood and would require a transfusion if he wanted him healthy enough to continue. The Major sent Pablo with the doctor and two guards to the building. As the Major looked over his prisoners, he asked us which one of us was called Bull Dog. His Spanish was very good. I had been surprised how well Pablo spoke. No slang, all proper Spanish.

He began again. This time in Spanish, "Como lajas?" he asked 'My Way'. He walked past 'Snake's' empty cage to 'Cowboy'. "Cual es tu rango?" (What is your rank?) He walked past me to 'Haystack', "De donde eres?" (Where are you from?)

'Haystack' just smiled at him with a big country-boy smile.

The Major didn't like the obvious ridicule aimed at him by 'Haystack'. He came back to me.

"Como te llamas?" (What is your name?) "Dime!" (Tell me!) He was reaching the end of his patience. "Who is Bull Dog?" he asked me, hands clasped behind him.

I answered, "I don't know, Major. Who is Bull Dog?" I wondered how my diction was. It obviously passed.

He stepped into my reach, still angry from our non-response. "You tell me!" he said.

I leaned forward in the cage as if to whisper. He leaned forward. 'My Way' saw that I intended to strike.

"I ate a bull dog for dinner last night," 'My Way' called out, causing the Major to step back and walk toward 'My Way'. I saw a small knife in his hands which were still clasped behind his back. Whew! 'My Way' saved my ass! Hey! I didn't know he could speak Spanish! But then again, a West Point grad should have some intelligence. I wished that I could say something to him. He really didn't like to be razed about the

Point.

The Krog called the guards over and ordered them to hold water and food up for us to eat and drink. I thought my stomach would jump out of my throat to bite the fruit. It was so empty! I ate all six pieces of fruit and three ladles of water. I was surprised how full and bloated I felt. Snake was fed nothing.

The Major returned to the headquarters building while we ate. About an hour later, he left and didn't return until after dark. Pablo wasn't returned to the post *or* a cage. He was kept in the infirmary for the night. That was a mistake, I thought to myself! The guards brought a generator to our location and placed it about ten yards from the tables. I wondered if they intended to hook up lights and interrogate us through the night. But, as it was, 'My Way' was right. These guys worked in twos. Krog either thought himself above the task of torturing or had no stomach for it. I quickly ruled out the latter due to his performance earlier with 'Bagman'. I wondered where they were going to take 'Bagman's' body. Would they bury him? Then I thought of Sharon back at NKP. They were really getting on well. I hated the thought of having to tell her. Then I thought of my present position. Who am I kidding! I'll never get out of this!

It was dark. The day's activities seemed to drain me of any energy I had. I laid down in my cage, curled up like a newborn baby, naked, and I slept.

The shot startled me. Then several bursts of automatic fire. The guards yelling at someone. A single shot rang out and that was it. I looked around the dark compound, but could only see the outline of the big building. I laid back down and slept.

"Highway," 'Cowboy' said, "get up. 'My Way' wants you."

I sat up and listened.

"Looks like Pablo's gone. That's what the ruckus was last night. I think he got Krog. The guards carried someone out of Krog's hootch this morning before daybreak, loaded him on a truck, and left. If that's so, it will take them some time to replace Krog and Duan. So maybe we may have some time. Try working the hemp in your cages at night. If you can splinter the bamboo, you may be able to saw small strands. All you need is two side slots and you can get out. Head east," he said, pointing toward the sunrise.

I began feeling around the bamboo poles. I found several with cracked ends. I pulled out on one which was on the backside of my cage. I had a piece of bamboo about six inches long. I could see 'Cowboy' already working on the hemp at the bottom of his cage, where a side pole was attached.

I laid down and began looking at the hemp. It had obviously been worked before. I found a piece that seemed more worn than the rest and began sawing at it! I worked about thirty minutes before it was too light to continue.

A pail of rice and something was hung off the bottom of my cage. I reached down and took a few pieces to eat. It tasted almost rotten. I opted for the fruit again, leaving the rice hanging. Three more ladles of water and I sat back in my cage. I looked over at 'Cowboy', sitting cross legged in his cage. A steady stream of urine pounded the dirt beneath his cage. Then the rest of us followed in style. The power of suggestion I suppose! I suddenly realized what the caked-on substance was on the bottom rungs of my cage. *Who were they, I wondered. How many had preceded us?*

Sitting naked in a cage with excrement caking the bottom was an awfully effective method of keeping us humble. I was overcome with the feeling that our interrogation was to become intensive very soon. I laid down, working on the hemp. 'Cowboy' stood watch and let me know if anyone was coming. 'Snake' was put back in his cage and given food and water. The pain from his shoulders being stretched made it difficult for him to draw his hands to his face to eat. I saw his constant kneading of his muscles. Right, then left, he worked with his arms, increasingly until he had regained use of them.

Day turned into night. No interrogations. It was time to go to work. I had cut about half of the strands of the hemp rope with my bamboo knife. It was rubbing my hand raw. But, driven by 'Snake's' example, I worked a few hours, and rested, worked and rested, throughout the night. We spoke without fear of being heard. There was no one left in the compound that spoke our language. 'My Way' and 'Pop' had decided on an escape route when we were free of our cages. We kept working, day after day.

"Eat that rice, 'Highway'," 'Pop' encouraged me.

"It's moving!" I said.

"It's alright. It's full of protein and you'll need it! So, eat it!"

I looked down at the bucket of live rice. Rice mixed with a rancid meat and maggots. No way! I told myself. I grabbed a handful and threw it away from my cage so that the guards would think I was eating it and bring fresh rice. It worked. They took the pail when it was empty and refilled it. I looked in and it wasn't moving. I grabbed a handful and choked it down. I gagged from the rancid meat, but was able to swallow it and keep it down. My foot steadily healed. The damage wasn't temporary. There was a break, but it would heal to a point of being usable. I would soon be able to stand and walk on it. We had been held for eleven days. The first day was our only day of interrogation. I had broken through on one rung. One more and I would have enough space to squeeze through the cage.

The morning of the twelfth day another Soviet officer arrived. He was accompanied by a Chinese officer. The two took the day to settle in. The following morning our interrogation began again. At daybreak, the guards pulled 'Cowboy' out of his cage. They were very cautious. It took six of them, three with weapons locked and loaded, and bayonets mounted. The other three tied him before he left the cage. They made him stick his hands and feet through the bars. They tied his hands and feet together, then opened the cage and led him to the posts. There they lifted him into the air. They did the same with 'Snake'. A fire was built about five feet from them. The heat was enough to cause dehydration to set in quickly. The new Major took his place at the breakfast table as Krog did twelve days before. He ate his fruit and drank his coffee. We had been given only the now live rice and water for days. The fruit looked delicious. I could taste the cool sweetness of the melon. *Ummmmm* I thought, as I watched him eat and drink.

The new Major introduced himself in Spanish. *We sure pulled one over on them*, I thought. His name was Vladinsky. The Chinese officers name was Chau-Ling. We would call the Major Dinski and the Chicom, Chow. Then, in midstream, the Major surprised us and started speaking English, "Or should I introduce myself in English? Your Pablo was quite well versed in both. But the path of pain which lead to death

inevitably reverts the dying to their predominant tongue. Isn't that right, 'My Way'?" he said. Looking at us, "And who is called 'My Way'? 'Snake'? 'Cowboy'? 'Highway', or should I say 'Bull Dog', 'Pop'," he walked up to 'Pop' and smiled. "And 'Haystack'. I assure you gentlemen, that I will know everything I need to know within two weeks."

He barked orders and the guards took away our food and water. "Or you will die with your secret, but not a pleasant death. Let me show you."

Chow walked up to 'Snake' and asked if he was thirsty. 'Snake' ignored him. He went to 'Cowboy' and asked if he were hungry. 'Cowboy' ignored him also.

"You'll ask for food or drink sooner or later, and, when you do, I'll give it to you. So, until you're ready to speak with me, I'll ask your leave," and with that, he left. But the guards remained.

I laid down. A stick poked me until I sat up. The guards shaking their heads and motioning for me to sit up. When I sat up, the poking quit. I grabbed a hand full of the caked substance in the corner of my cage and threw it at them. They backed off, leaving, one at a time, to clean themselves. The rest followed suit. I would be sure to share a fresh batch with the assholes on my first opportunity!

For three days, the fires by 'Snake' and 'Cowboy' continued. We were given a ladle of water a day and a hand full of live rice. But our friends on the posts were given nothing. We weren't allowed to sleep. When we laid down, we were poked by sharp poles. Dinski ate his meals in front of us, both breakfast and an afternoon lunch. He would speak to us, telling us the latest about the communists triumphs in South Vietnam. About the rebellions in the United States. He asked 'Snake' and 'Cowboy' the same question each morning. "Are you hungry? Just say yes and I will feed you!"

On the fourth day, when asked if he was hungry, 'Cowboy' said yes. The Major spat out orders and the camp came alive. Guards came to our cages, machetes and bayonets in hand. We were moved to the front of our jails and the sharp instruments were held to our heads again.

"I'm so glad to hear that you are hungry," Dinski said to 'Cowboy'. 'Snake' and 'Cowboy' were delirious from dehydration. Chow stepped up to 'Snake', drew his knife from his sheath, and cut a piece of thigh from 'Snake'. 'Snake' kicked and screamed. Two guards held him in place as the Chinese butcher did his deed. He took the chunk of flesh around to 'Cowboy' who's back was to 'Snake' and could only hear the screams. He could see nothing. 'My Way' yelled at the butchers and told 'Cowboy' that it was a piece of 'Snake'. A knife went into 'My Way's' cheek to quiet him. We were all yelling at our captors.

Chow walked around to 'Cowboy' and shoved the bloody chunk of 'Snake's' thigh into 'Cowboy's' mouth, pushing hard, the chunk gagging 'Cowboy'. He was gasping for air. The chunk of flesh was choking him to death. We sat, knives to our heads and watched 'Cowboy' die a gruesome death. Suffocating! Choking!

Dinski turned and asked, "Why were you dressed in our uniforms? Where were you coming from? Where were you going? Tell me or your nightmare is just beginning!"

We sat silent. 'Snake' was screaming in pain as Chow's sword cut him down by

cutting off his hands with a swift blow. 'Snake' fell to the ground. Screaming in terror. Blood spurting out of the ends of his arms where his hands used to be. They were butchering him alive. A guard stood on 'Snake's' knee to hold him down. Another blow took off 'Snake's' foot.

"Where did you come from?"

The last blow severed 'Snake's' head from his body. The body went into spasms. His mouth continued to move on the severed head and his eyes blinked for about thirty seconds. I was heaving up everything I had managed to keep down. I didn't know what was happening to the rest of the team. I was heaving too hard to hear or see them.

After a few minutes the guards sat me back up. "Tomorrow," Dinski said, "another will die. It will not be so fast though." He reached in his pocket and pulled out 'My Way's' St. Christopher medal. He took it to 'My Way'. "I believe this is yours."

'My Way' took it and tied it around his neck.

"If you haven't made peace with your maker, you would be wise to do so. All of you, because tomorrow is the beginning of your death."

The CH-53 with the survey team landed in the large field north of Phnom Penh. The team spread out and began searching the field. A UH-1 gunship remained airborne to cover the search team. Thirty-five American soldiers swept the large open field from east to west. About a quarter way across the field a soldier called, "Over here!" The officer and civilian quickly moved to the young soldiers' location. They looked into the hole. Two badly burned decaying bodies of NVA sappers lay in the bottom of the hole. Mounds of parched dirt surrounded the hole. "Over here!" another soldier had found something. The officer and civilian left for the second site. A badly burned metal box lay on the ground, "What do you make of it?" the young officer asked the civilian. The civilian took it and looked it over. On the back of the box he saw the word, "fuse". He placed the box in a shoulder satchel and continued.

Two hours later, the sweep was complete. Two charred sapper bodies and a metal box was all that was found. No other indications that others were hit during the napalm bombing. The survey team returned to the Jolly Green and departed. The civilian took the box out of the satchel and looked it over. The large helicopter began an unscheduled circle of an area. The Huey gunship had landed in a field below. Several bodies were strewn about the roadside. The Jolly landed.

"Doctor," the pilot called back. "They want you to look at something!"

The bodies had been there about two weeks. They were badly decomposed. Canteens were lying scattered around the bodies. He counted eight canteens. Animals, including a mongoose and several rats, were also dead.

"What do you make of it?" the civilian asked the doctor.

The doctor picked up a canteen and capped it. He took it with him, "We'll see," he said, as he reboarded the CH-53 bound for Phnom Penh.

"What do you mean, they weren't in the LZ? Then where the hell are they?" the

angry President asked the man on the other end of the telephone. "Not on the phone! Come over now!"

Within two minutes the National Security Advisor was in Nixon's office. He brought the recon photos and the ground team report. Laying the aerial photo on the President's desk, he began briefing. "The LZ is approximately one mile square. In this quadrant," he said, pointing to a dark spot on the photo, "there is a hole. We can only assume that the Montagnards prepared this as a mass grave for Red Rock. The Yards assigned to execute the team probably drove this road," Kissinger said, pointing to the road where the Yards attempted to kill the team. "Further back, canteens of poison water were recovered. There were several dead peasants on the side of the road. They must have found the poisoned water meant for Red Rock. There are two bodies in the grave here," he said, pointing to the hole. "They are two of the team members. This was found over here," showing Nixon the transponder box. "It is a communication device we used to find the LZ and bomb it. Unfortunately, the team must have been on to us and left before the fighters arrived. We have had no further communications with the team. Likewise, we have received no communications from Hanoi concerning the team," Kissinger concluded.

"What do you make of it?"

"I can only assume the worst. Team Red Rock is making its way to Saigon or one of the fire bases on the Cambodian/Vietnam border."

"In short, we're f_ _ _ _d!" Nixon put his hand to his upper lip. The sweat beads which dotted the area just above his lips began falling as a nervous twitch began. Deep in thought, looking for resolve, he said as he walked to the window of the oval office, "Look out here."

Kissinger walked to the window and looked out with the President.

"There," Nixon said, pointing to the anti-war protestor signs which read, 'Stop the needless murders!' and 'Peace not War'. "If word ever gets out that we were directly responsible for the death of those two service men, the 'Silent Majority' and these protestors will throw us out of the country. And then where will we go? There won't be a country on earth that would give asylum to a President that so blatantly double-crossed an ally!"

Nixon returned to his desk and sat, again in thought. Kissinger remained silent. "How long?" Nixon asked Kissinger. "How long since they've been spotted?"

"Twenty-two days," Kissinger answered. He continued, "Alex told me they're good men. They can be trusted if we find them alive."

"We'll have to keep them close to home!" the President said to Kissinger.

Kissinger was visibly relieved. "Yes, perhaps White House Communications can use them - if they're alive," Kissinger offered.

"Classify it - long - how long can we keep them from talking?" Nixon asked.

"Twenty-five years should do it," Kissinger said.

"Yes, twenty-five years. And they're good men?! Let's look for them. Order troops across the Cambodian border!"

"Excellent plan," Kissinger said. "JCS has been begging to go in on the ground. This will serve two purposes! We can perform ground reconnaissance into Cambodia for

Lam Son 719, and, if we find them, put controls on Red Rock!"

"Where were they last seen?" Nixon asked.

"There was an enemy air artillery site near the Vietnam border on the Cambodia side. A flight of fighters noticed smoke at the artillery site and several explosions. The aircraft went in for the kill. We assume that Red Rock attacked the triple A site."

"Why the hell would they do that, after we put the shaft to them?" Nixon asked.

"This group is possibly the most disciplined force in the world, Mr. President, and they are American soldiers, thinking of their comrades, not necessarily their government. I will warn you that there is a risk bringing them back."

"Risk?" Nixon asked, his lip soaked with sweat.

"Yes, risk! Undoubtedly they will want revenge. They will not seek it through the media. The loss of their comrades and the deliberate deceit by us will have a price. And, if we do not have an offer for them, they will undoubtedly take what they want!" Kissinger stood and watched Nixon's reaction. The twitching of his right cheek and upper lip began again. *More stress* Kissinger thought as he watched his President sort through alternatives.

"CIA or military?" Nixon asked.

"We need to have both options available. They cannot know that we ordered their silence in this manner," Kissinger said.

"Ask Alex who can take the fall. Maybe Colby," Nixon said, thinking of the CIA mastermind that planned and executed Operation Red Rock.

"I have some time this afternoon. John is picking up the slack on the domestic affairs for me to give me time to work this out!"

"Who else knows?"

"I'm not sure, Mr. President, but we must be certain that there is *never* a leak!"

"Bug the Cabinet!" Nixon ordered. "Have them followed. I mean to keep tight reign on everyone from here on out!"

"Very well! Is there anything else?"

"Not right now. But I want the names from Haig this afternoon!"

Kissinger turned and left. The *order* would be sent to recon for Lam Son 719. Haig could put it together. The problem is the sapper uniforms! How will we overcome that? Kissinger entered his office to call his assistant, General Alexander Haig.

The night was long. The guards had left us to sleep for the first time since the new regime took command of the camp. The horror of the day would not leave my mind. Every time I closed my eyes, I seemed to relive the nightmare. On a pole only ten feet from our cages, 'Snake's' head was placed, facing us, 'To remind us of the horror to come,' as Dinski put it. I was unable to talk. I had screamed so hard at the savages that I had strained my voice. The shift of evening guards was changed. It must have been past midnight when 'My Way' called out, "Pop', 'Haystack', 'Highway'!"

We each acknowledged.

"Tomorrow hold as strong as you can, but don't worry if you break. But know

this. We're dead whether we tell them or not."

'Pop' jumped in, "I've been thinking, 'My Way'. Maybe we can stall them. Leave things to me in the morning. I'm about through my two bottom rungs, how about you guys?"

"Yeah, another couple nights and I'm through," 'My Way' said.

"Me too," 'Haystack' said.

"'Highway', how about you?"

I shook my head, unable to talk.

"Okay," 'Pop' said. "I'll get us a couple more nights. Then we need to leave! Get to work!"

With that I picked a new piece of bamboo and began sawing on the second rung. The first was already loose.

'My Way' was busy working on the hemp at the bottom of his cage.

"What was the third step, 'My Way'?" I asked.

He looked up at me, sweat all over the handsome face. I remembered him in his dress greens, and how Lieutenant DeGraff was so taken by him the first time they met. I knew it was useless to even think that we could hope to escape. But 'My Way' wanted to keep us busy - to keep our minds off what was to come.

"Stamina," 'My Way' answered as he sat back in his cage, knees up and his forearms resting on his knees. "Both physical and emotional. For without stamina, we will surely die. At all costs - no matter how hard they try to break you - you have to remain strong. There's only one thing that you can take with you when you leave existence here, 'Bull Dog', and that's knowledge that you have gained through all of your experiences. You experience the difference between good and bad, love and hate, sweet and sour," he picked up the live rice and continued as he let it fall from his hands, "fresh and rotten, wet and dry, hot and cold - but all the knowledge that you gather will never assist you in your quest through the eternities if you take with you the knowledge that you gave up on all that you've been given."

"You mean like when we were captured and we had to surrender?" I asked, hunting for his meaning.

He smiled at me and looked up in thought. I waited.

"No," he said with a deep sigh. "I hope I can explain the difference here. In life and in battle we must make many choices. Those choices will put us in a new direction. If you compare life to a train moving from its point of origin to its destination, it may be easier to understand what I'm going to say. A train follows tracks. The direction the train goes is determined by switches in the tracks - do you understand so far?"

"I think so," I answered. I remembered a fifth grade train ride our class took. The engineer at the train station showed us how the switches would move the train from one track to another in order to divert if needed.

"Well - those switches are the equivalent to decisions which we must make in our life. Every time you make a decision - a switch is thrown which moves you in a new direction. Now, some people have been traveling in circles their whole lives and are no closer to their destination than when they started their journey. Some have made substantial deviations but will eventually arrive where they wanted - and then others went

directly to their destination. None of the three groups that I just mentioned have stopped their journey or given up. To give up is to stop. To surrender was a decision to change direction - substantially I admit - but only a temporary halt in your progress. We surrendered. We did not give up. It is much easier to simply give up. That requires no more effort or stamina. But to surrender requires more strength because now you have a major obstacle to overcome which requires more planning which requires more strength - or stamina. So, when you leave this part of your journey, you must never go with the knowledge that you gave up. That would dam you forever. Leave with stamina - with strength. You'll continue your journey with fervor when you reach the other side. Do you understand Chip?"

I sat and thought. I was tired, hungry, sick, and hurting. I looked at the hemp which was almost cut completely through. I looked up at 'My Way' and asked, "So, you mean we're not cutting this hemp just to keep us busy?"

'My Way' smiled again. I saw 'Pop' sit up and take interest in what 'My Way' was saying.

"No, it's my intention to keep trying new avenues of escape until I don't have a breath left in my body. Only then will I know that I have fought a good fight and will be able to continue."

"So, you're telling me that stamina, whether it is called persistence or strength, is the third step to surviving the Nam in Special Operations."

"No, strength is durability, giving you resistance to the beatings you experience in life, whether physical or emotional. Stamina is endurance which will allow you to push your strength to its limits. And persistence is the continued application of stamina. Persistence is what allows you to continue in existence through the eternities. The three are almost synonymous but require the other two. You can be the strongest man in the world, but without stamina, you will lose a long fight. And, likewise, you may have a great deal of stamina, but if you're not willing to persist - the stamina does you no good.

"Yeah," I said. "I think I understand. And you're telling me that this third step is what is required, not only in the Nam, but in life. But the other two, revenge and mechanical response, are particular to war."

"That's right, Chip. And when we're out of here - wherever it is that we are - you'll carry that knowledge forever. But, even better than knowledge - you'll have the experience to back it up. You will find that intimidation by others as a means to control you away from your destination will be impossible, and your journey will eventually be successful. "

Daybreak came. I had been working all night and was almost through the second rung. Chow was out early.

"Good morning gentlemen," Chow said to us. Then he turned to the head of 'Snake', mounted on the pole. "And how are you today, kind sir?" he said as he slapped the cheek and laughed, flies swarming away from Snake's head. "I am looking so forward to today's festivities," he said to us. He turned and left. An hour later the breakfast table was prepared for Dinski's meal. Together Dinski and Chow ate, bringing us up to date on the successes of the Chicom NVA army in South Vietnam. "We're

knocking at the door of Saigon," Chow said. "And now, are we ready for the day's festivities?"

Dinski walked to my cage. "I wonder who you are, young one!" he said to me. He got no reaction. However, it wasn't that I was toughened from the ordeal or not scared shitless. But my strength had been drained from lack of food and my inability to keep down what little I had been able to ingest. Chow spat out orders and my cage was opened. I was pulled out onto the ground. My legs would not fully extend. I worked at standing, but was unable. The guards picked me up and set me in the chair that 'Bagman' had been tied to. They picked the chair up with me in it and set it in front of the pole holding 'Snake's' head. The smell of the already decaying flesh was strong. His face was bloating and flies lighted all over the base of his neck where the raw flesh was exposed. They tied me to the chair and pulled out another piece of bamboo. This one pointed longer, and wider than the one used on 'Bagman'. My heart raced. They didn't secure my feet. I felt the adrenaline rush through my body. The Chinese officer, Chow, stepped in front of me. I moved my right foot as far back as I could. Knives were being held to the temples of 'Pop', 'My Way', and 'Haystack'. Their eyes were wide.

He put the shoot against the skin on my right side. He slowly pushed it into me like a knife. The pain shot through my whole body. My foot moved forward and up as I pushed the chair back with my other foot. The full force of my foot caught the Chinese officer in his groin. He folded to the ground.

My chair fell back due to the force of the kick. The guards moved quickly to tend to the Chinese officer. I twisted the chair on its side. Chow was laying on the ground. My foot struck out again into his face. The crack of the bone in his nose was crisp and clear. Blood was spurting out of his nose. I pulled back and kicked again. I hit the ankle of one of the guards, causing him to fall to the ground.

I felt the chair which imprisoned me, being pulled back, away from the men on the ground. I looked up at the Soviet officer. He was laughing. I was suddenly confused. Why was he laughing?

Two guards picked up Chow and carried him to the headquarters building. The other guard limped behind them. Major Dinski was still laughing.

I looked down and saw the chute till in my side. In all the commotion, the ropes on my right hand had loosened. I pulled lightly to see if I could free my hand. While I was struggling on the ground, the Soviet Major picked up my chair, still laughing, "You are a fierce one for your young age. You must surely be Bull Dog!" He walked toward 'Pop', congratulating him on my training. His back was to me. I pulled again, my hand was free.

'Pop' saw my hand come loose. He needed to distract the Major. "Bull dog isn't what he seems!" 'Pop' said.

The Major was delighted at his break through! I was standing. I picked up the chair, moved quickly to the Major, smashing the chair over his head. He fell to the ground. I hit him again. This time the chair broke. My other hand was free. I pulled the pistol from his holster and fired at 'My Way's' lock. 'My Way' moved quickly out of the cage to the table and picked up the AK's belonging to the guards. I shot the locks off 'Pop's' door and saw 'Haystack' slide out of the side of his cage. He got to 'My Way'

and took a weapon. Two of our satchels were laying on top of the uniforms on the second table. 'Haystack' began firing on the guards coming out of the door of the headquarters building. Most of the soldiers were not yet on duty. 'My Way' picked up the satchels and threw one to 'Pop'. He slapped it and threw it across the compound. It landed about ten feet from the front of the building. We moved off to the jungle behind us.

As we passed the Major, 'Pop' shot him once in the head. "No use wasting good ammo," he said as we disappeared into the bush. Breaking our feet three weeks prior was very effective. We were severely hampered by the handicap. 'Pop' was on point. He was the only one without a broken foot. We circled back to the opposite side of the compound. 'My Way' knew that the NVA would form and sweep in the direction of our entry into the bush. We sat low in the bush and watched the activity. A young NVA officer was barking out orders and sending three man patrols out to the opposite end of the compound. We waited. Every available soldier was sent searching for us. The NVA officer and one other remained behind.

The rear door of the headquarters building was about thirty yards in front of us. Shielded by the door, 'My Way' moved quickly. We needed ammo and clothing. 'My Way' opened the door and waited. Nothing. He slipped in. Seconds later he was at the door with five ammo satchels, and a handful of clothes. 'Pop' signaled all clear. 'My Way' moved to our position. The NVA uniforms were short, but better than nothing.

I began putting my shirt on and saw what 'Pop' was staring at. the bamboo shoot had broken off and a small portion was sticking out of me. I nodded as he motioned to pull it out. Again the pain tore through me. We had no socks or boots. We retreated deeper into the jungle, moving only in forested areas. I decided to tear my shirt sleeves off and wrap my feet. That was much better. Finally we got to a rice paddy. There was no way around. 'My Way' took point. We moved quickly this time, filing across. We were back in the jungle. 'My Way' turned us east. I could hear the clatter of tanks and the crashing of trees to the ground behind us.

The first tank burst out of the jungle and into the rice patty. Mud was slinging high off of the tracks as it bounced across the patty. Two more tanks burst out of the jungle. 'My Way' knew it was useless to continue. But, 'Pop' hit it on the nose when he said, "I'd rather be shot or blown up than tortured to death!"

We continued toward the jungle. The machine gun fire from the tank was hitting everywhere. The high spots in the patty caused the tank to rock up and down. This caused the stiff mounted machine gun to fire in the air, then down at the ground. We reached the forest.

I saw the turret open and a machine gun was mounted on top. The soldier began firing. The two other tanks moved into a column. the large barrels turned to the rear to enter the jungle behind us. 'Pop' motioned us on. He hid in the bush, laying in a low area in the dense jungle. I could hear tanks to our right and left. Then I heard one crashing through the jungle behind us. Several gunshots rang out behind us. There was no way 'Pop' could stall the progress of the tank. 'My Way' had the other satchel. *What was he doing?* I heard the machine gun of the tank. It kept firing. Then the gun was silent. The tank began crashing through the jungle again. It was right behind us. We

continued to limp through the jungle. The other two tanks had passed us without knowing it. I saw the tank turret behind me. The gunner had closed the hatch. The tank was moving closer. I could see the holes that the driver looked out of. We continued to run, knowing that we would die within seconds.

Then the tank stopped. The turret popped open and 'Pop' yelled at us to get in. I looked again and there was 'Pop', waiving us to him in the tank!

I yelled at 'My Way'.

'Haystack' yelled, "Shit hot, 'Pop'!"

We all climbed in the Soviet tank. 'Pop' drove, 'My Way' took the turret and firing position. 'Haystack' assessed the ammunition and main gun loading chambers. The tank burst through the jungle into another patty.

The other two tanks had already burst into the jungle ahead. 'Pop' spun the tank to the right, heading toward a road about a quarter mile away. Once on the road, he opened it up. 'My Way' turned the turret to the front firing position. 'Haystack' loaded a round.

"Take the first east road," 'My Way' said, calling to 'Pop'.

"We are going east," 'Pop' said. (No smiles - serious business.)

It was then that I noticed three dead NVA tankers. I began taking their clothes, helmets and sidearms. "Move to the side of the road," I said to 'Pop'. I put on a uniform shirt and helmet before opening the turret. 'Haystack' handed the dead soldiers out, one at a time. I dumped them off the tank to the side of the road. I mounted the machine gun and 'Haystack' took my position. He explained to me how to load the main gun and showed me where the machine gun ammo was.

I passed socks and boots around. The socks worked but the boots wouldn't fit my swollen foot. They were about a size six. I wore a ten!

An explosion blasted off to our left. The turret turned to the rear. 'My Way' readied to fire at the approaching tanks. 'Haystack' pulled in and locked the turret door.

I looked out the rear, "Shit!" I said. "There's five of 'em!"

"Bigger target!" 'My Way' said as he aimed. "Fire!" he yelled, warning the team to expect the noise of a round being fired. Bam!

"Whoa!" It scared the shit out of me!

"Put your helmet back on!" 'Pop' yelled.

I put it on and loaded the second round. Bam! The tank rocked.

"Stop this damned thing, 'Pop'!" 'My Way' said as I reloaded.

The tank came to a stop 'My Way' aimed. Bam! I watched out of the hole. The lead tank rocked back as an explosion hit under it. The tank rocked onto its side, hitting another tank to its right rear.

"Bingo!" I yelled. "Two for one! Good shot, 'My Way'!" I said as I reloaded.

Bam! Long. I loaded again. Bam. It hit the right track. The tank spun in a circle.

"Go!" 'My Way' yelled.

The odds were much better, two to one. The tank jerked to the right with a crashing sound. It threw me into the side of the ammo rack. A second crash from

behind. We were pinned between two tanks.

"Where'd they come from?" 'My Way' asked as we tried to sit up. 'Haystack' was unconscious and so was 'Pop'. I was stunned. 'My Way' was trapped in the gunner position.

The turret door opened. The NVA soldiers ordered us out. I climbed out, pointing to 'My Way'. The soldiers sent two in to hand the others out. We were thrown in the back of a pick up and taken to a new camp.

"My Way, you okay?" I asked.

"Yeah. How's 'Pop'?"

"Dazed but awake," I said, as I looked into 'Pop's' eyes. 'Pop' was laying on his side.

"How 'bout 'Haystack'?"

"Take more than a couple gook tanks to take this boy out!" 'Haystack' said, sitting up.

"Well, we gave it a good go," 'Pop' said as the soldiers opened the back of the truck to let us out.

'My Way' jumped down. I eased down, as did 'Pop' and 'Haystack'. We were taken to a large cage at the center of the compound. We sat on the dirt floor. I took the socks off of my bloody feet and dabbed at them with the soft material. The bottom of my right foot wasn't as bad as I thought. I examined the bottom. Several puncture holes from the sticks on the jungle floor were bleeding. I looked at my side. I had dried blood around the wound and droplets of fresh blood dripping down my side.

"Here," 'Haystack' said, handing me his shirt. "It don't fit anyways!"

I folded it and pressed it against the wound. Now that I had the time to think about it, the pain returned. A throb at first, increasing to deep pains. 'Pop' told me to lay down and raise my feet. I did and he examined me.

"Hard to tell about inside damage or bleeding," he said, looking at 'My Way'. "Keep pressure on it."

A truck drove into the compound. The Chinese officer stepped out.

"Holy shit!" 'Haystack' said. "We shoulda killed him. We're in trouble now!"

Chow walked over to our cage and stopped, staring. He spat an order. Several soldiers moved toward the door of our cage. Chow drew his pistol and waited. 'Haystack' was taken out and stripped. His hands and feet were bound and he was laid on the ground. Each of us were stripped, bound, gagged and carried to the truck. Chow would not make the mistake of underestimating us again. He would not allow any more communications between us.

We were carried back to the cages. 'Snake's' remains had been removed. As had the body of the Soviet Major. The soldiers threw us into the cages. I noticed the blood saturated soil in front of 'My Way's' cage. The foot bounds were removed, but the gags stayed. Our hands were retied behind our backs. I looked up at the sun. It had been a busy morning. It wasn't even noon yet!

The guards stayed clear of us, insuring that they were in a safety zone. 'My Way' encouraged them to come closer with a head movement. The soldiers would have nothing to do with it. I looked over the compound. The satchel explosions left a pot hole in the

other side of the compound and the front of the headquarter building had burned areas on it. We had definitely left a mark.

'Pop' put his head against the side of his cage and pushed against the knot on his gag, pushing the gag with his tongue. The gag rolled onto his chin, then onto his neck. We followed in suit. 'Haystack' called for a guard to come over. They didn't dare! 'My Way' laid on his side and drew his arms below his butt. Then moved them behind his knees. He laid on his back and moved his hands down the back of his legs, moving his feet to his head. His hands were now in front.

I thought about it and decided no way! I'd get hung in the middle somewhere! 'Pop' and 'Haystack' successfully executed the maneuver, so I had no choice. It wasn't as difficult as I had thought but it started my side bleeding again.

No longer dazed, and fully alert, the remnants of the team Red Rock worked the bounds off our hands. The soldiers assigned to watch us had already sent for Chow.

"Well, very resourceful! I am sorry we have to revert to using these crude tools, but we do the best we can!" he said. Chow approached 'My Way' and spit at him. He did the same at 'Pop', me and 'Haystack'. He stopped at my cage and barked an order to the guards. They brought him one of the sticks they used to keep us sitting. He hit the cage with it. I sat, staring at him. His eyes were black and he had gauze stuffed in his nose. He actually looked pretty bad!

"You look like shit, Major!" I said. "What happened, forget how to be a soldier? First lesson," I said, "never underestimate the enemy!" I always had been a verbal persona and if I was going to die, it wouldn't be in stoic silence like the Green Beret team members. I intended to make the little assholes life as miserable as I could!

"Have your fun, Bull Dog. For in the end, you will die and I will feed your remains to the predators!"

I picked up a handful of shit and threw it at him. The rest of the team began throwing the shit, chasing the soldiers away.

"Have your fun, gentlemen, have your fun," and with that Chow ordered the soldiers to dump some smoke grenades under our cages.

The smoke burned our nostrils and throats and lungs. It disabled us to the point that the soldiers were able to take 'My Way' to the torture post without resistance. 'My Way's' hands and feet were tied and he was lifted into the air.

When the smoke cleared, Chow returned. He walked up to 'My Way' and asked, "What is your mission in Cambodia?"

'My Way' was silent. Chow turned to us, "Why are you here? Tell me and I will not harm him!" he said, pointing to 'My Way'. "If you do not tell me, he will die!" Then he walked back to 'My Way'.

Chow posted himself directly in front of 'My Way'. He looked up into his eyes and said, "Are you a Christian?" Without wanting an answer. He reached up and held the St. Christopher medal around 'My Way's' neck. He pulled his knife from its sheath and inspected it. Then he barked some orders, sending a soldier into the headquarter building.

The soldier soon returned with a metallic object. 'My Way's' eyes widened.

"Why are you here? What is your mission?" he was practically yelling the

questions at 'My Way'. "Then die like your Christ," he said as he reached up to 'My Way's' chest and cut him lightly across the chest.

'My Way' refused to scream. I looked at the metallic object. It was one of the scalpels that Pablo got from Sawbones.

"Where are you from? What is your mission here?!" No answer.

A second light incision was made, just above 'My Way's' bellybutton. Trying to resist, 'My Way' groaned in pain. I began yelling. 'Pop' told Chow to stop.

"I'll tell you what you want to know!" he said.

"Then tell me now!" Chow suspected it was a trick. He reached up to the top incision and connected it to the bottom incision. Screams finally came from 'My Way'.

"Stop!" I shouted, but Chow wasn't listening. He was too engrossed in his work. I realized that the questions Chow was asking weren't meant to be answered. This masochist wanted to torture us to death. He reached to the top corner of the incisions and pulled the tissue down toward the opposite corner.

"Ahhhhh!" 'My Way' screamed as his skin was torn from his body. Blood was streaking his body from his chest to his toes and dripped to the ground. 'My Way's' screams of pain and terror ripped through the air. The interrogator cut an incision across the top of 'My Way's' thigh. He didn't bother asking questions any longer. He methodically stripped the skin from 'My Way's' right leg. He was unconscious. *Thank God*, I thought as I fell back in my cage, delirious, confused and weak.

'My Way' came in and out of consciousness throughout the night. Screaming in pain, begging us to kill him. But we were helpless. I couldn't even vomit, my stomach was so empty. But my body continued to convulse, attempting to vomit. 'My Way' would moan, then begin screaming, and then go back to moaning, then he was unconscious again.

Chow was up early. At daybreak he came to the cages. He handed each of us a ladle of water. He took me out of the cage and tied me to a post with my hands behind me and the post. They then tied my legs. Then the question, "Where are you from?"

"My mother," I said.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"To kill you," I said.

He stopped and looked at me. He grabbed a rifle and struck me across my nose with the butt. The minute he hit me, I knew that my nose was broken.

"Oh, my! Look what I have done! Please let me fix it." he said. "The doctor told me that you must stuff the nose so the bone is kept in place. I'm so sorry. I don't know what could have come over me!" then he went to 'My Way' and slapped him. "Wake up! Dog! Wake up I say!"

'My Way' moaned. Then Chow cut a strip of 'My Way's' skin. 'My Way' screamed as the scalpel touched his skin. Chow slapped him again.

"Talk to your Savior! Tell him to heal you!" Then he turned with a strip of 'My Way's' skin and walked toward me. He grabbed my hair and yanked my head back. He took the skin and stuffed it into my nose. "Gauze is so valuable. We need it for the good and honorable fighters, not for the dead! Now you will taste death with every

breath! Put him back!" and the soldier threw me in my cage with my hands tied behind my back.

I couldn't breathe. I was forced to breathe through my mouth. It was so dry. Blood was still dripping down my throat from the break. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't breathe! Oh God! Someone help me! I can't breathe!

Morning came again. I didn't want it to. I didn't want to see another day! I looked up. I saw the distant gaze in 'My Way's' eyes. He was gone now. The flesh was rotting in my nose and hanging into my throat. I could taste the rotting flesh whenever I took a breath.

"I can't do it, 'Pop'," I said. "I can't last another day! I'm not like you guys. I'm just not made of the same stuff!" I knew that he would be here soon. I had decided that I would make the soldiers kill me. I waited. The soldiers came first. They cut 'My Way' down and dragged him off. I couldn't worry about 'My Way'. It would take all of my strength to break away from the soldiers. They would have to shoot me. They already feared me, so it shouldn't be hard, I thought.

"Don't do it, Bull Dog," 'Pop' said.

"They'll have to kill me, 'Pop'! I won't let them do it to me again!"

"Get a gun and shoot me, if you can Tadpole," 'Haystack' said.

'Pop' sat silent and waited. My heart leapt when I saw Chow exit the building. My blood pressure was rising. I felt light headed. Adrenaline. Chow was at the cages. "Look! The dead man must have risen in the night! (Referring to the absence of 'My way's' body.) Ha, ha, ha, ha!" He kept laughing an out of control laugh. "Open the Bull Dog's cage!" the Chinese masochist said, pointing to me.

The soldier put his arm through the rifle strap, hanging the AK on his shoulder. The rifle was hanging on his back. I was laying on the floor. The soldiers reached in to pull me out. I held onto the soldiers arm to pull myself up, acting as if I had no strength. The soldiers began laughing at something Chow had said. I put one foot on the ground, but before the other one touched the ground, I acted as if I was falling. The soldier bent to catch me. I grabbed his head, and spun his head to a crunching death. Gunfire started. Bullets were hitting all around me. The cages were splintering. The other soldier fell to his face, dead. I grabbed his rifle, and laid on the ground, looking around. Someone was firing at me, who? I saw the headquarters building explode and bodies flew. Flames leapt for the sky. Chow grabbed his leg and fell to the ground. I crawled to 'Pop' and shot the lock off his door. Then turned and shot at 'Haystack's' lock. Shit! I missed! I held the trigger down. 'Haystack' jumped to the back of the cage as the AK 47 fired fully automatic.

'Pop' was out. Chow lifted his pistol and shot. 'Haystack' backed to the back of the cage again, grabbing his stomach. Blood trickled through his fingers. 'Pop' hit Chow in the head with the butt of an AK. I turned and pointed the gun at the Chicon. 'Pop' nodded. I pulled the trigger and kept it pulled until the rifle quit.

'Pop' was helping 'Haystack' out. I got on the right and 'Pop' was on 'Haystack's' left. We turned toward the jungle where we had escaped before. My blood was rushing through me. We began running. I tripped and fell. I got back up and grabbed 'Haystack', who tripped with me. We started moving forward. Something was moving

ahead of us. I saw a soldier roll from behind a tree. Then I saw the flash of the M-16 barrel. I was thrown off my feet. Burning, I was burning. Then I was relaxed. Everything got dark. I wanted to sleep. I heard voices. Americans. I was so tired. So tired. Those voices. Calling me. Strange noises. More voices. Chipper, Chipper. Grandma was calling me. I really missed grandma. She died when I was twelve. She always had candy for me. "Grandma, Grandma, where are you Grandma?" I began crying. I missed my Grandma.

"Sir! Doctor! Over here! John Doe! He's crying! Over here!"

The Hospital Commander, Col. Gunderson understood the stress that his staff faced. Clark Air Force Base had become the regional medical center for the Southeast Asian area of operations (AO). Originally built to support the Air Force base and surrounding bases in the Philippines, Clark Regional Medical Center was now operating well beyond its capacity due to the enormous number of dead and wounded being shipped from Vietnam. It was from Clark AFB that soldiers would be designated and moved to long care medical facilities stateside. Air Force transport planes, C-141's and C-9 Nightingales, configured as hospital ships were tasked to fly these heroic Americans back to the United States.

The Colonel sat at his desk considering his options. Should he pick-up the phone and call Saigon as instructed? He looked out the window of his paper-laden office, toward the palm trees that seemed to be in perpetual motion.

How long ago was it? he thought as he stared at the green palm fronds dancing against the blue sky. *Two, three, four weeks?*

He couldn't remember when the secretive visitor entered his office and gave instructions concerning the young soldier identified as John Doe III.

"If he comes out of the coma, he is to have no contact with any member of your staff that has not been cleared by me. Once I have debriefed him, I will decide on who will have contact with him. Do you understand Colonel?"

"Well, what's not to understand! But you need to understand - what you're asking is fine and good - but I don't have the facilities or the manpower to segregate that young man from the rest of the wounded. The best I can do for you is a semi-private room," the Colonel snapped at the small man standing in front of his desk. *When did he stand?* the Colonel wondered.

The small man reached in his pocket and pulled out a card and an envelope.

"Here are your instructions Colonel. Don't shoot the messenger," he said as he handed a business card and the envelope to the Colonel.

"Perhaps you should read the letter while I'm here in case you have any questions," the little man said.

As the Colonel opened the envelope, he couldn't help but feel he knew the man.

The letter supported the need for complete security toward the young soldier. *Who was this kid?* the Colonel wondered as he continued to the end of the letter. Signed by General Stoney, Air Force Communication Systems Command.

"Alright," the Colonel agreed to cooperate with the man. He glanced at the

business card to confirm the man's name as he reached across to shake his hand and show him to the door. The card indicated that the man was from the Saigon Embassy.

"Alright, Mr. Colby," the Colonel said. "I give you my word that I'll restrict all access to the kid."

"And you'll contact me the moment there is any change?" Colby questioned Gunderson.

"The minute there's a change," the Colonel answered, trying to placate Mr. Colby. Then, in his most sincere voice, the Colonel continued, "I promise, Mr. Colby. The moment the kid's condition changes, I'll call you personally."

With that promise, Colby left. The Colonel asked him on his way out, "Mr. Colby - we could use a name for the kid."

Searchingly, Colby gave a cold smile and answered, "John Doe the third," and turned on his toes and left.

Poor kid, the Colonel thought under his breath, thinking back to the young soldiers' condition. The Colonel knew that if he made the call to Colby, things would never be the same for the kid.

And how many other young men would these people push into a war that won't be won? the Colonel wondered to himself. "What the hell are they thinking back there?!" the Colonel said aloud as he continued to contemplate whether or not to call Colby.

"Excuse me?" asked the Colonel's secretary.

The voice startled the Colonel as he looked up at Mrs. James, his secretary.

"Oh," he quickly recovered. "I guess I'm thinking aloud again."

"If you don't mind, I think I can answer your question, Colonel," Mrs. James volunteered. "Most of them don't really realize what's happening over here. For example, I'm from Boise, Idaho. We just spent three weeks back there on leave and I'll tell you - Vietnam is the furthest thing on their mind. Don't get me wrong, it's on the news and the protestors are getting coverage in Washington. But, most Americans are comfortable and war hasn't touched them. Their kids are either too young to be concerned about the draft or they're beyond the draft. So, the people back home are thinking about their mortgage payment or moving up in their jobs."

"But what about the news?" the Colonel asked. "Surely the American people can see the number of wounded, killed or mission - it's enormous. How can they disassociate themselves with reality that way? And, surely the protestors in Washington are getting somewhere!"

"Oh sure," she answered dryly. "Do you know who these protestors are? They're students and wounded American fighting men and they want Washington to level with the people about what's going on in Vietnam. The government has labled them dissidents and, try as they may, I don't think they can quiet them."

"Well, it's certainly a sad day when the very men that have risked their lives for their country are labled as disidents. They're called dissidents by our elected officials because they only ask for the government, which life and limb was sacrificed for, to be honest to the American people." The Colonel shook his head in disgust, realizing that most of those labled as disidents were healed by his staff.

"Those young men are fighting wars on two fronts - they can't win," Mrs. James

added, handing the Colonel Colby's business card. "Now, it's your turn to choose!" she said slyly. "You can throw that card away as a symbol of your true feelings - knowing that you'll have to answer to someone - or you can make that call and send the kid right back into hell."

When he looked up, she had already left the room and closed the door.

For the next two weeks, I spent every day with Mr. Peepers, William J. Colby, or a psychiatrist who accompanied him. My primary medical care had been taken over by Colonel Gunderson and his Chief of Nurses. Ms. James, the Colonel's secretary, visited me daily. She would bring a paper or magazine and read it to me. It was over a month before I could focus well enough to read large print. It was during these visits that the Colonel and Ms. James explained the events leading to my first contact with Colby. Colby and the shrink questioned me about every aspect of the mission. I was injected with something to help me remember what had happened during Operation Red Rock. When their questioning was complete, he let me know that Haystack had died of his wounds and Pop was in the States, still in a coma. He explained that it was decided by the president that Red Rock was classified for twenty-five years. He told me of the discussions in the White House and how the decisions regarding Red Rock had been made by Nixon, Kissinger and Haig. Colby further explained to me the need, in the name of national security, to keep any mention of the mission confidential. I was not to discuss, write about, or even think about Red Rock.

"Let it die, Bulldog," he encouraged. "It's part of history now," he said, showing me an article from Newsweek outlining the successful raid on Phenom Penh by NVA sappers.

I was told that, due to National Security, I would be "held close" meaning that my assignments would be controlled, and he was assigned as my control. I was given a choice to work for the Central Intelligence Agency or maintain my affiliation with the military. I chose to stay in the Air Force, knowing that my assignments would be controlled by Mr. Colby.

He briefed me on security, operational security, and my new chain of command. Before he left, he assigned a code name to me.

"Sgt. Tatum, all communications will contain your code name." And with that he told me my code name and departed.

When Colby left, I lay in my hospital bed, wounded physically and emotionally, still wanting for answers. But, I had a code name, and my code name was Pegasus.

EPILOGUE

Following his conversation with Dr. Kissinger concerning the new fate of Team Red Rock, President Nixon moved swiftly. On January 18, 1971, Richard M. Nixon, finally comfortable with the new commitment of Cambodian Prime Minister Lon Nol to the war effort, and the loyalty of Team Red Rock, signed the order for a major offensive into Laos and Cambodia. Lam Son 719, as the offensive was called, now made strategic sense. It would also afford U.S. troops the opportunity to find any American POW's who may be held captive, specifically, Team Red Rock.

Finally given the opportunity to cross the 'fence' with ground patrols, Military Assistance Command - Vietnam (MACV) Commander General "Abe" Abrams ordered US Army and Marine patrols into Cambodia and Laos. The mission of the patrols was to map encampments, ammo dumps, fuel depots and AAA sites. The patrols were ordered to avoid fire fights at all costs, but, if fired upon, return fire. A concerted effort was put on locating possible American POW's. If a POW camp was located, orders were to liberate the prisoners. Air support would be available. The patrol limits were five kilometers beyond the Cambodian and Laotian borders.

A Marine patrol had stumbled across the encampment where Red Rock was held. No knowing that Americans were being held at the encampment, the patrol mapped the location and prepared to leave.

As the patrol began moving from the location, an NVA perimeter guard discovered the Marine's presence, and fired on the patrol. The American patrol returned fire, catching most of the NVA soldiers in the headquarters/barracks building. During the firefight, three naked soldiers attempted to flee into the bush but were acquired by two Marines, flanking the camp. All three soldiers were shot and wounded from gunfire and shrapnel from a grenade thrown in the vicinity of the fleeing soldiers. Two of the fleeing soldiers were wounded and unconscious, while the third, with critical stomach wounds, called out to the Marines in English to help them.

When the Marine patrol secured the camp, a medic was called to administer to the English speaking soldier with abdomen wounds. Before dying, he was able to tell the platoon Sergeant that he and his two comrades were American soldiers. Unfortunately, the US serviceman died within minutes of being liberated from his captors and was unable to give any further information to the Marine medic.

All three soldiers were medevac-ed to Saigon, two for medical care, one for the morgue. The oldest of the three suffered chest and head wounds which required immediate treatment in the United States. He was placed on an Air Force C-141 hospital aircraft, bound for the United States. The identification of the soldier remained unknown due to his state of unconsciousness.

The second survivor suffered a thigh wound from a bullet ricochet and shrapnel in the lower back (butt) area from a fragment grenade. He also suffered a head wound and concussion. This caused severe brain swelling, making a flight to the US for care out of the question. This soldier was sent to a military hospital in the Philippines. The soldier remained unconscious in a comatose state for three weeks. His identity was also

unknown. Both soldiers were shipped to their respective medical facilities under the name of John Doe.

GREENMAN I
A SOLDIER GONE
(The Greenman Series)

And a soldier dies
Here a young man lies
An answer to duty call

And a mother cried
And a mother cried
And a mother cried

And the Greenmen said
It's justified
For Freedom has survived

And a father weeps
As the raised guns speak
of heros, and life denied

And a mother cried
And a mother cried
And a mother cried

And a young wife grieves
Her husband and friend A flag
From the Greenmen - they say
"A soldier has died - It's justified
For Freedom has survived"

And a little boy
And a little girl
watch - a soldier gone

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gene "Chip" Tatum

The Author started his military career in 1970 when he volunteered for service during the Vietnam war. Graduating at the top ten percent of his class as one of the Air Force's first elite Combat Controller's (CCT), and later to become a Command Pilot for Special Operations, the Author survived his tours in Vietnam with a number of awards and decorations which included: Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medals for Valor, an Air Force Distinguished Service Medal, an Air Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal, and a Purple Heart. As his career advanced, he accepted an appointment as a Warrant Officer. Following his service in Vietnam, the Author was attached to the White House for "special" duty assignments. White House special duty assignments continued through 1986, at which time, the Author's talents filled a specific need of the White House which existed outside a militarily-restricted environment. The Author continued to serve the White House through 1991. Serving five administrations, through a quarter of a century, the Author commanded, planned, and participated in eighteen covert and black operations around the world. His codename is Pegasus.