

Operation Rock the Cradle

The Blake Walker Chronicles

Alex Guimonde



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Grandpa

Watching the young boy inspect and clean every inch of the Weatherby .243 in preparation for our pursuit of the elusive mule deer on Saturday, he could not help but to reflect back to when he was a few years younger than the boy. He thought about the summers he and Kyle spent with Grandpa at his cabin near Malvern, Arkansas, and his first experience with hunting. Kyle and Blake were first instructed in the art of shooting using the same type of gun. Grandpa had built his log cabin when he first came to Arkansas from Oklahoma in 1907, at the age of 17, to trap and make his fortune. Summers with him were always educational and fun and the first one his older brother Kyle and he spent was a shocking experience. Their dad had become increasingly violent toward all his children, and since they were out of school in the summer an escape was possible. This made Blake six and Kyle seven when they spent the first summer with Grandpa Blake Elliott.

About a half mile from his cabin was a large stream with several deep pools where catfish, perch, and bass were; this was also where they went for their drinking water. Since their dad was a city feller, Grandpa taught them everything about living in the woods, including hunting, fishing, and scavenging for food. You see, Grandpa had never experienced the modern amenities of life. It was a time, which was all too short, they enjoyed and fondly remembered. Even though Grandpa did not use the modern amenities available at the road's edge, he cherished his state of the art 1954 Winchester Model 70 30.06. He took special pride in teaching them how to not only shoot rifles accurately but also reload their spent cartridges to improve accuracy.

The summer of 1965, their first one, was a frightful experience. Early one morning just after school was out for summer, Kyle and

Blake were awakened by an argument that sounded like a freight train outside the door of the bedroom. It was not the first time, and certainly it would not be the last, an argument erupted outside their door. This time it ended in a beating, not on them but also for Mom. As he left for work that morning, they could hear Mom crying for what seemed like an eternity. Being afraid to go out the door for fear they heard wrong and Dad was still in the house, this was the day they first met Grandpa Elliott.

Within a few minutes Mom came through their door, still crying, and asked what they wanted for breakfast. It was then they knew it was safe to emerge from the room. Since they had dressed already, prior to the argument, they threw off the covers, hopped out of bed and headed for the kitchen. While they waited, while she cooked, Kyle and Blake were told to get their clothes together because they were going on a trip. The drive from Little Rock to Malvern down Interstate 30 always seemed an eternity. Their first thought was they were heading to Aunt Nancy's farm—they always enjoyed visiting her—but as the car approached her house Mom did not slow down but just kept on going on by and continued down the dirt road. Kyle piped in, saying, "Mom, we just passed Aunt Nancy's and now we are going to have to turn around." She told Kyle they were going down the road a little bit farther to their great grandpa's cabin. They looked at each other and thought, What grandpa? The Plymouth rumbled louder and louder as it proceeded down the old wash boarded road. The oak trees along the road got closer and closer till it seemed like they were traveling through a cave. Then, as if it was on cue, the trees parted and opened up into a meadow with a log cabin situated off the road a bit up against the oak trees at the edge of the meadow. They were perplexed at the sight of this place and how they could have a grandpa living there; there was not even a car. To their surprise Mom drove up into what looked like a front yard that had never seen a lawnmower.

The two boys had never seen a log cabin in real life before, just in books. It was severely dilapidated, and at first look they agreed they had built tree houses better than this. There were no windows, just

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holes with stained and worn pieces of cloth covering the inside, and shutters on the outside. The walls were made out of logs with moss growing on the inside as well as out. The roof did not appear to be able to keep the rain out because it had boards intermingled with pieces of tin just like the patch work quilts Mom used to make. The storm struck. They thought about why Mom was bringing them here and what they did to deserve this; little did they know it was for their own protection. As Mom pulled up to the front door, which looked like two pieces of wood held together by two small boards and a couple of coat hangers, it was starting to open and what appeared to be a very old man emerged with two dogs just behind him.

He was a hulk of a man and was taller than if Kyle put Blake up standing up on his shoulders. His eyes seemed to be burning with fire and his face was hidden by a beard of grey and black and what looked like pieces of food contained inside. Below his lips and continuing down past his chin his beard contained some substances that neither Kyle nor Blake had ever seen in their short lives before, but resembled the mud they used to track home from the field across the road in front of their house in Little Rock. The dogs were small in stature, not even coming up to their knees, and were barking just like the horn on their uncle Tom's semi truck. As the dogs barked their heads raised up as if the noise they were making was propelling their heads backward. While the old man approached the car, and Mom was getting out, he raised his foot as if to kick one of the dogs and he barked "shut up," instantly scattering the dogs, like a piece of glass hitting a rock, yelping as they went. He wore an orange and white flannel shirt, which had never seen the inside of a washing machine, with what Kyle referred to as the Green Acres coveralls from hell.

As he saw Mom emerge from the Plymouth his face went through a transformation from evil hatred, having his day disturbed by some yahoos in a Plymouth, to genuine friendliness and concern for the person emerging from the car. "You finally left him didn't you, and only after a beating. I guess he did not listen to the warning and the beating I gave some three years ago," said the old man. His voice sounded like the vampires they used to see in movies when Mom

took them to the drive-in theatre in Little Rock. Just like at those movies, they could feel the hair stand up on the back of their necks, with one exception—it was different because it produced genuine fear in them this time.

“You old weasel,” said Mom. “No, I have not left him. I just need a little help so I can work things out.”

“Do you want me to have another talk with him?” piped the old man. “I can make sure he understands clearly this time.”

As they sat in the back seat of the car the boys grew curious as to who this man was and how their mom knew him. They thought they had met all their relatives but she kept referring to him as grandpa. Mom told him of the fight, about the same old problem, and that she needed to go to a place where she could think and not have their dad find her and the boys.

Speaking in a kind voice, the man said, “Come out here and let me see you two. It has been three yarns and you two have grown so much.”

Sheepishly they eased out of the car on the opposite side of the man. “Don’t you two remember old Grandpa? Kyle, you should remember me since you was four at the time.” Kyle slid to the front of the car to look over the hood at the old man on the other side of the Plymouth. As he looked Blake could see a smile starting to form and his brother’s apprehension start to leave.

As for Blake he was minimally happy on the opposite side of the car. Just then he heard Mom bark, “You boys get over here and say hello to your favorite grandpa,” and as if on cue Kyle ran around the car to the awaiting arms of Grandpa Elliott. Blake however moved cautiously to get a better look at the man who seemed to be different than his first impression. Neither of the boys recognized the cabin since they had never gone this far down the road from Aunt Nancy’s.

It had been three years since the last family gathering. That was also the last time Dad and Grandpa Elliott had been in the same proximity. Kyle could but Blake could not remember it; Grandpa and their dad had had a little disagreement as Mom called it. Apparently Kyle and Blake were playing and it did not meet with the approval of

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their dad, and they were about to be punished quite severely for it until Grandpa stepped in. Dad, being a city feller, was no match for Grandpa, even at his age. The beating their dad received also included a warning, "If you ever punish my grandchildren that way again I will be visiting you and you will get more of the same but over a longer amount of time." The boys were about to receive one of Dad's, what they called, twister whippings; he would chase them whipping with the belt as they ran until Dad could not run anymore. Fortunately for them Grandpa knew what was coming. After that Dad would not go anywhere Grandpa was, not even for family gatherings.

Grandpa gathered Kyle up into his arms, as easily as one would pick up a feather, and motioned for Mom and Blake to follow him into the cabin. Kyle and Mom went in willingly but Blake was still very much concerned.

"Are you sure it will not fall down?" he piped out very assuredly. The three just giggled and continued on inside. As Blake followed apprehensively into the cabin, he watched the man put Kyle down on what looked like a long box with a blanket on it. He then pulled out two chairs, offered one to their mom and sat down on the other. Blake glanced around the dark, musty one-room cabin and determined the furnishings were nonexistent except for the box, two chairs, a table, and what looked like a shelf about a foot wide running down one side of the cabin. The shelf held a cast iron skillet, two large pails, two tin cups, some silverware, three plates, and a bowl with broken walnut shells in it, something that looked like a press with several different heads, and about ten little boxes of differing sizes. One thing that did catch his attention above the fireplace mantel were two long objects with wood on one end and a pipe on the other. One of them even possessed another small pipe on top. What amazed them was the guns looked out of place since they were clean and the metal pipes shined like their church shoes. Remembering what Mom had said earlier, that she needed to go some place where Dad could not find them, Blake was sure they would be leaving to go there to their final destination real soon. Then his hopes of moving on were smashed when Mom asked the man if they could spend the night.

“Why don’t you boys go outside so Grandpa and I can talk,” said Mom. Being bored anyway they complied most eagerly since this afforded the prospect of exploring a new territory. Everything about this place excited their curiosity, even though they did not want to spend the night, because of the field across the street from their house in Little Rock. It was a lot with trees of various sorts where they spent most of their time hiding from Dad; this type of behavior would continue until they left home. It was not very large since they could walk across it in a short time when going to Billy Stedman’s home. From the front door they could see the other side of the meadow about 600 yards out, and after that trees seemed to go on forever. As per their character they were strangely methodical for small boys, and quiet when exploring and discovering new things.

Going out the front door of the cabin the dogs approached them apprehensively with their tails tucked between their legs. Their friend Billy had a dog named Bart, which was much bigger than these two put together. Blake thought they were strange looking dogs. Their ears appeared to be twice the size they needed to be, and instead of being one color, like Bart, these had three: white, black, and tan. Unlike dogs that barked normal, their bark sounded more like they were in pain and they assumed the dogs were because of how far their heads went back when they let out a bark. Walking around back the dogs followed them curiously and never got close enough for either boy to touch them. Surprisingly, behind the cabin was a corral with a horse in it with a shed at one end, and as they approached the horse whinnied, startling both of them. Mom instinctively knew when trouble was about to occur and they heard Mom say from within the cabin, “Do not go into the corral with the horse; he does not like little boys and neither do the pigs.” The man stuck his head out the window in the back of the cabin and said, “You two can go and pull some grass for the horse and feed it to him, he will like you better for it.” The man owned animals they had only seen in pictures, but what interested them the most was the animal across the meadow that looked like a small horse but had horns sort of like a bull.

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Not being interested in pulling grass for the dumb old horse, they moved on around the cabin. As they passed on to the other side Blake saw something that looked very strange. It first appeared to be two sticks moving above the grass on the other side of the meadow. Creeping up to Kyle's side Blake motioned with his hand to look at the two sticks. Perplexed, they gradually moved closer, crossing the road and into the tall grass. Mom and the old man instinctively and quietly came out the door to watch the trouble the two boys were about to get into but made no effort to stop them. About 150 yards on the other side of the road they came across a fallen tree and stealthily crept on top to take a better look at the animal. Having stalked animals before to shoot at with their slingshots this was, by far, the longest stalk ever accomplished by the two boys. The animal was about the same color as the grass and it slowly moved along the edge of the field eating from left to right. Not ever seeing this kind of animal in a picture they moved back to the cabin, quietly so as not to startle it, to ask the old man where he got this animal; this is when they knew their mom was watching the whole time.

Since Blake was still skittish of this man Kyle approached him and asked about his animal across the field. Looking puzzled the man asked Kyle what it looked like. Upon hearing the description the man went back into the cabin and over to the shelf and opened one of the boxes and pulled something out. Then he went to fireplace and with a sweeping motion he pulled the rifle down and placed a bullet into the chamber as he moved to the window. Pulling back the cloth to one side and hanging it onto a nail, he motioned for Blake to come and show him what he was talking about even though he knew exactly what the boys were stalking; surprisingly he did not hesitate. At the window Blake whispered, "Look for the two limbs moving up and down at the furthest point across the meadow." With skillful grace he pulled the rifle scope up to his eye and scanned the other side of the meadow slowly until stopping abruptly. After watching for a few seconds he motioned with his free hand for them to plug their ears. All three complied and Blake proceeded to watch the whole process with genuine curiosity. With his left hand the old man cradled the

stock, as if it was a newborn baby, and gently rested it on the left side of the window opening. Blake could hear the old man's breath slow to a deliberate and measured inhaling and exhaling. His stance was surprisingly majestic for a man who almost stumbled as he approached the car earlier. Watching him progress through a series of deliberate moves and adjustments as he drew the cross hairs down on the animal, it stupefied Blake at how long this process seemed to take even though it was just a couple of seconds. As he began the final sequence of taking the shot, Blake could see by his facial expression the many calculations the old man was making in order to deliver the bullet across the six hundred yards of flight to its target. This whole process heightened his curiosity and then, as if on instinct, Blake placed his fingers into his ears and turned to gaze at the animal across the meadow. Amazingly he barely recognized the rifle's report as the man gently squeezed the trigger and at almost the same instant the two twigs Kyle and Blake saw crumbled below the grass.

"I was wondering what we would be eating for dinner. Now we have meat that will last us at least a month," said the old man. In that instant, for some strange reason, Blake's impression of the man went from apprehension to great respect for he now had numerous questions running through his mind about what he had just witnessed.

Almost instantly the boys bolted for the front door so they could get a closer look at the animal that Grandpa had just shot. However, Mom had anticipated what they would do upon the downing of the animal and gracefully moved to the front door to block their exit. She whispered and motioned with her hand extended toward them, saying, "Sh sh sh; we need to wait a few minutes so the animal can die and we can approach it safely." It seemed like an eternity before Grandpa went over to the shelf and grabbed a large knife. Then he motioned to the boys to follow as he headed out the front door. With great eagerness and curiosity they followed as he crossed the meadow in a slow and deliberate movement, imitating their grandpa to the tee. While approaching the log they had been at just a few

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minutes earlier, Grandpa motioned for them to move quietly to the log and then scan the edge of the meadow for the animal. Looking intently at the spot where they had seen the animal go down, neither Kyle nor Blake could see evidence of the animal's presence. Grandpa then arched his neck, raising his head like the dogs did when they wailed; he took a long deep breath through his nose.

As they imitated him something smelled strangely out of place from what their memories recollected when they approached the animal earlier. Grandpa sensed this by the expressions on the boys' faces and motioned to them to follow as he whispered, "That is the smell of blood; see if you can detect other scents as we approach the downed animal." This was the beginning of something that would greatly affect their entire lives. Slowly and deliberately they approached the spot where the animal went down after being shot. The smell of the blood was getting stronger in the air and it was joined by other odors with one distinct odor—the odor that seemed a lot like wet wool. When they arrived to approximately 40 yards from the spot where they saw the animal go down, Grandpa whispered, "Close your eyes and follow the odors that are out of place." As the two boys shuffled along, Grandpa watched intently to prevent them from tripping over any obstacles in their way and also at the abilities of tracking animals the boys were learning. The odors of the animal gradually drew them to their right with it seeming like several minutes before Grandpa put his hand on their shoulders and instructed them to open their eyes. Not more than five feet in front of them laid this majestic ten point white tail buck. It was about the size of both of them put together. Reaching over and grabbing the hind legs, Grandpa dragged the buck over to a log in preparation of bleeding the prize.

In a low and kind voice he said, "This animal is a white tail deer." He further explained the males have horns but females mostly do not.

"We first need to bleed him and that is why I placed his head downhill from the rest of the body," said Grandpa. Taking the knife he then placed its point on the buck's neck just behind and below the horns and made a tiny slit resulting in deep red ooze flowing from the

wound. Motioning for the boys to come with him to sit on an adjacent log, he instructed the captive audience many things about hunting, reviewing how they had arrived at the animal and how to use the information in the future.

Pointing up the meadow Grandpa said they were about 40 yards from the spot the buck went down. Then pointing to the ground he showed them where the buck apparently crawled to this spot to die in an effort to hide himself. If their mother had not stopped them they would still be tracking him. After you have taken your shot and you are confident the bullet has struck home, wait a few minutes for the animal to die unless, of course, you have broken their back or killed them instantly; animals will always move off from where they have been shot. This deer was not killed instantly and Grandpa had struck him in the lower part of his heart, so with his last ounce of strength he crawled some 40 yards away. After teaching them many things concerning tracking animals after they have been shot, he approached the deer, and with the skill of a surgeon he showed them, at length, how to field dress a carcass.

During this time Mom had followed them at a distance while reflecting back to when she and their uncles went through the same educational process some twenty years ago. She watched the two boys' faces gleam with anticipation as the old man took them through each step, teaching important lessons that would surface on many occasions. This is when she realized, even though Blake and Kyle were only six and seven years of age, it was time for them to spend the summers with their Grandpa Blake Elliott.

"Come on, boys, let's drag this deer back to the cabin," said Grandpa. "Just before the sun sets tonight, when the coyotes come, we will see if we can sneak up on them and watch as they finish off the rest of the deer."

On the backside of the cabin there was a log that protruded past the roof's drip edge with a pulley fastened to it; this is where they dragged the deer to. Grandpa said he was going to fetch some rope from the horse's shelter to hang the deer up so he could skin it out and they could have some meat for dinner tonight and make jerky

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tomorrow. Mom suggested that Grandpa take them and old Jake (the horse) over into the meadow and get straw for bedding and also go down to the creek to get water while she took care of the deer. Kyle and Blake looked at each other, thinking: water comes out of the faucet in the house and doesn't Grandpa have mattresses? At the same time Jake's ears perked up, for he knew he was getting out of the corral.

As Grandpa was moving around the corral to the horse's shed, like a robot, Jake walked to his shed in preparation for his pack saddle to be put on. It was a strange looking object that appeared to be two crosses fastened together with two pieces of wood and with a long strap attached to it that went around Jake's belly. The functionality became apparent when Grandpa took two large strange looking pails, that the boys learned later were milk jugs that he used to get milk with up at Aunt Nancy's, and hooked them to the saddle. As he opened the gate Jake stepped through and started heading down a trail, joined by the two dogs that meandered along the edge of the field and then down into the woods. They were flabbergasted at the thought that Jake was getting away but Grandpa did not seem concerned. Apparently Jake knew where he was going and as he strolled down the trail he took the occasional mouthful of grass to chew on. After Grandpa had gone into the cabin to retrieve the shotgun, he and the two boys followed Jake and the dogs down the trail heading to the creek. To their surprise, Jake was waiting at the edge of the meadow eating the small tender shoots of grass, apparently waiting on them to catch up. Grandpa could see the perplexed look the boys made the closer they got to Jake, so Grandpa began to explain many things about the horse.

Jake had been with Grandpa since he was a colt some twenty-two years ago. He had never seen the need for a car, let alone afford one, so his mode of transportation was his two feet and Jake. Aunt Nancy would go to town, with his social security check in hand, and pick up supplies for him once a month. In return Grandpa made sure they always had jerked venison plus blackberries and huckleberries in the summer and little mason jars with water in it in the winter. As they

were moving along the trail just before the creek, Jake stopped abruptly and simultaneously the dogs started baying at something in the middle of the trail. At first it looked like a bunch of leaves but at closer observation it became apparent what had put so much excitement in the dogs; it was a snake. Grandpa told them to not get close just yet as he was moving over to a willow tree to cut off a limb about five feet long. “Boys, this is why the dogs and Jake went down the trail before us. It was just in case we ran across a snake. There are four types of snakes around here that are poisonous: a water moccasin, a rattlesnake, a coral snake, and that right there is a copper head. Whenever you go into the woods take the dogs or Jake with you since they are very good at spotting snakes. Plus, do not worry if they get bit since they can take a bite from snakes and not die.” Then, to their surprise, instead of killing the snake he gently used the limb he had retrieved and encouraged the snake off their path. Then Jake and the dogs continued down to the creek to take a drink.

After Grandpa had filled the two pails with water and Jake and the dogs had drunk to satisfaction, he put the pails back on the saddle. As if this was his cue, Jake turned and headed back down the trail to the cabin but the dogs did not follow. At the creek were many different bushes, trees, and small plants. Moving alongside the creek he pointed out the deep pools where fish could be caught. He then slowly approached the stump mound of a large cypress tree that had fallen over the creek. He warned that this is one of the places they could come across a very aggressive snake, the water moccasin, since it especially likes fallen trees and blackberry patches. After he made sure no snake was present he pointed to a small plant about two feet tall with big leaves that looked like elephant ears. He said it was a poke salad plant that is good to eat when it is small and berries are not starting to grow on it. He demonstrated to them how to pick poke salad and fortunately for them on the other side of the mound was a good example of what not to pick and eat. At every opportunity Grandpa would show them things the boys could and could not eat and especially how to identify plants with edible roots since these could be harvested year round. Kyle and Blake thought they had a

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real life Daniel Boone as a grandpa. They also thought he could talk to horses since when arriving back at the meadow Jake was there with two large potato sacks and a knife that was shaped into a circle with a long handle attached to the pack saddle. When Grandpa started cutting the grass with the knife he also instructed them to stuff the bags with the grass. Somehow they knew what their bedding was going to be.

Back at the cabin Mom had cut off some meat and placed it in the smoker that was up in the woods behind the cabin. She also took about ten strips of meat, rolled them in salt, pepper, and dill and hung them on a wire that was on the south side of the cabin. Continuing with the preparation of the food she hung a pot of water to boil over what they called a campfire on the backside of the cabin. This was also used to boil four eggs and then to cook the poke salad. The smoker emitted a sweet smelling odor which reminded them of apple, and with eager anticipation they wondered what the meat would taste like since they could not remember if venison or poke salad was included in their diet before that day. Little did they know they had because Grandpa supplied Mom with wild game on a regular basis through Aunt Nancy, even though Grandpa and Dad did not see eye to eye.

Venison, strangely enough, tasted a lot like beef or at least they thought it did; as for the poke salad it tasted similar to spinach. Mom and Grandpa just smiled when Kyle made this comparison and it would be many years later when they discovered their first taste of store bought beef was when they went off to boot camp. To add to a very exciting day during dinner a strange man in a Ford pickup drove up to the cabin. In the bed of the truck were several bales of hay. Grandpa went over to the man and spoke very softly so they could not hear the conversation. While the man climbed up into the bed of the truck to remove some of the bales of hay, Grandpa went up into the woods with Jake and the dogs for what seemed about thirty minutes. During this period of time the man kept looking down the road back toward Aunt Nancy's house. From where the boys sat it appeared the man had just made a walkway into the bed about the width of a bale.

This seemed very strange to Blake and Kyle. When Grandpa returned with Jake the man went around his truck to the other side and removed a rifle and a large box from the cab. Grandpa then took two large boxes from Jake's back and slid them in between the bales of hay into the bed of the truck. At the same time they could hear what sounded like two pieces of glass clanking together. Grandpa then helped the man place all the bales of hay back into the truck in the same manner as when he arrived except for one bale. After receiving the box and rifle from the man Grandpa shook his hand and said I will see you next week. This was the beginning of what they observed were many weekly visits by strange men in pickups with bales of hay in the bed.

The rifle's barrel glistened in the sun and the boys observed it with eager anticipation as Grandpa brought it and the box over to where they sat. It looked very similar to the rifle that downed the buck, however the butt was much shorter as if it was made for a small person. Grandpa explained that the rifle was a Weatherby .243 and he was going to teach them how to shoot with it. In the large box that came with it, was another press with many different attachments on it, eight boxes that looked like the ones on the shelf inside the cabin, a small object that looked like the barrel Saint Bernards carried on their collar in Switzerland, a small set of scales, and several boxes of objects that looked like short pencils made out of what appeared to be copper. Blake and Kyle's faces showed sincere excitement as Grandpa started illustrating many details about the rifle and the items in the box. It seemed the press was a machine used to reload spent shells, the boxes contained shells that are used in the gun, the small barrel contained gun powder for reloading, the scale measured the gun powder for reloading, and the objects that looked like short pencils were the bullets that are placed in the cartridges when reloading. All the while Mom was watching and wondering if her two boys would follow the same path as her grandpa had done in World War I. Then he licked his index finger and held it up in front of them, checking the wind, and then looked back toward Mom and said it was time for them to sneak down to where they found the deer.

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As he was pointing to the direction of the wind he tried to wink at Mom, so as to not have them observe, and at the same time whispered for them to follow him back across the field.

As they entered the grass he motioned with his hand for them to follow in the same manner as he demonstrated. Gracefully he maneuvered his way through the grass without making a sound. Neither of the boys could understand why he did not move in a straight line since there was no animal out there at this time. He walked very strangely. Instead of walking normally, heel to toe, he placed his feet down onto the grass in a sweeping motion that looked like roller skating on the outside edge of his boot and then rolling the bottom of the boot till it was flat onto the ground. As they imitated him their steps improved and gradually became quieter and quieter. Arriving at about forty yards from the place where they left the entrails, Blake and Kyle could hear the faint sound of the Plymouth starting and then heading back down the road toward Aunt Nancy's place. While sitting there, in a low voice Grandpa was explaining why they approached this spot in a sweeping half circle. It seems everybody carries scents that other animals can detect, at a distance, much like how they followed their noses to the site where the buck had died. To avoid detection they approached in a manner that took their scent out of the area in which the coyotes would be using as their approach to the entrails.

Coyotes are the most resilient predator that can be found anywhere in the United States. Despite bounties on their carcasses they have not only survived but have thrived because of the wiliness. He explained they will approach from the woods and will come up to the entrails much in the manner as they did in a sweeping half circle. "You are neither going to hear them or smell them first, but watch for them by scanning the edge of the forest, not concentrating on any specific object. Since you will detect the movement in your peripheral vision long before you see them using this method, you will greatly improve your ability to detect them. At first only one will come in and when the coyote has eaten his fill he will let out a sound that sounds a lot like a dog that has been struck by a car; this will

bring in the other ones. For many hours now the entrails have been emitting odors that numerous coyotes have detected and will soon be showing up.” Just before sundown they started showing up exactly as Grandpa had described. The first one came from the forest directly across from them and at a ninety degree angle to the wind direction. Slowly and cautiously he proceeded, checking every one of his senses with every step he took. Since the breeze was taking their scent in a different directions, the coyote was unable to detect them for the time being. For his other methods of detection their concealment was not so absolute. Keeping low into the grass allowed for their outline to be broken from observation, plus staying perfectly still also prevented the coyote from hearing their presence. However, after about fifteen minutes, their excitement gave them away since they were constantly adjusting their position to better observe the habits of the predators. With a giant leap the coyotes bolted toward the forest, running for safety just like a pack of startled cats. Grandpa stood up, chuckled and casually headed across the meadow back to the cabin with the boys in tow. Their brains were elated at the new experiences they had received so far and speculated with eager anticipation of what more was to come.

When their mother had left the boys paid her no never mind since she usually did not go far from them. However, arriving back at the cabin they knew deep in their gut it would be a while before Blake or Kyle would see their mother again. She had returned home to face the music for what she had done. Not surprisingly, Dad did not miss them during the absence at the first and successive summers to come.

During the day they could hear various sounds from the meadow and the forest but at night the noise increased threefold. Since the cabin had no electricity the only light Grandpa possessed was from a kerosene lantern. It put out a dull yellow light and emitted a distinct odor that is hard to describe. He did not burn the lantern too long, being of modest means, so they all went to bed rather early for their summertime sleeping schedule. Being still excited about this adventure, both just lay there listening, for a couple of hours, to the sounds that after a while sounded like a symphony playing. There

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after Blake and Kyle cherished the sounds of night since their fondest memories of childhood occurred with Grandpa and at his cabin; even years later as teenagers they spent as much time in the woods as possible even sleeping there in makeshift cabins built with anything found in the surrounding area. Some of their friends, later in life, would find their escape from reality in drugs, but Kyle and Blake, however, viewed the woods as their escape and friend.

Grandpa had, as the boys would gradually find out, immense knowledge about guns and shooting. The jars of water—what they thought was water—placed in the back of the trucks were traded for the guns and all the equipment needed to reload the spent cartridges. As it turned out the man came back several times for those jars and never gave Grandpa any more money. It was only later in life did they discover the amount he gave in trade for the gun; all to teach them the skill of shooting and hunting. To start with he took the rifle and pulled it up and placed the butt against his shoulder tightly. Then he moved his eye up to the scope and viewed the target. He instructed them this was the sequence you take in preparation to taking your shot. In preparation for Kyle to take the first shot Grandpa walked out about forty yards across the meadow and placed a bottle on a log. He then came back to Kyle and loaded the rifle. Then he handed the rifle to Kyle. Following the sequence he observed Grandpa doing, Kyle brought the rifle tightly up to his shoulder and then observed the bottle through the scope. During this Grandpa started telling him to, since they were so close to the bottle, put the cross hairs on the very top of the bottle. “Now slow your breathing down to long steady breaths, and when you have exhaled completely gently squeeze the trigger; remember you will only have about two seconds to pull the trigger.” *Crack* went the rifle and the bottle went unscathed.

“Do not worry,” said Grandpa, “it will take a few times before you get the hang of it.” Now, he said, it was Blake’s turn, handing him the rifle and saying under his breath, “Let’s see if you make the same mistake.” The rifle was heavy while standing there pointing it at the bottle, however, being determined, he followed the sequence exactly as he had related, with the exception of once his breath ended

it did not take him three seconds to squeeze the trigger; *crack* went the rifle and the bottle shattered into a million pieces, leaving just a little bit of the bottom sitting on the log. After that Kyle was chomping at the bit to do it again.

His next shot struck home and they had two bottle bottoms sitting there on the log. As Grandpa increased the distance he would tell them where on the bottle to aim and the boys would complete each task accurately. After their fifth shot each they realized that the gun was getting heavier and their shoulders were starting to ache severely like they had been punching each other all day. One hundred yards was the limit at which they could shoot the rifle standing and still hit the target. "Come over here and sit down and let's talk about what you just learned. Did you notice as the bottle moved further away you aimed lower on the target? That only works out to one hundred yards." Explaining in terms that they would understand, he related the basics of bullet ballistics. Amazingly enough, Grandpa could put everything in terms both could understand. Grandpa gave them an adequate education on the business of shooting the Navy, however he would finish the job some fourteen years later.

Unlike Blake's father, it was his turn to pass on what he knew to the progeny that was standing before him. Blake had spent the last three months teaching the basics of shooting and shooting accurately to Tanner. He displayed the same characteristics Blake had with Grandpa quietly listening to everything told to him, soaking it in and then asking questions. Periodically he would quiz the boy on distances and ballistics of the .243, since Blake knew them by heart from Grandpa, and Tanner would answer correctly every time. Tanner would practice at varying distances and, to help, Blake would hang up little strips of plastic so Tanner could see how the wind was down range just like how Grandpa had done with him some twenty-four years ago during that first and succeeding summers. This gave Blake great pleasure, teaching him with the gun Kyle and he used every since the summer of 1965.

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They left Twin Falls, Idaho at about lunch time Friday, heading north on Highway 93 toward Ketchum. Owl Creek was their destination, which was situated on the west side of Highway 75 just before Galena Summit. It was a place that produced quality mule deer for any who wanted to pursue them, where only mule deer and mountain goats go. The creek ran down between two ridges that came off of Galena Summit. Back up against the mountain in the back was a large bowl about twenty-five hundred yards across and sparsely treated with sagebrush, douglas fir, and lodge pole pines. The slope was steep, ranging from thirty degrees at the bottom to around sixty degrees at the top, and rising some three thousand feet from the creek to the top of the ridge. To make it extra dangerous the bowl had shale slides everywhere, and if you happened to cross them casually you would eventually stop at the bottom, missing a few limbs. The strategy they were using was the same as the one used every year: climb the mountain the day before and sleep on the mountain at the top. Then wake up the next morning and wait for the hunters coming in at eight o'clock to push the deer up to them. It worked every year and Blake was usually back at home in Twin Falls by two that afternoon. Instead of climbing it at night he was taking Tanner up the mountain this year during daylight the day before opening day.

The road, if you wanted to call it that, came off Highway 75 about fifteen miles north of Ketchum. To reach the bowl of Owl Creek it required crossing the creek four times with the first one through water about two feet deep; this weeded out a lot of hunters, and on numerous occasions, during his departure, Blake had to pull someone across it so he could back out to the highway. It was precarious at every turn, but with patience and skill one could navigate to the back end. He could see Tanner's excitement building the closer they got to their departure point. It brought back to Blake memories of the first time Grandpa allowed the two boys to harvest a deer back there at his cabin. Upon their arrival he realized they were the first ones to be on the mountain the day before the season opens. Later that night many of their friends, including Kyle, would be

climbing the mountain to their pre-determined vantage points. The climb usually took Blake approximately two hours to make, but today his load was much greater than when alone. An overnight pack usually consisted of a sleeping bag, bed roll, two quarts of water, first aid kit, matches, three meals of freeze dried foods, rope and a flashlight, but today it was doubled; on top of that a nine-year-old boy and sunset as the dead line.

Their route was much longer than usual. The ascent took them through areas with shallower incline and bypassing all the shale; by seven o'clock that night they would have ascended some three thousand feet, covering about two miles. This area of Idaho was both breathtaking to the eyes and to the nose by the variety of scents put off by the trees and its inhabitants. It was a cool October day being in the high thirties when they departed the truck and headed up the mountain. Tonight was going to be a cold one, dropping to the single digits. This made the conditions perfect for their hunt in the morning; a cold night with no overcast and a waning moon. Just like their grandpa had, Blake instructed Tanner on what he saw and smelled and the significance of each. Occasionally on the lower part of the ascent Tanner observed a variety of wild game. Mule deer were everywhere and this prompted Tanner to ask where the bucks were. Blake explained bucks like to play the king of the hill game and the big ones are up there pointing to the ridge line some twenty-five hundred feet above them. They'd stay up there because they feel safe and only descend at night to get a drink in the stream below and eat the vegetation around them. Blake instructed him why he usually climbed the mountain at night. This is when the bucks would give him no never mind but today they would go up to the top and then move to the west about a half mile along the ridge line. None of the friends coming tonight will take the same path they had. Kyle's path tonight would be directly at them so this would give him a good chance to exercise his hearing skills. Even under these conditions Kyle would be very difficult to detect because of his stalking abilities. As they continued to climb Blake related an incident that occurred a few years earlier concerning his uncle Kyle and him.

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One of their favorite pastimes when elk hunting was bugling in other hunters and then sneaking out of the area, leaving them baffled. It would serve two purposes: (1) they would experience a lot of fun and (2) this would cause hunters to come back the following day to try and get the massive bull they found the day before, leaving the area the brothers would move to absent of hunters. Bow season for elk opens on September first in their favorite area just above Fairfield, Idaho, called Soldier Mountain. It was their favorite place since it produced good elk numbers and Baumgartner State Park with its geothermal hot tub located close by. Usually during the first week of the season the elk are just not where they think and this makes finding them difficult. When in the rut a bull elk will bugle to round up cow elks and to run off other bulls. Hunters have exploited this by developing reeds for them to imitate by making bugles of their own. The trick is to make the other bull think you are not as big as him or convince him you are a cow. Hunters practice all year long in order to develop their abilities. The problem with this is they practice so much their bugles become too perfect. In the wild elk never bugle perfectly so this is how you identify other hunters. Every now and then you run across someone that has mastered the ability to not bugle perfectly, but not this day. So, usually in the early afternoon there is a chorus of hunters still bugling and they liked to exploit this type of situation. The best one, Blake thought, was two years ago on Soldier Mountain.

Early opening day they were at their usual starting point at a bowl on the northwest side of the mountain just below the observation tower the forest service uses to spot fires. It had always produced large bulls that were easy bugling, at least until rookie hunters made the elk bugle shy. However, on this occasion, the brothers' bugles did not receive responses from elk, but it did from other hunters. Determining that it was highly improbable they were going to down an elk on the first day, they decided to have some fun with what they could detect was four other hunters. Leaving their favorite vantage point, they stealthily crept down into the thicket at the bottom of the bowl along a game trail. All the while they heard bugles from hunters

about every two to three minutes. Arriving into the thicket they positioned themselves about one hundred yards apart. Their process was to start bugling, alternating between a cow call, a spike call (young bull elk), and a herd bull call like there was no tomorrow. This tactic worked great in drawing in bull elk, but it worked even better at getting the juices moving in other hunters. Gradually they could hear the hunters moving in on their position, by their bugles, and when they were about a hundred yards away the brothers would shut up and creep to another position about a quarter of a mile away, giggling under each breath at every step they would take. Then they'd start the whole sequence again.

They never failed to hear later that night back at the hot tub about the amount of elk in their special hunting place called "No Tell'em Creek"; they received special delight at the stories this behavior produced. Kyle especially loved asking them questions, trying to get them to reveal the size of the bulls they saw and the general location of this creek of theirs. Many a world class bull have been run across on opening day. Tanner always loved the escapades told to him about his uncle and his dad; at least the ones that could be told. By the time Blake was through telling the story and all its details, they arrived at the ridge with only about eight hundred yards to go to their destination point. The account worked perfectly since Tanner never once complained about the physical exertion required to make the ascent.

Ever since the discovery, on the first time the brothers climbed Owl Creek in 1987, of the rocky outcropping that was shaped almost like a recliner, they have returned to the same spot every year on opening day of deer season. It provided a panoramic view of the bowl, including a clear view of anything that moved out to about fourteen hundred yards, and virtually nothing could move without detection. However, it required the ability of making a shot of no closer than six hundred and out to fourteen hundred yards. This made the vantage point a perfect spot for Kyle and Blake, but beyond the abilities of even the best of hunters. Both had brought many of their friends to the outcropping, but when they took their shots they all

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made the same mistake. Even though they were shooting at distances of six hundred yards as the crow flies, they failed to take into account the horizontal distance was about half that; the shots always went over the buck's back by at least a foot. Tanner, on the other hand, was fully aware of this phenomenon and only time would tell if he was up for the challenge, and if not there were plenty of alternate sites.

Creeping slowly across the ridge Blake and Tanner arrived at their destination about thirty minutes before sundown. Just like a kitten with a new toy promptly upon arrival, Tanner pulled out his binoculars and started meticulously scanning the trees and rocky faces below. There was a good chance he would see one of the objects of their plan gradually making his way to the water and food below. His face became elated with joy when he spotted two medium-sized four-point bucks laying in some grass just above a tree line about seven hundred yards to the west of them. As Blake scanned the object of Tanner's joy he noticed a patch of small bushes approximately thirty yards in diameter called bitter brush. Explaining to him that bucks of this size are usually accompanied by a much larger buck, he motioned for him to scan the bitter brush to the right of the grass. Large mature bucks seek the security of bitter brush since it afforded them a secure hiding place, and no predator, especially humans, can approach them stealthily. Intense concentration outlined his face as he followed the instruction given, systematically scanning an area in search of game. Slowly the corner of his mouth moved from almost a frown to a sheepish grin. In the brush was a buck at what Blake estimated having a thirty-two inch span by using the rule of thumb of a distance of twenty-six inches from ear tip to ear tip and calculating the rest by how far the rack protrudes farther out. Not a massive one but a high quality buck with nice mass and good height that would be the coupe de resistance of Tanner's first hunting season. Blake then instructed him bucks are creatures of habit; if these three are not disturbed by their presence there is a good chance in the morning they will come right back to this spot.

From their vantage point they could also see the road leading into the bowl. Later that night, as they observed vehicles making their

way to where the truck was, Tanner kept asking when his uncle was coming. Kyle was unexpectedly deployed to parts unknown two weeks ago, so they did not know if Kyle was going to be able to make it until the phone call early this morning. Deployments of this nature came frequently and unexpectedly to members of the team and Blake was just grateful that his Captain had not deployed him also. Kyle was arriving back home on the last flight from Salt Lake City on SkyWest into Twin Falls at 9:45 p.m. This made his arrival time to the base of the mountain sometime after 1:00 a.m. and their vantage point about two hours later.

Even though Blake was in a place of enjoyment and peace, ever since his childhood sleep was never a welcomed occurrence no matter what condition or place. Tanner had already gone to sleep next to him and Blake was sure he would do everything he could to shelter his son from the same fate. At this time of the year it became easier to see the Milky Way and its entire splendor. Even peaceful settings such as these would not stave off what was to come when sleep captured his body.

Beirut

“Condor, are you in play?” cracked the radio.

Frantically the lieutenant keyed his radio. “Condor, are you in play?” He previously ordered Condor and his other sniper teams to move their positions; Condor to the roof of the El Sid Hotel and the two others, Kyle and Stedman, to take up positions four hundred yards east and west of his location. This would give them a bird’s eye view overlooking the opposition’s position at the abandoned train station some ten minutes ago just before all hell broke loose.

Lieutenant Brady informed the team at this morning’s musters, in the basement of the Marine Corp barracks, Intel had in its possession reliable information of the location concerning the number three target on their list of targets of opportunity. Targets of opportunity were opposition combatants (terrorist) they were authorized to take out, if presented with the opportunity, while executing normal missions. The men sat elated at the possible presence of someone so high on their targets of opportunity, in the general area of tonight’s mission: Amin Moussoui. It never ceased to amaze Blake at the Navy’s ability to establish plausible denial in setting up missions to look like something other than the systematic removal of PLO’s top leaders. Tonight’s mission would be completely different than the some thirty previous ones in more ways than one; Kyle, Stedman, and Blake would be on the same mission and it would take an unexpected path.

In Beirut in August the sun sets a little after nine p.m. Standard operating procedure dictated a cover team and their spotters would leave thirty minutes before the rest of the team, thus allowing for them to cover each others’ path as they entered each sniper’s zone of fire. As the team proceeded to the mission’s destination the snipers

and their spotters would leap frog each other, making continuous zone coverage in support of the team and each other. Thus, everyone involved was afforded a measure of protection since, even as the snipers advanced, the two in front could also provide fire support with one exception; as a new sniper would leap frog into the front position, he was only partially covered by the one behind him, making the last two hundred yards the most precarious. Their mission tonight was to patrol the area around the abandoned train station on the north side of Beirut. The team made a circle around to the north of the station about two thousand yards and then approached from the north; all to hide who they were and where they had come from.

“Condor, proceed and take up an observation position on the roof of Hotel Alpha,” barked the lieutenant on the radio. Blake’s spotter was Ted Sylkowski, and he knew this was when their exposure to enemy combatants would be at the apex even though El Sid had been abandoned eighteen months ago due to the fighting; it still could contain the subject and his men of the focus of their mission. Pulling up across the street from their objective, Condor and his spotter entered into what appeared to be an abandoned travel agency’s office across the street and immediately donned their night vision goggles to view the hotel and discuss what approach they would take. Directly across the street from them was the emergency exit on the backside of the hotel, which opened into a stairwell that led up to the roof some seven stories up.

“Proceeding to their objective,” Condor whispered into the radio. Still with his night vision goggles on, Ted sprinted across the street in a zig zag pattern, unnoticed by anyone but Condor or so it seemed. Subsequently Condor proceeded in the same manner, arriving at the door safely as if he was jogging across Central Park in the daytime. Upon entering into the stairwell both Ted and Condor smelt something that was completely out of place in a stairwell in a hotel in Beirut, and somewhat familiar for them personally. Not being able to put their finger on the strange odor they proceeded up the stairwell toward the roof cautiously.

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“Base, this is Ooza, our package has arrived as predicted and I will have a wonderful report for you very soon.”

As they were making their ascent up the stairwell to the roof, the odor became even stronger, which caused both men to rack their brains trying to put a name to the scent. Slowly and cautiously they opened each floor’s access door to determine if there were other guests in the hotel besides them. Both men noticed the disappearance of the odor at each departure from the stairwell. At what looked like regular intervals the stairwell was littered with debris, requiring them, on occasion, to clear out a pathway before continuing the ascent. Ted had always been a thorough and efficient point man, being able to detect traps that lie in wait of opportunity. Having just inspected the seventh floor for visitors, Ted proceeded up the stairs to the landing just below the roof access. Completely out of place laid a pile of debris with an AK-47 protruding out one side. As he was reaching down to pick up the rifle, Condor realized what the scent was—Irish Spring bath soap, and shouted, “NO!”

“Base, this is Ooza, message has been delivered, starting plan Bravo at this time.” From the basement in the hotel twenty-two PLO members moved up the stairwell to the first floor and out into the street behind the hotel, taking positions to trap the other Americans who were soon to arrive.

Ooza began to feel great joy as his, what he considered fool proof, plan began to unfold. He fully expected to kill at least one of the two American soldiers who entered the building ten minutes ago. With a little luck one would still be alive to be used as the ultimate bait to bring in the rest of the team for a futile rescue attempt. Twenty-two of his men from the basement were now in the offices surrounding the path in which the scouts had traversed on their way in to the hotel. Four more proceeded up the stairwell to the roof to retrieve the bodies of the infidels.

It has been ten minutes from the last contact with Condor, thought the lieutenant when he keyed his radio and said, “Condor, report your position”; no response. After about fifteen seconds he again repeated his message; still no response.

“Hawk, what is your position?” keying the radio again.

“We are four hundred yards away from our objective, Hotel Bravo,” said Kyle.

“Be advised it has been ten minutes since last contact with Condor; take appropriate precautions. Eagle, what is your position?” the lieutenant continued.

“We are arriving at Hotel Charley now. Will have a bird’s eye view in two,” said Billy. From the direction of the Hotel Alpha came a muffled boom; from the vantage point of Hawk and Eagle it sounded like a grenade report. Instantly the lieutenant heard the boom also and said into his radio, “Condor, are you in play?” No response and he repeated, “Condor, are you in play?”

“Lieutenant, I am in position now. I have movement exiting the Hotel Alpha. It sounded like a percussion grenade went off on the roof of Condor’s location,” reported Eagle.

From Eagle’s position he had a clear view of the path, taken ten minutes earlier, that Condor used to approach and enter the building. Within seconds he started reporting the number and positions of what he determined as unfriendlies, on both sides of the road at what looked like an ambush being set for the other members of the team. Even though the moon had not risen and the subjects were wearing black, the night vision goggles provided a clear view of them and their movements. Shortly after his men took up positions Ooza came out to the street to confirm his orders were being followed to the tee.

“Lieutenant, I have in my sights what looks like their commander. Take the shot?” asked Eagle.

“In position now, I also have the subject in view,” reported Hawk.

“Take the shot,” the lieutenant ordered over the radio. At that moment both men’s training and experience began to dictate each one’s movements in preparation to eliminate the commander of the PLO. Each one shouldered their M-4 rifles and began lining up the cross hairs on Ooza’s head. Their respirations began to slow, taking long and slow deliberate breaths. Each one was timing the complete exhalation to coincide when the heart was between beats and in a relaxed position; the specific time when their eyes were not being

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affected by the blood pulsating through the veins contained within. Just before the trigger was given enough pressure to release the firing pin, four distinct shots from a military issue .45 caliber pistol went off somewhere in the upper part of the hotel, resulting in Ooza bolting toward and into the hotel. After reporting bolting of the commander back into the Hotel Alpha and the four shots, the lieutenant ordered Hawk and Eagle to observe and report until further orders were given.

A sharp pain transmitted up Condor's leg, jarring him from the dazed state he was in. As he opened his eyes to a black curtain he realized the blast had removed his goggles and also sent him tumbling down stairs, finally settling on the seventh floor platform against the door. Exploring with his hands over his body for any injuries and the source of his pain, he found a piece of wood that pierced clean through his upper thigh with the wood protruding out both sides. He was elated to find lack of a warm liquid oozing from the wound, for this meant it had missed his femoral artery. Below him, he could hear the approach of three maybe four men moving rapidly up the stairs. Reaching on instinct to his holster, he brought out the pistol and slid over to the center rail in preparation for what was coming toward him. With his left hand Condor reached down to his radio and keyed it: dot, dot, dot, dash, dash, dash, dot, dot, and dot all the while wondering if his radio still worked. The men approaching sounded like they were in poor physical condition since they, at about the fourth floor, had ceased their ascent and began breathing very heavy as if desperately trying to catch their breath.

Listening intently at the both the men approaching and for any signs of life in Ted, Blake then made a mental note of all the defensive weapons he possessed: a .45 caliber pistol with four extra clips, his Israeli-made Uzi also with four extra clips, a k-bar, and his .257 Weatherby with five rounds in the magazine and twenty more on his belt. His pistol should be enough to handle the men approaching since, from the lack of experience being displayed by not closing the gap between them cautiously, Blake would have taken a different route to hide his numbers and approach route. As

Condor was removing an extra clip for the pistol, in preparation for the ensuing battle, the men below continued their ascent slowly but in no way cautiously shining their flashlights to and fro looking for the bodies of the Americans. When making the turn to climb the final segment, one of their light beams went across a body slumped up against the rail in the center of the stairs and he then let out a boisterous laugh, "Damn, the grenade killed 'em both," with the other three chiming in.

Lying there, feigning death, Condor waited for the moment when all were on the stairwell just below his position, thus allowing him the opportunity to eliminate all and then make his escape. From the movement of their flashlights, out of the corner of his eye he could see the outline of his, or Ted's, goggles three steps below and precariously balanced at the edge just below the rail. Unfortunately for his adversary, when feigning death, Condor had placed his right hand down next to his leg, hiding the clutched pistol in his right hand and the extra clip in his left hand, preparing for the ambush. It seemed like an eternity waiting for the perfect circumstances that would ensure his survival for at least another ten minutes.

Grandpa and the Navy had prepared him well for situations such as these, passing on the intricacies of shooting that he had learned, first as a young man surviving in the wilderness of Arkansas and then from the British in WW I. Emphasizing the littlest of details such as: bedding the barrel into the stock, trigger hammer spring pressure, the composition plus shape and grains of the bullet, depth of bullet placement into the shell, and the variety of gunpowder available to achieve the highest muzzle velocity within the limitations of the rifle. Then naval sniper training had finished the job. Not only instructing on how to shoot better but also when either wounded or under distress. Not realizing it at the time of training, he was ever most grateful now.

Dot, dot, dot, dash, dash, dash, dot, dot, and dot came over the radio, giving the team, Hawk and Eagle a gleam of hope since they now knew at least one of the team member in the El Sid Hotel was still alive, but which one? With the combatants having their

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flashlights in their hands and rifles slung across their backs, the ambush that Condor set was assured certain success. It was like shooting four deaf and blind turkeys walking in single file. The pistol sounded like a machine gun with its trigger being held as the four combatants slumped down, in unison, on the stairs as each successive bullet found its target. Two seconds later he heard someone coming through the door below very much in a hurry. Being of considerable more experience than the four lying on the stairs below, this one continued on into the hotel without stopping. Realizing now that someone with more experience was stalking him, Condor slid over the landing, experiencing sharp piercing pains with every movement of his leg, retrieving a dropped flashlight and his goggles.

“Ted,” whispered Condor. After trying several more times at reviving Ted, resulting in no response from him, Condor struggled to his feet and climbed the twelve steps to the next platform where he lay. The blast had lifted him up against the corner of the platform, setting him down in a distorted position in the corner of the platform. After checking his carotid artery, Condor cursed under his breath at the lack of life signs in his longtime spotter and friend. Working quickly he located, on Ted’s limp body, and removed eight clips and placed them in his pockets: Uzi clips with Uzi clips and 45 clips with 45 clips, thinking he would certainly be able to put these to good use, especially if more combatants were coming. After evaluating his situation the logical conclusion was to make his defense in an environment that would afford the use of all his weapons, plus where he could receive support from the other team members, making the roof his only logical choice.

“Base, there are complications to our delivery,” reported Ooza from the first floor of the hotel.

“You fool, have you botched my plans again?” responded Amin Moussoui over the radio.

“One of the Americans is still alive and it appears he has eliminated the four I sent to retrieve them. I am pulling four off the other delivery to approach and will eliminate the American in the

hotel. We will need additional support to accomplish our objective.” The plan was perfect, thought Amin, and this imbecile had ruined six weeks of planning. For this Amin thought, *Ooza is going to pay.*

Noticing the systematic elimination of many of his lieutenants starting two months ago, Amin Moussoui needed to determine who was behind the assassinations in order to continue to be an effective deterrent to the Americans and their puppet nation. First he thought it was the Israelis only to find out the Americans had convinced them to stay out and let them handle the PLO, through political negotiations, or at least for the time being. Then he ruled out a rival organization trying to remove the PLO and present them, what they thought, as the only hope for Lebanon. This ideology was the most significant factor that had prevented Lebanon from being liberated. Finally he realized it was the Americans but only after placing five observers outside the Marine Corp Barracks at about seven hundred meters out, watching their movements, which enabled him to determine the culprit. Every time one of his lieutenants was assassinated his observers would report the departure of two soldiers about thirty minutes after sundown, and following fifteen minutes later a squad of sixteen departed. From watching over a period of several weeks he was satisfied that the Americans did the exact same thing, without deviation, every time; then and only then did he begin to develop his plan to eliminate this team of American soldiers plus show the world the superiority of the PLO’s soldiers. Additionally he needed to determine the traitor who, in his chain of command, was feeding the Americans information, and eliminate him in a slow and painful way. Using himself as bait, each day he would systematically inform only one of his subordinates his location for that night, never sleeping in the same place twice. The plan was to place Ooza’s unit at the site given earlier that day and wait for the Americans to come. For the last thirty days the plan had not produced the traitor in his midst but now he knew.

“Base, we have visitors,” reported the radio.

“Deliver the message,” replied Amin. Immense anger boiled up inside Amin, realizing the traitor was his most trusted advisor,

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friend, and brother Sanja. Pulling out his pistol and pointing at his brother's head he said, "Why? No, no, it does not matter why, you will have to answer to Allah for your cowardice; but not just yet. I think you have much information to give me and then a slow and painful death you will receive as your reward." Talking to one of his attendants, "Hammed, prepare your men and move into position to complete the ambush." Leaving the train station Hammed and his unit first went east and then to the north, bringing them in behind the main force of Americans.

"Lieutenant, I have fifteen unfriendlies leaving objective Zulu, heading toward the east in a hurry," said Eagle.

"Track and report, Eagle. Moving our position to the west and will be approaching from behind Hawk," came back over the American soldier's radio.

"After moving two, unfriendlies turned north and are still moving fast," came over the radio a minute later.

"Four went back into the hotel leaving eighteen outside," reported Eagle.

"Hold until we can close on your position. Home Plate, alert one for rooftop extraction at location Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. Estimated time is four zero minutes." Immediately the flight deck of the helicopter carrier USS Iwo Jima, currently located thirty miles off the coast in the Mediterranean Sea, came to life preparing for a rescue mission.

"Ackmed, Ibrahim, Sumja, and Naza, come into the first floor of the hotel. The rest maintain positions and report any sightings," said Ooza over his radio. Complying with their commander's orders, the four men moved quickly back through the door and on into the first floor hallway where Ooza was waiting without stopping.

"We have about ten minutes to eliminate the American cowboy at the top of the stairs. Sumja and Ibrahim, go to the front stairwell and proceed to the top. Ackmed and Naza, I want you to cross the top floor to this stairwell (pointing behind the men) and wait for Sumja and Ibrahim to cross the roof and blow the door. At that point the American should have his attention on the roof so you can burst in,

kicking the door open and toss another grenade in behind him. This should most effectively eliminate the coward. Any questions?"

"All right, Ted, let us get to our objective, the roof," Blake said to the lifeless body.

Ted was taller and heavier than Condor and dragging his lifeless body would be difficult without the injury. Wounded or not he was not going to leave his friend behind. Additionally, thinking like his aggressors, he needed to get out of this hole since they would not be coming directly up the stairs again but in another direction. Even though he had not received any communication over the radio, he knew if he got to the roof's edge Hawk and Eagle would be able to get a visual on him; this is where the flashlight would come in handy. All this time he heard no other weapons fire around his position, making the chances very good that Hotel Bravo and Hotel Charlie contained four of his friends. Fortunately for him the blast had knocked the roof access door ajar about halfway; he did not need to blow the locked door and give further information to his pursuers. El Sid's roof was flat with a two foot parapet wall around the edges. Since it was tar and gravel it afforded a beautiful defensive position until help arrived; no one would be able to approach without detection. Outside the door and to Condor's left was a series of rooftop air conditioners standing about forty inches tall with spaces between, being approximately four feet. Behind them, away from the door, at a distance of about ten feet, was the parapet wall at the roof's edge. Pain shuddered through his body as he put weight on the leg, trying to drag his friend over and between the HVAC units. After settling Ted into the place of safety, he retrieved the captured flashlight and moved over to the parapet in preparation to signal his comrades.

"Have movement on the roof. Appears to be one of ours," reported Hawk.

"I have a visual on Condor One. It appears to be Blake and it looks like he has taken a hit."

"Arriving at your position, Hawk. Cover as we approach the welcoming committee from the west. Home Base, will need extraction in three five, do you copy?"

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“Extraction in three five, that is affirmative, Cradle Rocker.”

“Also request you neutralize objective Zulu.”

“Affirmative, Cradle Rocker, will be coming in east of your position with gunship’s first followed by three black hawks. Extraction will take place in three two minutes on Hotel Alpha first followed by Bravo and then Charlie last. Only ten seats available for pickup at each location so divide up accordingly.”

“Unfriendly’s turning south now out four hundred yards and appear to be heading toward position you would have been in,” reported Eagle.

“Affirmative, in position, take opportunities as presented. Will handle the quail flying the coup,” ordered the lieutenant.

With insatiable fury Hammed led his team first to the east then turning north and then finally south, closing on the position where the Americans were to be. It was time for the infidels to pay for all the atrocities their puppet state Israel has inflicted on his people. The plan was to creep up behind the main body of the insurgents into his country, and catch them in a cross fire. It was such a beautiful plan, no doubt blessed by Allah since it was fool proof. As they were closing in on the Americans Hammed felt his shoulder go forward and to the right, on its own initiative, accompanied by what felt like a bee sting and then, after it felt like an eternity, a rifle report reached his ears and his now limp body hit the pavement. Then something else strange happened, his radio man fell down upon his body as if he was trying to stop Hammed from being shot again; what a brave comrade.

“Taken out the commander of force two and his radioman,” reported Hawk over the radio.

Ackmed and Naza, followed by Sumja and Ibrahim, following Oza’s orders, made their ascent to the seventh floor platform very cautiously, for they did not want to see Allah just yet. Dividing up as directed two went to the roof and the other two crossed the seventh floor, via the hallway, to the other stairwell door. Following his instructions Sumja placed his ear on the door and waited for the others to accomplish their assignment. Something was wrong, for he

could not hear any noise coming from the stairwell. Naza reached the access door first and with the care you would give a newborn baby he slowly opened and peered through the slit of the door jam. After being satisfied all was well he moved the door open and proceeded to the other roof's access door followed by Ackmed. It was a cool breezy night which was a welcome occurrence for the two men. Thinking how grateful they were not being assigned the pursuit through the hot hotel, and being extremely careful, they cautiously proceeded across the roof. Slam went the door behind them as the cool summer breeze blew it shut.

Immediately Condor crouched down taking a defensive position, accidentally brushing the protruding wood against the parapet, at the sound of a door shutting some sixty yards on the other side of the roof. Whoever was there they were being extremely quiet. The only problem for them was Condor could smell Irish Spring again. Elated with the joy of being presented with the opportunity of avenging Ted's demise, he moved back toward the HVAC units, like a leopard closing his position on a Thompson gazelle, to be in a better position to deliver justice. As the odor grew stronger Blake began the process of mentally slowing his beating heart. To his surprise the men did not even suspect his presence on the roof; this would be a fatal mistake. Just before the two arrived at their objective Condor heard a rifle shot from Hotel Bravo; Kyle had eliminated someone since he never misses. The two men instantly crouched down expecting that they were the target of what was just heard, not knowing that they would feel the bullet hit long before hearing the rifle report. Being satisfied they were not, Naza removed a grenade from his pouch, pulled the pin, set it next to the door and the two stepped back hurriedly to the HVAC unit closest to the door—third one down from Condor's position. Four seconds after the grenade blew the roof door off, another boom came from the stairwell.

“Grenades going off on Hotel Alpha's roof but do not, I repeat, do not have a visual,” reported Eagle. Seconds later, “Four shots heard from roof top of Alpha,” came over the radio.

Enraged by the sight of their commander and the radioman being

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shot by the American cowards, the remaining ones of Hammed's command bolted at full speed toward the El Sid Hotel, itching for a fight.

"Force two closing on your position fast. I estimate one three unfriendlies left that will be at your position in less than two minutes."

"Cradle Rocker will be feet dry in twenty-eight minutes, gunship's at objective Zulu in three zero minutes."

"The Americans have at least one, possibly two, snipers over our position," screamed Ooza over the radio.

"Zarick, I am in need of your abilities. Climb to the roof (pointing up) to find and eliminate the other American snipers," instructed Moussoui.

The train station's roof was about four stories up and was attained by climbing a chute with a ladder contained within all the way from the first floor. This would give Zarick a good vantage point to overlook the roofs of all the buildings, with the exception of the El Sid. He was not concerned with that one since the American there was either dead or would soon be dead at the hands of his fellow freedom fighters. It was going to be difficult to locate them without the aid of night vision goggles, but there was always their muzzle flash. Positioned on the roof he started running scenarios through his mind, assessing which roofs he would pick to hide on for the operation they would be running. It was obvious that Moussoui was their objective tonight. Three hotels would afford the best locations for snipers to overlook the battle, giving support when needed. Since the El Sid was obviously not one of them now, and the American there was either dead or soon to be, he focused his attention on the one to the east about three hundred meters. Just where he had predicted, a muzzle flash erupted three seconds later.

The eighteen original unfriendlies were held up in such a way that Eagle could make a shot with all certainty. Snipers have basically two principles: (1) remain undetected and (2) only take absolute shots; if you violate number two you will also violate number one. These two principals preserve the sniper alive to be able to go on

another mission; they worked extremely well if and only if there was not another sniper out there. The best Intel puts no opposing snipers in the area. Since his primary field of fire was obstructed, Eagle focused his attention on the closing force; there were definite opportunities there. Drawing the cross hairs of the M-4 rifle on his target, he took the shot on the lead man at a distance of about five hundred and fifty yards. At this distance and with special loads, loaded by each sniper, he needed to aim the bullet twelve inches above its nose. To make it especially difficult the target was moving back and forth in a predictable pattern and he was moving at about three quarter speed. Squeezing the two-pound trigger, Eagle sent the bullet on a trajectory to the spot the target would be at in less than a second. The men scattered for cover as they saw the bullet strike home and heard a report from a rifle.

“One more down,” came the report over the radio. As Eagle watched the object of his attention go down and stay down, he felt something out of the air jump up and sting him in the back. Trying to turn around and see what happened, he heard the report of a rifle behind him and discovered that his legs were no longer answering the demand his brain was making to move and find cover.

“Eagle one is down; we are taking fire from the south of our position,” reported Eagle Two.

Hawk Two had heard the rifle report behind them and now was scanning the area at objective Zulu for its source. Meanwhile, the eighteen combatants outside the back of El Sid were increasingly getting nervous at the absence of their commander and the periodic rifle shots ringing all around their position. Unknown to them, Ooza, their commander, had departed the location.

Waiting inside the El Sid, Ooza had decided it was better for him to wait to hear reports from his men and his superior, Amin Moussoui, before making the decision to leave. After hearing distressing reports over the radio, accompanied by the periodic gunfire, Ooza decided to depart the area in order to fight again another day. Exiting the east side of the hotel, he moved to the east and then south, looping around the old train station to wait and watch the outcome of the ensuing battle.

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At last, thought Hawk as he watched the combatants below finally start showing signs of cowardliness. Periodically the men would stick their heads out looking for what appeared to be someone or something. Concentrating on one combatant, he watched through the gun scope for an opportunity to eliminate him. While he was hearing the report of his spotter informing all on their radio channel that Eagle had taken a hit from someone behind their position, he concentrated on the shot he was about to take, putting full trust in Quinton to alert him of any danger. After tens seconds of intense concentration and at the point of where eye fatigue sets in from looking through the scope, he took his shot of opportunity, delivering the projectile two inches above the selected point of impact, followed by the combatant's body going limp and settling to the ground like a feather fluttering down.

"Sniper spotted southeast corner of objective Zulu's roof," came across the radio. On instinct both Kyle and Red (Eagle Two) tucked and rolled, in a single revolution, across the roof and bolted for cover, ultimately hiding from the assailant to their south.

Yes, yes, there you are, thought Zarick as he saw the muzzle flash, resulting in his pulling the American-made stolen M-4 rifle to his shoulder. Just like a precision machine he meticulously lined up the scope's cross hairs on the back of the sniper, preparing to take the shot. At the same moment of the trigger releasing the hammer in his rifle, the target rolled to his right.

"How did the infidel know?" he muttered under his breath as he watched the projectile strike the roof inches behind his target. Out of anger he released one round after another, peppering the trail behind the coward until all five of his rounds were spent. Instantly he quickly reloaded his rifle while moving to his right, ducking for cover from the soon-to-come return fire.

Seconds after Sumja and Ibrahim heard the blast from inside the door, confidently and casually they strolled over to inspect the mangled door. Ackmed and Naza emerged through the door, baffled at almost running into their comrades standing before them. Seizing the opportunity to eliminate the four men, Blake promptly put a

bullet in each of the aggressors' heads, eliminating the immediate threat. Confident that his position was now secure, Blake sat back down against the HVAC unit next to his friend, only to hear another shot succeeded by four shots in quick succession come from the direction of objective Zulu. Realizing he was in the best position to eliminate the individual responsible, Blake started making his way to the south side of the roof, all the while making sure he kept his outline below the parapet wall. Halfway there a sudden light headedness came over him. In immense pain he arrived at the parapet wall as his strength flowed out of him; an examination of the piece of wood for any signs of excessive bleeding was needed to determine the cause of his light headedness.

Realizing the piece of wood had in fact nicked the femoral artery by the now present warm liquid covering the piece of wood, he knew that his movement had opened and closed the wound, allowing for the blood to exit his body periodically. Mustering up his last ounce of strength he possessed, Condor One un-strapped his rifle and peered over the wall to locate his objective. On the rooftop of objective Zulu on the east side was someone taking cover from the direction of Hawk. As he watched the sniper at irregular intervals take shots at the roof where Hawk was, Condor One shouldered his rifle and, using the wall as a support both for him and the rifle, he began to calculate the distance, looking for signs of the existence of swirling wind, and selecting the point on the sniper's body where he would aim. Mathematical calculations started flowing through his brain. Eight hundred and fifty yards, not that far to take a head shot for an uninjured shooter, but his body was losing blood and he did not know how long he would remain conscious; a chest shot was the best selection because it allowed some fudge room. Now was the time Hawk needed him; the rifle went off as his eyes blurred and the lights went out.

"Allah, why have you forsaken me?" cried Zarick as the five shots struck only the roof. *Now my position has been given away*, he thought as he quickly reloaded the rifle. The coward had covered the distance between him and the air conditioning unit ten feet to his

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right very quickly, and now he did not have a clear shot. Realizing his error, Zarick mentally prepared himself for the maneuver he needed to do to make it safely back to the chute. Standing up, he delivered a bullet into the HVAC unit, covering the coward, and then started to back pedal to the chute. After only one step, Zarick's body no longer answered the commands given and started crumpling down on the roof. Approximately one second later the sound wave of the shot arrived at his ears, proving what he was thinking: his comrades had failed to eliminate the soldier on top of El Sid.

"Feet dry in two zero minutes," came over the American's radio.

Tucking in behind the HVAC unit Kyle felt a measure of safety, thinking to himself, *This guy is good. He must be over twelve hundred yards from me, right at the edge of my M-4's capability.*

"Quinton, you okay?" he said into the radio as another shot went part way through the HVAC unit.

Seconds later as he heard the report of a rifle shot that came from the direction of Hotel Alpha, Quinton answered, "I'm okay; I do not think he knows I am here (pause). Sniper is down and it appears that Condor is responsible." It was at this moment he knew his brother was still alive and his friend Ted was gone.

"Cradle Rocker, sniper is down; Eagle One is down and Condor One still with us. Commencing the rocking of unfriendlies below," reported Hawk to Lieutenant Decker.

"Home Plate, we have casualties on Hotel Alpha and Bravo. Recommend you send birds with assistance to those locations. Will be meeting you on the roof of Alpha with ten, Bravo with ten, and two on Charlie in two zero minutes." With shots coming from Hotel Charlie at regular intervals, the final twenty minutes of the mission began.

The Hunt

As the years went by, dreams about the missions became less intense. Nevertheless it always bothered him what might happen if he was startled by someone when asleep and dreaming, thus the need for extra precautions at his home for the safety of Mira and Tanner. Out in the wild it was different, his senses were finely tuned for any occurrences within a hundred yards of his position. Blake's internal clock awakened him promptly twenty minutes before Kyle's scheduled arrival. Basking its brilliance over the bowl below, the quarter moon had risen about two hours ago. All of his senses were functioning at their peak now: he could hear the movement of deer and possibly elk, and he could definitely smell the presence of both elk and bear; he could also view animals out in front of him with several animals moving down the mountain. Reaching into his pack he retrieved a set of night vision goggles he had borrowed two weeks ago. *Night vision goggles are amazing, he thought, since they are able to amplify light reflected by an object at night some twenty thousand times.* The view was spectacular before but now the goggles allowed the observing of the bowl as if it were daylight.

They were a wonderful tool, which had on several occasions saved Blake and Kyle's bacon, for working at night and a luxury when hunting. Idaho law states that hunting is open thirty minutes before sunrise to thirty minutes after sundown, thus eliminating the need for night vision goggles for a hunting application unless you are poaching; any intense light source shined at the goggles would effectively negate the person wearing them. They were great however for locating animals when they have virtually no fear of hunters, especially the ones coming up the mountain shortly. Just below and a little bit to the east he could see Kyle effectively making

his way to the ridge walking right between several elk. He was also making quite a bit of noise since he knew that the animals around him would not be bothered, plus he did not want to startle his brother from sleep until he was closer and able to defend himself. It was a game they often played with Kyle being the usual victor, but not tonight; Blake was unfairly prepared by bringing the goggles.

With joyful glee he took the fir limbs gathered earlier that night and put them under his sleeping bag, feigning the appearance of someone contained within. As Kyle approached from the east he tucked up in some bitter brush ten yards above his sleeping bag and the sleeping Tanner. When Kyle got within forty yards of his goal his movement went deadily quiet and he began his approach with extreme caution. Finally, upon attaining a distance of ten feet from what appeared to be his sleeping brother, a rock crashed two feet behind him, causing him to leap just like a startled cat, straight up into the air. With a loud chuckle, Blake closed the distance between them, laughing boisterously, which ultimately aroused Tanner from his deep sleep.

“Uncle Kyle, where have you been?” demanded Tanner.

He gave the standard answer: “Parts unknown with people you do not know.”

“Just before the sun went down we spotted three bucks down the mountain about six hundred yards out. I hope they are back there in the morning,” returned Tanner.

“Spud, I would like to talk to you right now but it has been almost forty-eight hours since I have caught some sleep. It is about three and a half hours before the sun comes up and I would love to use that time for sleep. We will have lots of opportunities to talk tomorrow while we are gutting out some deer,” replied Kyle. Kyle was the only one the young boy would tolerate calling him by that name. Anyone else but him would receive the severest chastisement, which could only be described as a miniature tornado.

Immediately upon his head touching the makeshift pillow, Tanner went back into a deep sleep. Much like Blake, Kyle also found it difficult getting to and experiencing restful sleep. It was

times like these that both men used a technique, learned in training, called the alpha brain wave technique, which took you quickly to the restful, relaxed sleep and prevented the going into REM sleep where they experienced the disturbing dreams. They used it on missions so they could get rest and yet remain alert for periods up to two weeks with only twenty minutes of alpha sleep each day; it was also used to have dreamless sleep. Experienced users of this technique require no longer than five minutes to enter into dreamless sleep. Contrariwise to the benefits, it also has a dark side; excessive use can cause irreversible harm because eventually the lack of adequate sleep can catch up with you.

Unwilling to return to sleep, Blake continued watching the bowl below, keeping track of all the deer and noting where each one of their friends went. This small group of hunters had systematically staked ownership of this area of the Sawtooth Mountains. The area was too steep and the climb was too treacherous for anybody except for savvy hunters. The first creek crossing weeded out about ninety-five percent of all hunters, and the climb to the ridge line took out the rest unless you knew the trail they had taken the previous day. On many occasions, as they were descending the mountain with their fresh kill, they had past numerous hunters trying to make their way up to the ridge, and all with the same question: "Seen any other bucks besides the ones you have there?"

In many ways Blake's son lying there in the sleeping bag was a much better shot than Kyle or him. After the time that Dad would not allow them to go to Grandpa's in the summer, they pretty much spent all of their free time in the woods either hunting or fishing around where they lived. Dad recognized early how well Grandpa had taught them about hunting, fishing, and trapping, so he encouraged them to shoot anything that moved, in season or not, in order to fill the smokehouse and freezer. Not wanting to bear the expense of reloading .243 cartridges, Dad purchased them a Remington .22 caliber rifle that held eighteen shots and a Crossman .177 caliber pump pellet gun. He would buy the pellets and .22 shells by the box load since they were cheap, and he never complained how many they

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would use just as long as squirrel, rabbit, quail, and the occasional deer ended up in the freezer or smoke house. While they were young Dad moved them on a regular basis, due to his job with the railroad, until they ended up out Highway 10 west of Little Rock very close to Pinnacle Mountain. It was a perfect spot, about a half mile from the river and at least ten square miles of woods to explore and hunt in. This is where they rejoined a good friend named Billy Stedman. After about seven years of not seeing Billy they moved back from Oklahoma and right down the street from their childhood favorite partner in crime.

He lived about a half mile down the Barrett Road from their place and was the one who introduced them to all the terrain and the occasional fishing in the forbidden part of Lake Maumelle. Up the hill behind both their houses some contractor had put in a long and nice road, minus the pavement, in preparation for building houses up on the hillside. Shortly after the road was put in, the contractor went bankrupt. This left a partially completed road that was perfect for a shooting range. This is where they honed their shooting skills in an unorthodox manner. Their favorite game was to light a cigarette, which we acquired out of their mom's purse, set it standing up in the mud, lit and then proceeded to varying distances. Intervals were set up every one hundred yards for the .22 and every ten yards for the pellet gun. Each one was to take their shot, in the standing position, at the cigarette, attempting to remove a piece of the fire but leave it still lit. If you missed you were out; this continued until only one had accomplished the objective. Only Blake could make the shot at the five hundred yard mark, but many times the contest ended at four hundred. Tanner learned in the more conventional way with a bench rest and silhouettes. Additionally he received the sum knowledge the brothers possessed to date about shooting. Soon his knowledge and abilities would be put to the test since target shooting and putting a bullet into a living creature, whether it was human or animal, was no easy matter, even for the best of the trained.

By the time of five thirty in the morning the rest of their friends had achieved their beginning positions with the Dunkin Donut

Hunters arriving shortly after sun up. The later were the ones they relied on to move the bucks up the mountain nice and slow. Their strategy worked great on opening day, since the deer had not been shot at, with the succeeding days requiring a different one. That is why they always achieved their goal on the first day; it was as easy as riding a bicycle. Hopefully the three bucks they spotted the day before would return to what looked like absolute safety in a mule deer's mind.

"Tanner, it is time to wake up," Blake whispered into his exposed ear. Almost instantly Tanner began to move back and forth, as he usually did every morning, stretching every muscle in his body much like a cat.

"Did Uncle Kyle make it?" muttered the boy in the sleeping bag.

"Don't you remember your conversation with him about three hours ago?" Blake said, chuckling softly.

While the boy was eating some freeze dried food, the two brothers placed Tanner's self inflating mattress over at the edge of the rocky shelf in the center, laying his sleeping bag on top. Repeating the process with their own sleeping items on each side, they had effectively created a shooting platform that would cover one hundred and twenty degrees of the bowl before them; all to improve the chances of Tanner making a successful first hunt.

The first of the Dunkin Donut Hunters showed up at the bottom of the bowl at seven thirty a.m. From their vantage point they could see three men emerge from the F-150, urinate on several bushes present at the parking spot, and then head up the gully directly at the Walkers. Even being three thousand yards away they could hear them as well as they could see them, and soon they would even be able to smell them; usually reeking of last night's beer. Hoping they would not startle the deer below, all three continually scanned the trees for any movement. They watched the boy intently to see if he remembered the instruction on how to find animals that are adequately camouflaged with their surroundings; not try to see them but rather look for movement. Fifteen minutes after the three men started their trek up the mountain, the boy began to move up the ledge, slowly

pointing straight downhill, whispering, "There is something moving about four hundred yards in front of the DDH's." Kyle whispered back to the boy, "Where and what is the range?" knowing full well the distance. Tanner whispered confidently back, "Twelve o'clock at twenty-two fifty."

"Correct but how far horizontal?" chimed in Blake.

"Twelve fifty," was the response.

"Correct. Let's watch them closely. If they pick up their pace we may have to take a long shot, say at a thousand. Are you ready for it? Hopefully those guys are smokers and their bad health will slow their ascent," responded Blake again.

After climbing about four hundred yards more the hunter's ascent began to slow. Almost in unison with the hunters the three good bucks and the half a dozen two and three point bucks ahead of them by four hundred yards slowed their ascent. It was going to work out just about perfect and just maybe they would be able to take all three. Casually taking the occasional mouthful of vegetation, the group of bucks slowly and methodically closed the distance. The route they were taking would eventually lead them across the Walkers' position, moving to the east at a distance of eight hundred and fifty yards; five hundred horizontal and a shot very doable. Upon the bucks reaching a distance of one thousand, they moved Tanner into place on top of the left most sleeping bag. He showed unordinary patience lying there in the prone position, waiting intently on the bucks' arrival to the closest point of approach. The plan was for Tanner to take the first shot, and after the buck was down the two brothers would take out the other two.

With just ten more yards for the buck to traverse they could hear the boy's breathing become slow and long. Then at the perfect point he brought his eye up to the scope, exhaled and squeezed the trigger and nothing happened. In his excitement he had forgotten to release the safety; a rookie mistake. Quickly reaching up to turn off the safety, Tanner followed the exact sequence again. All the hunters up Owl Creek heard that first shot taken at 8:10 a.m., wondering who had shot and was it accurate. Crumbling and falling back down the

gully, the buck stopped and lay motionless after sliding some forty feet. Shortly thereafter came the report of what sounded like a very large rifle, possibly a .458 magnum, thought the other hunters. To the contrary it was the sound of two .257 Weatherbies shot simultaneously. Over the next fifteen minutes they could hear shot after shot since the deer were now on the move.

Leaving Kyle behind to bring the gear down, Tanner and Blake made their descent to his prize, taking almost forty minutes to arrive eight hundred and fifty yards down the mountain. Approaching the fallen bucks carefully, Tanner used the barrel of the Weatherby to verify they were truly dead. Of the three, Tanner's buck was farthest down the mountain. The magnificent four point mule deer would be a trophy in anyone's game room. Mentally Blake thought to himself it should go 175 on the Boone and Crocket scale. Kyle arrived at about the same time Blake and Tanner had moved the two other deer downhill to the same level as the big buck. Proceeding as instructed, Tanner withdrew his hunting knife and carefully put a slit in all three of the buck's carotid arteries, effectively bleeding the carcasses. While waiting for the blood to leave the animals, each one pulled out their mule deer harvest tags and made the date marks required, ultimately fastening them at the base of horns with a small piece of wire to indicate a legally harvested deer; the one and only mule deer for that year. Then after the slow, methodical field dressing of all three bucks, the three hunters started the slow drag of their prize back to the truck below.

The gully they were using to descend the mountain afforded an easy drag since the shale acted like virtual marbles, making it easy for the boy. Not more than thirty minutes into the drag the three DDH's came traipsing up the gully, asking the usual question, "Are there any other bucks further up the mountain?" Kyle, affording a sadistic grin, responded excitedly, "We missed the three biggest ones! They came out of the tree line about four hundred yards up and casually moved to the east of us. Fortunately for you we never saw them." Chuckling inside, Tanner and Blake thought these boys would be chasing the three phantom bucks for a week now.

Kyle

Just after graduating from high school Kyle was the first one to get out of Dodge so to speak. In January of 1976 he joined the US Navy on a deferred enlistment program. Ever since the brothers could remember they had discussed avenues of getting out of Arkansas after high school graduation. January was significant since his enlistment occurred at virtually the same time as their parents filing for divorce. The violence with Dad toward his children had peaked about six months prior to the start of the divorce with his children delivering back what they had taken just about all their lives. It was then the abuse focused on their mother. In June that year he made his trek to the Promised Land and went to Orlando RTC for basic training. Unbeknownst to Blake, Kyle was immediately directed in a different field of training after taking the initial weapons training in boot camp.

After completing Radioman "A" school, to get a generic rating since there is no rating for his or Blake's primary assignment, he continued on to his primary training at North Island San Diego. Boot camp was pretty much a joke for Kyle and he could not help but laugh at the city boys changing their minds after the realization of their decision set in. Naturally he excelled at the physical fitness in addition to shooting. It required an exceptional marksman to bullseye the targets with worn-out Colt .45s and circa WW-II M-14s. To this day he can remember the expression on the DI's face when the target came back with a pattern of five bullet holes three inches in diameter. When given praise by the DI, he responded, "I could have made just one large hole if using a decent weapon." Five months later and two weeks shy of graduating from Radioman school, he received an order change: instead of going to Naval Station Subic

Bay he was going to North Island Naval Air Station San Diego. He thought this should be a skate duty since he could not imagine there was anything else to learn about the art of shooting. This is where he became acquainted with the M-4 rifle.

Being designed after the pre-1964 Winchester Model 70 30.06 the M-4 was an efficient sniper rifle with an effective range of about eleven hundred yards; at the time it was the best the military had until the M-101 came along. Using gunpowder that is classified and a Nosler Vanguard 150 grain 30 caliber ballistic bullets, it could accomplish an obstruction shot rather easily at 800 yards and out. This enabled a sniper to have a tree, or other obstructions, between him and the target, providing the target with a false sense of security, and still be able to make the shot. Not too long after starting school he realized there was a number of things that either Grandpa did not teach them or just had no knowledge of. Depending on the conditions, projectiles' flight can be affected by many different forces. These forces are negligible at distances inside 300 yards, but as the bullet flies minor variations in the trajectory, early on this can cause a bullet to be delivered to other locations besides the target. If the humidity is up above eighty percent the bullet will take a longer time to reach the target, due to the resistance of the air, and on the converse if it is low then it will reach the target sooner than expected. If the bullet's trajectory goes over a road or parking lot, the heat rising from the asphalt or cement will create thermal currents above it and therefore disrupt the flight. Also, wind can be blowing in one direction at the shooter's position, but as it travels down range the wind direction can change, usually by buildings or trees, causing eddy effects, and therefore disrupt the flight. Then you also need to analyze the bullet's characteristics too.

Bullets come in varying shapes and sizes but snipers use just one style. Kyle and Blake's choice was the Nosler Vanguard ballistic tip. This shape has proved very effective in keeping the projectile flying straight and spinning but not tumbling. These bullets also come in sizes starting off at 45 grains for .22 calibers and up to 300 grains for a .458 magnums. Kyle used the M-4 and his bullet size of choice was

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the 150 grain 30 caliber but he was also known to carry cartridges loaded with 120 grain bullets for varying reasons. Blake broke from military tradition and used the Weatherby .257 magnum with 85 grain bullets with muzzle velocities about 3200 feet per second; he figured a small bullet traveling faster virtually removes external interference and increases the effective range out to at least 2000 yards. Having made this choice he also realized it prevented him from making obstruction shots unless the target was more than fourteen hundred yards. This is where he met up with Lieutenant Rick Decker and the rest of the team since this was where they were stationed. Blake and Billy followed him about a year and a half later.

Then in the summer of 1980, two years after his brother had enlisted, Kyle was summoned into Lieutenant Decker's office.

"Reporting as ordered," said Petty Officer Kyle.

"I understand you have a brother on the USS Wichita and he is as good as you are with a rifle. Do you think he would be interested in joining our team?" said the lieutenant.

"I do not think so since he enlisted on the buddy program with our friend Billy Stedman; they are pretty much inseparable."

"Our area of operation is going to change in the next six months and we have a need for at least two more shooters. The first time we tried to recruit him, the lieutenant in charge at the time made a judgment call and only wanted one. If both can pass the training they can stay together. I am tied up right now and I would like you to go and make the pitch to him." Kyle had never informed Blake, or any family member, as to the nature of his assignment at North Island. The hard part was getting to where they were; somewhere between Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

After Kyle had flown the coup Blake and Billy became virtually inseparable. Both went into the Navy at the same time under the buddy program so they could spend their six-year enlistment together, both through A school and then C school and ultimately ending up on the same ship, the USS Wichita AOR-1. Just like Kyle they were recruited for the special training in boot camp, but decided against it since it could have separated them. Since the Wichita did

not carry any marines, sailors on board were used for assignments such as security alert team and one that used virtually the same sailors, which is too classified to be mentioned. Currently the task force they were supporting was about five hundred miles behind them off the coast of Iran about one hundred and fifty miles. Within the next few hours they would rendezvous with a merchant marine oiler, bringing them about ten million gallons of fuel; this evolution is called an UNREP, which means underway replenishment. Since they possessed no offensive types of weapons and only flack canisters for defense, they were always escorted by two ships, a Spruance Class Destroyer and sometimes fast frigates. During the UNREP they received orders from COMNAVPAC (commander of naval operations pacific) to dispatch their CH-46 Sea King and fly south for two hundred and fifty miles, to rendezvous with another destroyer and pick up a passenger.

Any time one of the Navy's Sea Kings flies out over fifty miles from their ship, they are required to carry a water survival expert with them. Today's pilot rescue swimmer and water survival expert was Petty Officer Third Class Blake Walker. After donning his survival equipment he boarded the helicopter ready to enjoy the flight. He thought to himself this was highly unusual sending the helicopter to pick up a passenger, but at least he would get some flight time so his hazardous duty pay would stay in effect. The crew speculated who this guy was since no one could remember ever doing this before. The flight was uneventful and upon arrival to the destroyer the first thing they accomplished was to splash some fuel and exchange movies (for the recreation room). Then after the necessary items were taken care of for a safe return flight, the First Class Petty Officer was allowed to board. Blake was astonished when he recognized the Petty Officer walking to the helicopter and he quickly organized a scheme to have some fun with Kyle. He also wondered why he was their pickup and why he was out in the middle of the Indian Ocean; maybe he made some officer mad and got his orders changed.

The load master greeted the Petty Officer on board and strapped him in. Usually when they pick up passengers the orders of the day

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is to give them Dramamine for air sickness. Having been alerted already about Kyle's propensity to motion sickness, and the brother of their rescue swimmer, the pilots decided to have some fun by not providing the pill. As they flew back to the Wichita the pilot started moving the helicopter back and forth in a smooth rocking motion. Blake continued sitting in the back just out of his brother's view. Gradually Kyle started to turn a nice shade of green. When they were fully convinced Kyle was approaching the puke zone the load master went over to Kyle and stated, "You look a little sick. We cannot have you throwing up in the helicopter and we do not carry those little puke bags airlines carry. This is what we are going to do: we are going to take you over there and put on a safety harness so you can hang out the door and throw up." Even though he was severely sick it took a lot of shmoozing to convince him that it was safe. The plan was working perfectly. After donning the harness and attaching the winch cable to the back of the harness, the load master took him over to the door and then opened it up. As Blake snuck up behind him, his brother leaned out the door in preparation for the inevitable. Just as he was about to throw up Blake said from behind him, "You are not going to throw up on my nice and clean helicopter so out you go," and he pushed him out the door with the brake release on so the winch could free wheel for at least a little bit before stopping his descent. The pilot heard him scream "YOU!" and other non-understandable words. After his brother had plunged about fifty feet Blake applied the brake, stopping the descent, and then winched him back into the helicopter.

Kyle returned to a stable helicopter with the entire crew laughing boisterously. This was a good way to break in his brother to the ship board life since Kyle had never been stationed on a ship. Relegating this episode to a good practical joke he understood that revenge is a dish best served cold. The two exchanged the usual greetings and discussed many things about what has gone on in each other's life until Blake asked, "So just why are you out here in the middle of the Indian Ocean?"

"I will discuss that with you after I check in with your captain,"

responded Kyle. During the rest of the ride back to the ship Kyle experienced no motion sickness since it had pretty much been scared right out of him. Whenever someone reports aboard a ship in this manner while at sea, or in port, they are required to present their orders to the captain of the ship. So while Blake went to change out of his wet suit Kyle visited with the Captain.

Captain McDermott was relatively new at being a captain of a ship. Being a flight officer when he attained the rank of captain the Navy started training him in preparation of giving him an aircraft carrier command. This made him a lot more informal than regular line officers. Just after Blake had finished changing his clothes the IMC announced for Petty Officer Walker and Stedman to report to the Captain's stateroom immediately. The trek up to the Captain brought on the usual heckles and speculations as to the nature of order. As they entered the stateroom and announced they were reporting as ordered, they could not help but notice the only ones present were the captain, Kyle, and the master at arms.

"Petty Officers, Petty Officer Walker is here to retrieve you from my ship and take you back with him to San Diego," said the captain.

"We have a desperate need for your services here but the Navy thinks you two are too valuable to be stationed on an AOR. Now you can say no but just remember the Navy never makes a mistake, so I guess we are satisfied that you have volunteered. See how easy that was, Petty Officer Walker."

"Yes, sir, that works fine for me," responded Kyle.

"Master at Arms, take these two into custody and put them on the flight leaving at 8 a.m. for Diego Garcia for the court martial on charges of drug trafficking.

"That should work as a cover story," said the captain.

Rumors travel fast on board ships, however real accounts travel even faster. Blake and Billy were good friends with just about everyone on board, since the crew knew if somehow one of them should fall overboard it would be one of these two coming after them. Scuttlebutt was the Petty Officer that came aboard NCIS. During the night the captain had ordered the ship to continue farther south

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toward Diego Garcia thus enabling the CH-46 to be able to reach it with out stopping to refuel since time was of the essence. Once the helicopter had dropped them off at Diego Garcia and left, the handcuffs were removed from Blake and Billy; all their shipmates would know was they left in handcuffs except the crew of the CH-46 knew the true identity of the Petty Officer; they would be sworn to secrecy. Billy asked, "What was with taking us off in handcuffs?"

"Well I guess it is time to tell you what I have been doing for the last two and a half years," said Kyle. "When I was in boot camp they apparently thought I could shoot pretty well. It was amazing that none of the other recruits could shoot at all. So after I graduated from radioman school I reported to North Island in San Diego for sniper training," said Kyle.

"I was asked if I would like to go to a school at North Island. They had not asked Billy so I turned it down," said Blake.

"I did not know they had tried to recruit you then but now they want both of you if you can pass the training. It's not too hard except there is a lot more about shooting than Grandpa had taught us," responded Kyle. Then he described the training. "You remember our little contest and how you could shoot the fire at five hundred yards with the Remington, well they are going to show you how to shoot out to a thousand yards with an M-4."

Blake said, "I hope you brought my .257 from the ship with you because I have fired the M-4 and it is a piece of junk. Besides, I have taken shots off the fantail of the ship with my .257 at about twelve hundred yards with no problem. The only reason I did not shoot further than that is it got hard to see the cans pitching in the waves." Kyle was amazed at his younger brother's abilities and told him the Captain had sent the rifle with him as evidence. The three agreed that even Billy would be able to pass it since Kyle had seen others with lesser abilities make it through.

At noon, Diego Garcia time, they boarded a P-3C Orion that was due to return to Barbers Pointe, Hawaii to start and then catch a hop to San Diego. The trip would take them to the Philippines, Guam, and then Hawaii for the first three legs of the journey. Every Friday night

Barbers Pointe has a P-3 make a school run to North Island. This is how they made the final leg to San Diego ultimately arriving at 7 a.m. the next morning. It was a long and arduous journey that lasted about thirty-six hours. They were anxious to finish the trip since once they got there they had almost forty-eight hours of celebrating to do.

North Island San Diego contains several Naval Bases. The two bases of interest were Silver Strand Training Complex and SERE Training Facility Warm Springs because they would get the full benefit of one and part of the other. Their orders to place them on the team required passing SERE training and sniper school which was taught at the other command. Kyle explained that SERE training would be pretty much a cake walk since as teenagers they had learned everything you needed to know about finding food and evading capture from Grandpa and reading books. On many occasions when fishing back behind the house on Lake Maumelle near the dam (illegal to do so) they were pursued through the woods by Fish and Game; sometimes lasting several miles since they wanted to catch them in a bad way. Their favorite episode was when an officer came within ten feet of them and had never seen them in the brush. The only difficult part of SEER was experiencing many of the common interrogation techniques used around the world. Still after Dad they could take just about anything. Sniper school would be entirely different.

While growing up they had learned an immense amount of knowledge about shooting from Grandpa and they subsequently passed this knowledge on to Billy. The school was sixteen weeks long being divided up into two sections of eight weeks each. In the first eight weeks each student was required to learn about shooting itself and at the end, after shooting thousands of rounds at the range, they were required to hit a six inch diameter black spot on a silhouette six times out of ten shots at one thousand yards to receive a passing grade. With confidence Kyle stated, "You two will have no problem passing the test in the first eight weeks of school, however the next eight weeks will be extremely difficult since it entails you making shots under duress."

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The program for the second eight weeks started off with shooting with a lot of distractions around you such as noise and chaos. Beginning with just noise then increasing in intensity and finally ending up with deafening sounds of gunfire and mortar fire as well. This part lasted four weeks and at the end the move on to the next phase was to make the same qualification shots again at one thousand yards. Then you were moved on to the pain section of the training. The Navy possessed very interesting ways to simulate being shot at under complete distress; even being able to simulate your losing consciousness which later proved to be essential for saving Kyle's life.

Pain simulation consisted of donning what looked like a jump suit or complete coveralls. It was made of canvas and lined with thousands of feet of wires which possessed strategically located pain modules that simulated anywhere from being stabbed to being shot. The only way to overcome pain is mind over matter. The whole purpose of the training is not to desensitize you from pain but to enhance your ability to function extremely well while experiencing pain. Many scientists say women can endure pain better than the average man but the Navy's sniper school proves that theory wrong since it proved women may be able to endure it but could not function during; it takes an exceptionally strong-minded person to accomplish this feat and this is where the school weeded out ninety-five percent of all males selected for the training and to date no woman being able to pass.

Donning the suit was very arduous since it weighed approximately sixty pounds. Blake spoke across to Billy, saying, "I am glad we are not going to try to do standing shots with this thing on." Laughter erupted through the rest of his classmates. Illustrating the various positions they would shoot from, the DI got into the prone position and then various adaptations of a kneeling shot using structures as a support. The shooting range they were using had target pods starting at five hundred yards and then successively one hundred yards there after out to twelve hundred, but that was not the end of the range. Blake could not understand why it went an

additional five hundred yards with no target pods. This prompted his question, “Why does the range stop at twelve hundred when it can clearly go out to seventeen hundred yards?”

“It is because no one has been able to hit the twelve hundred yard target under complete duress except one person,” responded the DI. Blake instantly knew who the one was and he would soon show his older brother a thing or two.

It was an interesting shooting range with the shooting platform being contained in a building so no outside personnel could see the method of instruction or the students. Initially the suit only provided minor irritations like bugs crawling over your body and making the shots seem like child’s play to Blake and Billy. Day by day the level of pain and distraction increased. During the first two weeks the students only experienced the pain and as it increased one by one their number dwindled, resulting in only three left when they reintroduced the noise. The last week brought on the most intense pain and as such the noise became almost unbearable with it resulting in Blake and Billy being the only ones to accomplish qualifying shots. Initially the school had rejected his .257 Weatherby, however after explaining that it had a range much farther than the M-4 he was allowed to use it. They were very impressed at his ability to hit the target ten out of ten at each qualifying level and extremely skeptic at his boast of being able to do at least fourteen hundred yards.

His shot for the record came early the next week after passing sniper school. The reason for the delay was CINCPAC Fleet and few other admirals wanted to be present; they were reviewing the M-4 for a possible change as the provided weapon for Navy snipers. The rules for setting the record required ten shots at each distance starting at one thousand yards and moving successively out with all being completed in thirty minutes. The day seemed exceptionally breezy and Kyle wondered if he would even be able to hit the twelve hundred yard target. One thousand and eleven hundred yard targets were of little trouble with ten out of ten scores. The problem was now Blake had taken twenty shots, with his shoulder starting to have pain plus the wind was picking up speed.

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After using up five minutes of his time by taking a little break, Blake lined up for the twelve hundred yard target. Toying with his brothers' emotions he deliberately made a qualifying score of six out of ten. Kyle was then confident his brother would not deliver one bullet home at the thirteen hundred yard target since now with thirty shots under his belt and accomplished in ten minutes the pain would be taking its toll. Blake decided to take another break for five minutes just to build the suspense. After his break was over he stealthily approached the shooting position, laid the extra five cartridges next to him and then clicked off five shots in quick order, reloaded and then shot the last five all in under forty seconds. The tension in the room could have been cut with a knife as they waited for the report. When the report came through and before it was announced Blake spoke up, saying, "Let me guess, ten out of ten."

"Correct," stated CINCPAC Fleet.

"Move the target out to fifteen hundred," he ordered. He then accomplished the shots, in the same fashion as before, at the fifteen hundred yard mark.

"Son, even at fifteen hundred yards you still put fifty percent of the bullets into the target, an exceptional feat. You are going to have to explain to my staff and I how you were able hit the target at that distance," as he continued further. Blake explained it is a function of the rifle, how the cartridges are prepared, gunpowder, and his abilities. The one notable difference is the bullet he uses is 80 grains in size, which is smaller, and the gunpowder that allows for muzzle velocities in excess of 3200 feet per second. This reduces the effects of humidity and wind but with this type of load you cannot complete an obstruction shot inside of twelve hundred yards due to the flatter trajectory. Even though Blake made a convincing argument the Navy would not make a change, but they would allow him to continue using the .257 since they could see some special applications.

Teams

After the Vietnam War in 1977 the President of the United States authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to form two units that would, at the direction of the JCS, eliminate enemies of the United States around the globe. Each unit would comprise of sixteen assault personnel, a sniper, and a spotter. Every branch of service with the exception of the Coast Guard would be included in the selection process. With exception to the snipers the team members came from SEALs, Marine Recon, Green Berets, Army Rangers, and Air Force Special Forces. Initially when Kyle was recruited there were two snipers. While Blake was in Basic Training a situation arose and the other sniper was lost, thus the need for Blake. Recently the new sniper also was lost and the powers at be determined the need to have an extra one mainly due to the length of time needed in finding and training a replacement. To begin with, their area of operations was the western Pacific which was due to the instability of two governments: Vietnam and North Korea until expansion into other areas was needed when instability hit the region of the Middle East.

Much like the North Koreans, South Korea also dug tunnels under the DMZ for one purpose or another. These tunnels facilitated the movement of people back and forth. Just shortly after Blake and Billy became unofficial members of the units, orders came through from CINCPAC for them to deploy to South Korea to assist their Special Forces in Pusan. Since they did not carry any weapons other than small arms a P-3 Orion is large enough to carry the thirty-eight men assigned to the units anywhere in the world that had a landing strip. As a double benefit the P-3's were the fastest propeller driven planes the Navy possessed, making their trip to the Philippines rather expeditiously and easy. Their objective was to enter South Korea

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secretly which made the last part of their deployment a little bit difficult. Leaving the Philippines required the use of two E-2 Hawkeyes to deliver them aboard the USS Enterprise; ultimately being ferried from the Big E, off the coast of Japan, to a port just south of Pusan Korea by the USS Perry FFG-7.

To make the flight to the Enterprise shorter, just after the teams left North Island, the carrier task force moved south of the Japanese island of Tanega-shima about one hundred miles. Riding on P-3's was just like being aboard an air liner; however the Hawkeyes were a horse of a different color. Being about half the size of the P-3's they bounced around at every little bit of turbulence. To finish off the flying portion of their deployment they arrived at the Enterprise just after dark experiencing the ride of their lives. Aircraft carrier landings are dangerous enough in the daylight but at night it is just crazy. To make things easier on the planes the carriers turn into the wind and order a flank bell (or top speed). This reduces the speed the plane needs relative to the landing strip, thus making it a whole lot safer. Even though these precautions make it safer, accidents do happen. The landing was so bone jarring most of the teams left the aircraft holding their lower backs. Their visit to the carrier would be short lived if they were to make Pusan by the morning.

Both units were able to board a single CH-46, familiar grounds for Blake and Billy, for their final air born leg to the Perry. Having never been aboard a Fast Frigate before they were quite impressed at the speed at which it took off and the completing of the four hundred mile trip across the Sea of Japan to Pusan before sunup. From here it was up to the Korean Special Forces to deliver them to the ultimate destination Incheon. The plan was, in two days to go up the Imjin River to about five miles from the DMZ and thirty miles away from Kaesong. This was the point along the DMZ where the teams would cross over into North Korea on a mission to retrieve someone. The Americans' portion of the mission was to provide support on the South Korean Special Forces exit with the prize using the American snipers giving support to the Korean Special Forces with cover fire. The rest of the teams were to give support to the snipers if needed.

Going up the Imjin River on boats that looked a lot like Vietnam Alpha boats brought back memories of the movie that made them famous. Having a top speed of about fourteen knots, but only going at seven knots to be safe, the four Alpha boats made the forty-five miles in eight hours through the dark to their demarcation point. Korea's landscape is virtually the same as Oregon; areas with desert intermingled between large forests. Upon arrival they set up tents among the trees, to remain hidden and posted sentries so most of the men could catch some sleep before their hump that night. Once they achieved the destination tunnel that night they would be informed as to the identity of the target and his location.

Summer weather in Korea, just like Oregon, can go from the temperature in the 90s in the daytime to 40 degrees at night, thus making the need to carry extra clothing. Carrying their forty pound field packs were arduous enough, but now adding the jacket for the night times had the effect of carrying a hundred pound pack. Two hours and five miles later they arrived at the tunnel. On the way just about all the Americans speculated how large this tunnel was for a force this size to move through; it had to be at least ten feet in diameter. Upon arriving at their destination, they discovered the tunnel was seven feet in diameter and about six hundred feet long. Instantly the men knew this was going to be a problem since if they were being pursued it would take about thirty minutes to move everyone through; not a good scenario for the last ones through. Fortunately the South Koreans had done some thinking and did not make it a straight tunnel but one with defensible positions by making thirty degree switch backs every one hundred feet.

Taking almost an hour both teams of the Americans and the Korean team arrived on the other side. Their target was in a farm house ten clicks into North Korea. He was of interest because Intel had discovered a plan to send in a team to assassinate South Korea's President, Jung Il Su, the next day in Seoul. Korean Special Forces already had the North Korean team under surveillance and was in position to prevent the assassination attempt. President Jung wanted the man responsible for the attempt on his life, his brother General Jung II Wong, the target of the Americans.

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The plan was to have the snipers and their spotters taking point approximately five hundred yards ahead of the South Koreans. The objective was just a half mile in from the DMZ and two miles to the east of the tunnel. Apparently this location was relatively close to a tunnel in use by the North Koreans. To maintain a cover over the advancing snipers, two would take positions approximately two hundred yards apart and positioned to have observance of all the possible lanes of fire of each advancing sniper. This allowed the one in the lead to be covered if the North Koreans discovered the advancing soldiers. After making a distance of four hundred yards the point sniper would hold in a hide and cover the two behind as they advanced, passing his position and proceeding on to the next hide. The three teams following behind them, at a distance of two hundred yards, would advance to close their distance so as to keep in contact visually with their point teams. This slow and methodical approach allowed each part of the advancing force to remain covered from the firing positions of the other snipers and also as prevented their detection by North Korean Forces.

Arriving at the farm house they could not help to think how Jung II Wong became a general. It was situated in an open field in the middle of a forest about six hundred yards from the tree line. This allowed the snipers to have a bird's eye view of all the sides of the house and be able to seek immediate cover from returning fire. Sporadic bushes and broken down farm equipment provided at least three distinct lanes of approach that virtually covered them from small arms weapons fire. Additionally, he was being protected by a minimal force of about ten soldiers with only three sentries outside. After reporting the information to Lieutenant Decker and the South Korean Commander it was determined that it smelt like a trap. Blake, Kyle, and their spotters were to recon the woods surrounding the house to determine if any other hostiles were in the area.

Looping around the meadow about fifty feet into the woods the two brothers proceeded in opposite directions with their spotters. All four men prepared themselves for action by lock and loading their Israeli-made Uzis. Moving as quietly as a leopard on the Serengeti

they advanced slowly and methodically, periodically checking all their senses. Occasionally each of the brothers would get a whiff of what smelled like Kim-Chi, a nasty smelling dish of fermented cabbage that is the Koreans' national dish. If there was an opposing force out there the biggest mistake of their life is eating that crappy dish while on guard duty; even an imbecile could smell it at a thousand yards. After each sniper had progressed about a third of the way around the meadow the odor became stronger and now voices speaking Korean were drifting through the woods. Reporting the matter to their lieutenant, they were instructed to hold and observe.

"We are going to take the prize at daylight," came over the radio.

As the sun slowly rose in the east many details were revealed about the farm house's defensive position. It was a two story structure with the roof being at an angle of about seventy degrees. This allowed for a room upstairs with a window in the eaves; currently the window is closed and the curtain as well. The sentries were stationed on the front porch, out in the yard and one around the back with the rest of the force inside with their general. During the night the South Korean Special Forces had closed on the house, taking up positions behind many of obstructions out in front of the house. Their commander was in the middle held up behind a broken down tractors about one hundred yards from the front porch. It was a simple front porch being about eight feet wide and fourteen feet long with the steps to it in the middle and a three foot high rail with banisters.

"Lieutenant, I have determined force size to be approximately forty and there is a ten foot wide well worn trail leading from the back of the house to their position," reported Blake.

Blake's spotter, Ted Sylkowski, was required to learn Korean when inducted into the team; all members were required to learn a language with Blake's being Croatian. All through the night he had been making a transcript of the many conversations they had heard. Most of them comprised of their complaining about being stuck out in the elements while the general was in the cushy house.

"Move to cover trail leading to the house. Count to time of

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announcement one five minutes,” came across the radio. The four soldiers moved back away from the trail to an observation point at six hundred yards and un-strapped their rifles.

“General is on the front porch,” reported Billy.

Every morning, according to Intel, the general goes out on the porch to smoke his favorite cigar and this morning was no exception.

“Count one zero minutes,” came over the radio. While Billy was watching the general he could not help but feel that something was off or they had missed something very important.

“Count five minutes,” as every one was waiting patiently for the action to begin. With two minutes to go the general abruptly went back into the house and at the same time the upstairs window opened and the curtain was drawn back revealing what was contained within. Peering intently through his scope he could make out what appeared to be a tripod mounted machine gun with a steel shield.

“It’s a trap. They have an armored machine gun in the upstairs window,” reported Billy. Apparently the South Koreans did not hear or understand his warning and they started their approach at the predetermined time. At that moment it became clear how well the trap had been prepared.

As each one of the Koreans moved around their cover and started to approach the house it became evident that all the obstructions in the meadow had been wired with explosives. One by one each of the South Korean soldiers were slaughtered by the explosive and the remaining ones that had not been done in by them were mowed down by the machine gun in the house. Instantly Billy reported to the lieutenant, “I have a clear view on the machine gun; permission to fire.” Following in succession Kyle reported, “Force on the move.”

“Rock and roll,” came over the radio.

“Do rolling retreats back to our position, and, Billy, you get a shot at the general take it,” ordered Lieutenant Decker. At that Billy went into action and dropped the machine gun shooter and then started to look for other opportunities in and behind the farm house.

In a dead run some of the soldiers emerged from the woods with weapons drawn heading toward the house. Detecting that something

was wrong, since not enough men emerged, both spotters started watching the rest of the tree line for unfriendlies. It would take them a good minute and a half before the others could close on their position so they made a mental note to pull back in thirty seconds. Both Kyle and Blake started picking off the soldiers heading to the house as if it was a shooting gallery at the county fair, using a method that their grandpa had said he got from Sergeant York in WW I; they called it the turkey shoot method: picking off the last in line so as not to alarm the front ones. This method made it easier to eliminate all; at the thirty second mark all twenty running for the house were gone; time to peel back two hundred yards.

“Moving our position; cover us, Billy,” came over the radio.

“Believe the number in the woods to be at least twenty, maybe more,” reported Kyle.

Strapping their sniper rifles over their shoulders Blake and Kyle pulled out their Uzis and bolted into a two hundred yard sprint. Amazingly enough, neither the snipers nor their spotters took any fire in their retreat. While Billy was watching their friends run the two hundred yards his spotter caught sight of something happening in the house. At this distance it was impossible to tell but there was definitely some movement going on. Then something funny happened; a white flag was stuck out the door followed by the general with a megaphone.

“American soldiers, you are surrounded; please give up and you will not be hurt,” said the general.

“Take the shot, Billy,” came over the radio and just as the order was ending the general crumpled on the front porch followed by gunfire in all the woods surrounding their position.

“Changing our position; cover as we move to your location,” reported Lieutenant Decker.

“You have unfriendlies behind you; take exit, Bravo, and we will cut a whole,” responded the other team’s commander. One thing the North Koreans did not count on was the team left a half mile back in the woods to cover their flank.

Planning for just this kind of situation they had prepared three

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methods of exit if a trap had been set. Over confidently the general had placed two men every thirty feet back in the woods a quarter of a mile, to catch them as they exited. Exit Bravo was due west of the house and in the opposite direction of the DMZ. Hopefully the general had planned for the soldiers to make as direct of a retreat possible being straight at the tunnel. They could still hear intermittent gun fire in the woods as the snipers made their approach back to the team. No one could figure out what the Koreans were shooting at since no one was reporting any encounters. Taking the lead, the snipers and their spotters moved due west in the manner as their initial approach to the farm house. As Blake moved through the under brush he detected the odor of Kim Chi gradually increasing.

Moving just like he used to do while sneaking away from Fish and Game Officers in Arkansas, Blake slowly moved into a shooting position where he could see at least four sets of North Korean soldiers positioned thirty feet apart with one looking in the direction the soldiers were coming from and the other the opposite direction. Keying the radio eight times to let the team know what he knew, Kyle approached his brother's position to assist in the opening of their exit route. When Kyle got there he thought this was going to be easy; they were not even trying to hide their numbers or location.

"Team Bravo, we will take out eight unfriendlies at exit. Bravo, cover our exit eliminating ones to the east," ordered Lieutenant Decker.

Blake then motioned to Kyle, with his fingers, for him to take the four on the right while he takes the four on the left. For situations just like this one, back at North Island the three snipers had practiced shooting together, at the range, to take their shots simultaneously in order to hide their numbers when in a combat situation. Kyle gave the signal and the countdown began with them firing simultaneously four times eliminating the eight soldiers without even a fight. With the hole opened and the other team starting their covering fire to the east, their team exited followed by the three snipers.

"Colonel, they have exposed our flank and we are in threat of being over run," came over the Korean radio.

“You imbecile, which flank?” retorted the colonel.

“Our western flank,” returned the soldiers.

“They are going out our western side; all troops close on that position,” ordered the colonel.

“Be advised you have unfriendlies closing on your position from the east. I suggest you be at your business quickly,” came over the American radio. As the team was moving west rapidly Blake, Kyle, and Billy watched intently to the east for the impending force heading their way. With the team now safely through the picket line, they started their rolling cover maneuvers following the team. Their comfort lasted only for a short while until Billy was on his turn of holding the back position. As he and his spotter left their position in a dead run toward Kyle, the trailing force started to take pop shots at them.

The woods only afforded, at the most, one hundred yards of visibility. To make it even more difficult the trailing combatants were moving in erratic patterns using the trees as cover. Still they were able to eliminate one of their pursuers every twenty to thirty seconds.

“Setting up gauntlet four zero zero yards behind your position, bring them through in one zero minutes,” came over the radio.

Their gauntlet maneuver was designed to bring a trailing force between two teams, using the snipers as bait. Now with the two teams safe and the snipers delaying the pursuing soldiers a gauntlet was set up to eliminate any pursuit. Blake picked up the covering fire for Kyle and Billy as they did the two hundred yard sprint toward the gauntlet with Blake leaving bodies in their wake. Thinking about the numbers they had already brought down the three snipers wondered how many more were behind them. Had they eliminated the majority of the force or have they just scratched the surface? Taking all into account there was definitely more than forty North Korean Soldiers in the woods that day since at least eighty had been killed so far. The more they retreated and eliminated the more soldiers came and the three began to wonder if they were even going to make it to the trap before a stray bullet caught one or all of them.

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Just as Billy made his way to the end of the trap both teams were in perfect position to mow down the pursuers. Thirty seconds later Kyle made his way through. Strapping his Weatherby over his shoulder, Blake pulled out his Uzi and both he and Ted took off into a dead run randomly shooting behind them; all the while Billy and Kyle were taking shots at their pursuers. So far only the snipers had racked up confirmed kills and now it was time for the rest of the teams to get into the action. To continue the illusion the six men continued on their rolling retreat until they were a hundred yards away from the end of the gauntlet. The force of about one hundred and sixty soldiers then found themselves in a trap the Americans had set for them. Ten minutes later the total dead count of the North Koreans stood at two hundred and seventy and no survivors present. Lieutenant Decker then called the three sniper teams together.

“Petty Officer Stedman, how good of a look did you have at the man on the porch?” queried the lieutenant.

“It was a general’s uniform; anything further I do not know if it was the general we are after,” responded Billy.

“Teams, we are heading back to the house.” In less than twenty minutes Billy, Kyle, and Blake were back in their positions from earlier this morning closely scanning the house once again.

“All looks pretty quiet; cannot tell if anyone is in the house,” reported Kyle.

“You three move around the back of the house and cut off any exit and we will flush the coup,” came over the radio. After Lieutenant Decker’s team surveyed the situation they were confident that General Jung did not have any more troops close by so they began to rock the front of the house with gun fire. In less than a minute two soldiers came out of the back of the house in general uniforms sprinting up the trail towards the three sniper teams.

“Two are flying the coup and both are generals,” reported Kyle.

“I want both of them alive and ambulatory,” ordered Lieutenant Decker. When the two men were a hundred and fifty yards away Billy was the first to start taking shots at the two men’s clothing (just like they had done as teenagers with cigarettes) nicking here and there. It was not too long after the brothers also joined the fun.

“I said I wanted them alive and walking,” chided the lieutenant.

“He is, Lieutenant; we are just having some fun.” From the sight of their clothing being plucked from their bodies with bullets the generals stopped dead in their tracks, raised their hands and stood there shaking like a pair of scared Yorkshire Terriers. Since the South Korean soldiers were the only ones that knew what General Jung looked like both were going to Seoul to meet with President Jung.

Even though they had eliminated the opposing force in the woods their return to the tunnel was cautiously rapid, only stopping to search all the bodies for any information they could find. Acting like sheep in a shearing plant as they were herded along by the American soldiers, the men thought these two men hardly acted like soldiers. Since the amount of men that came through the tunnel had caused significant signs of travel the tunnel would no longer be useful, so as they passed through South Korean Engineers booby trapped it, ensuring it would only be used as a grave. Even though he was saddened at the loss of his soldiers President Jung II Su was most happy to finally be reunited with his brother.

Returning from a mission always allowed the observance of countryside in a less excited manner. The Alpha boats were right where they had left them and the slow ride out during the daylight afforded spectacular view of the countryside. It was hard to imagine a war virtually devastated the land some thirty years ago. The Imjin River moved lazily through the countryside with gentle bends, and from looking at the bank's water marks it was hard to imagine that each year this peaceful river becomes a raging torrent during the wet season. After being in country for four days their exit came just like the way they got there except it took them almost a week to get home versus three days to get there.

USS Perry was waiting for them at the port just south of Pusan, not to ferry them back to the Enterprise but deliver them to Okinawa which is situated about three hundred miles south of Pusan. From there the teams would catch MAC flights easily stopping again in Guam and Hawaii on their way home. Unfortunately for them they experienced a day layover in both places.

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Guam is a little island situated right on the Marianas Trench. Being about thirty miles long and eight miles wide it has an Air Force base on one end and a Naval Station at the other. Some of the best scuba diving in the world occurs there. On their trek earlier this year, the USS Wichita had pulled into the Naval Station at Polaris Point with a propeller shaft problem. While there Blake and Billy went over to Special Services to get some scuba gear and went out to dive the bomb craters in the reefs. It was an amazing amount of damage that bombs in WW II had done there when the US had shelled the island to encourage the Japanese to leave. It worked but the result was craters as much as thirty feet in diameter and forty feet deep down into the reef creating a spectacular view. Sadly they were not going to be in Guam long enough for Kyle to experience the scenery.

While the teams are deployed the Navy has a provision for family to give news of home which is sent in radio grams. Unfortunately, they relegate the content so anything major contained within the grams are not delivered until after they reach home port. During the layover in Honolulu Billy called his parents back in Arkansas and learned some distressing news; Blake and Kyle's mother had been in a serious car accident seven days ago and the family had been trying to reach them through the Navy and the Red Cross but to no avail. After informing Lieutenant Decker, Blake and Kyle caught the next flight heading toward Little Rock on a C-130 on emergency leave. This flight was heading to San Bernardino Air Force Base and catching another MAC flight to Jacksonville Air Force Base North Little Rock from there.

Home

The two brothers had sworn, after they left Arkansas, the only reason why they would ever go back to Arkansas was for a funeral and unfortunately that was the case this time. By the time they arrived at University Medical Center in Little Rock their mother had succumbed to her injuries. The accident had occurred, by the time they got there, nine days ago. Their mom was returning home from work around 7 p.m. and somebody had run her off the bridge where the Little Maumelle River is crossed by Highway 300 at Pinnacle Mountain State Park. She had spent the night halfway in the river until Billy's dad had spotted the car the next morning while he was on his way to work. Now the police were investigating it as a murder. Since the Navy had graciously given them thirty days leave they decided they were going to be around for a while.

"Hello my name is Lieutenant Drake Moen of the Little Rock Police Department and I have been assigned to investigate the accident that cost your mother's life," said the cop. "I understand you are grieving right down but if I am to catch the person who did this time is of the essence."

"No problem," replied the brothers (they want to catch him to).

"Do you know of anybody who would want to hurt your mother?" asked the cop.

"We have not been in Arkansas for over a year, how would we know if anybody wanted to hurt our mom?" looking at each other.

Then the cop said point blank, "Do you know where your dad is? I understand the two of them has some history."

"We have not talked to him in years and would not know the first place to look," replied the brothers.

"Were you able to find any evidence of who ran Mom off the road?" asked Kyle.

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“There was some contact by the other car but that was all,” responded Lieutenant Moen.

“Where is Mom’s car now?” asked Blake.

“It is still at the impound lot downtown,” responded Moen.

“Can we get into it to retrieve her personal effects?” asked Kyle.

“No, not until we have finished our investigation and it appears this is going to take some time,” answered Lieutenant Moen. He continued, “Where are you staying in case I need to get a hold of you.”

“At Mom’s,” they said in unison.

Each of the brothers knew the other so well that, in unison, first they were going to take a look at the river and then get a good look at Mom’s car. Aunt Nancy told them Grandpa had not been informed about their mother for fear of what he might do. But now he needs to be told since the funeral has been arranged, by Aunt Nancy, to happen in four days. Nancy asked the two brothers to break the news but Kyle said, “We have some things to take care of and we do not know if we can make it out to Grandpa’s before the funeral.”

During high school the two brothers had bought and restored a 66 Chevy step side pickup. After Blake went into the Navy their truck was being stored at Uncle Keith Elliott’s until they came to retrieve it. Knowing that Blake and Kyle were coming to see Mom at the hospital Uncle Keith had brought the truck down to the hospital and left the keys with Nancy.

“We have things to take care of,” said Blake.

“Aunt Nancy, can you give us a lift to pick up our truck at Uncle Keith’s?” said Kyle.

“I can do one better than that,” Nancy said and tossed the keys, “it is down in the parking lot.” Blake thought to himself, that will save some time and they can look at the river first and get down to the police impound lot later that night.

Out Highway 10 from Little Rock had not changed much in the two years since Blake had been there and the same was true for Highway 300 out toward Pinnacle Mountain. Arriving at their mom’s trailer on Barrett Road both Blake and Kyle could see what

the years of neglect had done to the property and the single wide eighty foot long trailer. The one thing they both wanted to know was if their Weatherby .243 was still where they left it. When Blake was about to leave for boot camp he put packing grease on it and wrapped it in gauze for storing. Then placing it in a steel box he buried it in the ground under their mom's bedroom. This was a precaution, since one time Blake had to escort his dad out of the trailer at gun point and Mom did not know what would happen if he came looking at the trailer while she was gone; he was very unpredictable in everything except his poker playing. Fortunately the rifle was where he left it.

To keep from being seen by possible onlookers, they proceeded to the wreck site via their old trails down by the river. Just a little ways west on Barrett Road they entered the thick undergrowth on a trail that had not been traveled in a long time. Due to the inattention, the trail had received for the last three years, traveling on it took longer than expected. A half mile later and arriving at the river they first turned west to go up to a river crossing they knew all too well. Fortunately, about thirty years ago the rancher that owned the property on both sides of the river had poured a concrete pad crossing the river; as teenagers they had driven tractors across it many times when bucking bales of hay for the owner. Then it was easy traveling through the cypress trees and stands of cane poles. After about a thousand yards they arrived at the bridge and could see distinctly where Mom's car had landed at the edge of the river by the ruts in the river bank.

Apparently another car had forced her off the left side of the road, just before the bridge rails, indicating that it was coming in the opposite direction. From how the undergrowth was laid over and the damage to the bank it appeared that Mom had moved over into the oncoming lane, to avoid a head-on collision, and was then clipped in the passenger side rear quarter panel, spinning it sideways toward the river; this was due to the appearance of her car length-wise down the bank. While Blake was examining the river bank Kyle walked up the side of the road scanning for anything that might give them a clue to the identity of mom's killer. In the ditch about fifty feet past the point

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of impact Kyle saw lying in the tall grass what looked like a broken piece of glass from a mirror. Gently he picked it up and examined it just like he would do when identifying a target through his rifle scope. It was shaped like a triangle with one side being the factory edge. Thinking it might be important he put it into his pocket for future retrieval. Then he made his way back to Blake all the while carefully examining the tire marks left on the road.

Mom's skid marks started on her side of the road and continued intermittently over to the other side all the way to what appeared to be the point of impact. Interestingly enough there were no skid marks from the other vehicle. Judging from the broken glass still present on the road the two then theorized that the vehicle they would be looking for has passenger side front end damage and may be missing a piece of the passenger side view mirror. Making a quick exit, before anyone saw them, they headed back up the river, retracing their steps all the way back to the trail from which they took to get to the river. Instead of going back to the trailer Kyle wanted to go and see if their cane pole cabins were still in one piece at their favorite fishing hole.

Unfortunately, only pieces of the structures still remained. Every year in the spring rains always swell the Maumelle River beyond its banks and at one time it reached up all the way to Barrett Road. The cabins had been situated on a knoll on the North side of the river where it opens up into a pool about one hundred and fifty feet across and an average of six feet deep. This is where they trot lined in the summer and noodled in the spring. In the spring large catfish dig holes in the mud and lay eggs there. This process starts with a male digging the hole and then lying in there until a female comes along to lay eggs. Every year for four years Billy and Blake went noodling at this spot for catfish that were twenty pounds and up.

The process starts by taking off your shoes and socks and walking across the bottom of the river until you find a hole with your feet. Once located you then dive down and stick your arm down the hole and if a catfish is in there he will bite your arm. To catch him, once he is on your arm, all you have to do is grab whatever you can that is at reach with your hand then hang on for dear life. Billy had the record since he was almost drowned by a sixty-five pounder.

It saddened them to see the place where they had spent most of their teenage years and wondered if anyone else had used it for the same purpose. Close by was plenty of food: huckleberries, blackberries, cat tails, bamboo shoots, poke salad, wild potatoes, pine nuts, and even wild onions. Deer, squirrel, rabbit and quail were known to stroll by providing them with dinner. They stood there just gazing at the area until the whole weight of everything in their life, which was wrong, became unbearable. Almost simultaneously the two turned and slowly walked back to the trailer not saying a word.

All those years, while in the Navy, their dad did not contact them once and neither did Blake and Kyle reciprocate, so they had no clue as to where he lived. They certainly knew where he was since he was at the same place every year starting on September first, the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas, so he would be easy to find. First they tried the telephone book to no avail. Next they decided to find one of his friends at one of his favorite stomping grounds, the local Elks club. Dad had taken them to play pool, while he went to play poker in a private room, just to make him feel good about doing something with them. The only problem with going there, since there was illegal gambling going on within, was they did not take too kindly of inquisitive questions.

On the way to the Elks club they drove past all the residences that Dad had used at one time or another including all his old girlfriends' houses. They knew it was a long shot but they had time to kill, since his gambling buddies would not show up until after 8 p.m. at the Elks. Harold Grafton was their objective at the Elks. He was their best hope since they knew him personally, and he and Dad had been close friends since his arrival in Little Rock in 1956; he would know where Dad was living. The plan was to ask on the auspice of inviting him and Dad to the funeral. Upon arriving they waited across the street, at the Texaco service station, until Harold showed up. He was easy to identify since he always drove old Studebakers.

Harold arrived as if he was the one required to open the door at 8 p.m. You could always set your watch by him. After waiting about thirty minutes, they pulled the Chevy truck into the Elks parking lot,

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parked and walked up and rang the door bell. Members get inside by sliding their card through a scanner but the brothers would be dependent on somebody letting them in.

“Who is there?” came over the speaker.

“Could you ask Harold Grafton to come out here because Ron Walker’s sons are here,” returned Kyle.

“Well hot diggidy dog it has been a long time,” said Harold over the speaker. “I will be there in just two shakes,” he continued. “Where have you boys been?” said Harold as he opened the door to let them in. “Come in quickly, you never know when someone is looking.”

Once inside they exchanged the customary Arkansas greetings and the members of the Elks club went through the process of arguing about who was going to buy Ron Walker’s Navy boys their first drink. It was easy to get drunk this way because it was the same at every Elks club all over the US. Both thanked the men present for their hospitality and then motioned for Harold to join them at a table about fifteen feet away from the crowd.

“What’s this all about, boys?” said Harold.

“We came here looking for Dad. Mom died yesterday as a result of a car accident. The funeral is going to be at Charley Marshall funeral home on Cantrell Road Saturday at 10 a.m. You of course are invited too.”

“Oh, I am very sorry for your loss and I would be happy to come, but your dad is not here tonight,” replied Harold.

“Where is Dad living now? We looked at all the addresses of his old girlfriends but with no luck,” answered Blake.

“He is staying with an old girlfriend that lives in the house you lived in out on Shackelford Road,” he returned. “But he is not there, in fact he is where he usually is this time of year, Las Vegas,” he continued.

“Right,” said the brothers, looking surprised.

“How long ago did you say your mother’s accident was?” questioned Harold.

“Eight days ago, about a half mile from the trailer,” replied the brothers.

“Your dad had gotten drunk and ran off the road eight days ago. Boy that is coincidental,” replied Harold. “In fact he left his truck with me so I could fix it and strangely enough he wanted it done quickly, like I move very fast,” he finished off.

“Wow, that is sad to hear,” Blake said, trying to look sad.

“It has been nice talking with you, Harold, thanks for the drink. We need to get out to Malvern tonight to a get together with the rest of the family,” they said as they took there leave. They knew Harold would be there until 1 a.m. so they decided now was as good a time as any to get a look at their dad’s truck.

Harold Grafton was a man of simple means and lived a simple life. Everything he was involved in—his home, his place of work, and his one and only private club—were all within six blocks. His home was a three-room shack with a detached two-car garage that was bigger than his house. Oddly enough, he had not even parked the truck in the garage, and best of all he had not even begun repairing it. The inspection of the truck lasted about thirty seconds, which is the time it took for Kyle to pull the piece of mirror out of his pocket and compare it to the broken side view mirror. Most of the glass had been shattered out but his mirror was a newer one and the words “Objects May Be Closer than They Appear,” matched up perfectly across the bottom. Looking up at his brother he said, “I guess we do not need to go to the police impound lot tonight.” Now all they had to do is go and clean up the rifle, take it out and test fire it, and reload a bunch of cartridges.

Both knew once Grandpa heard what happened to Mom he would be going after Dad without even looking at the evidence, already having made his decision as to the responsible party. Aunt Nancy was going to tell him tomorrow night when the family was scheduled to get together. It would take him a few days to find out where Dad lives but they did not think he would go out to Las Vegas, but instead wait till he returned; Grandpa had not been outside of Arkansas since the eighteen hundreds. Tomorrow they would go out and see Grandpa and Aunt Nancy, then make an excuse that they had been recalled by the Navy and head for Las Vegas out I-40.

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Grandpa Elliott had not changed one bit in the fifteen years since last seeing him; neither had his cabin. He was heads and shoulders above Blake and Kyle, standing six foot two inches and about two hundred pounds. The two brothers had barely grown taller than their dad with Blake being the tallest at five foot ten inches. He was looking at the Chevy truck very strangely as they pulled up to his, if you wanted to call it that, driveway. His eye sight must be getting pretty bad since he did not recognize them until they said hello.

“Well if it is not my two favorite grandsons that disappointed me by going into that sissy boys club called the Navy.” Aunt Nancy had supplied him on a regular basis with pictures but he had never seen them with their high and tight hair cut.

Sitting there at his cabin with their old nemesis, conversing with him about things that had happened in each others’ lives, the brothers’ minds began to wander, at times, remembering pleasant things and experiences the old man shared with them. It was hard lying to him when he asked them if they were going to be at the family get together that night. His mind was sharp for an old man and the two brothers were informed, when in sniper training, about their grandpa and how he attained quite a reputation in WW I as a sniper, plus about his hide identifier being the Ace of Hearts. In the past many snipers signed their kills with some object placed at their hide and Grandpa was no different. Today the leaving of markers is strictly forbidden and pretty stupid considering the level of technology. Both men wanted to know more about him but could not ask due to the possibility of revealing their present assignment. Funny though, even out in the middle of the woods, Grandpa could find out somehow what he was determined to know and they were soon to find this out. After eating lunch, which consisted of jerked venison and homemade cheese, Blake spoke up and said, “Grandpa, we need to get back to Little Rock and take care of some things at Mom’s trailer but we will see you tonight.”

On their way out they stopped to tell Aunt Nancy they had to go back to Little Rock to talk to Lieutenant Moen about something they found at the bridge and they would probably get back to her house

about 8 p.m. All the lying pricked their consciences and they hoped everyone believed them since they needed at least a half day head start over Grandpa. Hoping not to draw any suspicion from the relatives they had left all their gear back at Mom's trailer so upon leaving Aunt Nancy's getting their gear, including the .243, was the first objective. It was pretty much a straight run to Las Vegas on Interstate 40 except you took a right at Kingman, Arizona. With a little luck and driving straight through they would arrive in Las Vegas around 5 p.m. two days ahead of their grandpa.

Walking through the woods on a trail seldom used in the last ten years Blake Elliott thought to himself, why did his family feel the need to lie, by omission, to him, especially his favorite grandsons. Leaving his cabin, after Blake and Kyle had departed, he proceeded to the train tracks south of his house about two miles through the trees. Thinking no one is going to give a ride to an old man carrying a rifle, the only transportation left was at the railroad tracks. This presented only one problem: he had not hitched a ride on a train in twenty years.

Back in the 1950s the Rock Island Railroad installed a main line leaving Little Rock to Dallas, Texas for the expansion of their rail system. Three times a day a train left Little Rock heading to Dallas, and vice versa, and it passed within two miles of Blake Elliott's cabin. When passing through Malvern city limits the train is required to slow down to thirty miles an hour. This however was too fast for the old man to get on board. Fortunately the train passing through after 4 p.m. is required to stop, on a side track just before Malvern, and wait for a train coming from Dallas, thus giving him the opportunity to hitch a ride. In the old days it had been easy to hop a train but today a little stealth is required. To prevent this type of behavior the railroad companies patrol their trains, when it is stopped, so travel by this method requires waiting until it starts moving again and then climbing on toward the back of the train into an empty car.

Approaching cautiously through the woods, Blake Elliott could see the train sitting on the side track right where it was supposed to

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be. Going through the process of analyzing his situation, he proceeded along the tracks about fifty feet in the woods toward the engines. This allowed him to count the cars, both full and empty, to determine where would be the best location to board. To prevent riders the railroad closed all the doors, trying to deter boarders, however the old man could tell, by examining the springs above the wheels, which cars were empty and which ones were full. Usually, but not always, they put the empty cars to the back of the train and today was no different. Now came the difficult part, determining if anyone was already in the cars. Early on, in his train hopping career, he found out quickly the need of getting into a completely empty car since climbing in is the easiest way to get robbed or even killed.

Off in the distance he could hear the approaching train and could not help but wonder how this situation was going to work out. He knew his grandsons would be determined to take care of their father once and for all and he could not allow that to happen. If they were successful they would most likely get caught and he could not live with himself if his favorite grandsons went to prison; estimating that he only possessed a few more years of life he would probably die before being sent to jail and that is only if he got caught; with a little luck he would not. With that the train started to inch forward and the old man climbed aboard without incident. Hopefully, he thought, he can stay aboard this train all the way to Las Vegas since it may be one that is heading west out of Dallas.

Being fearful of running into Lieutenant Moen the brothers made quick work loading up their gear and the rifle into their truck; just in case they proceeded west out Highway 10 following the back way out to I-40 through Perryville. Just like in the briefing rooms at Naval Air Station Coronado, they started analyzing their dad's habits for the best opportunity that would allow their getaway: he plays cards at Circus Circus, he eats at cheap buffets at the edge of the strip, he usually stays at cheap hotels at the edge of the strip, and he always visits the Mustang Ranch thirty miles north on the Great Basin Highway. That would be the spot since it can be approached easily, on foot, without detection and provided an easy way to depart the

area without detection. Plus it afforded possibilities of taking a shot at distances greater than one thousand yards. They thought this too would be the place selected by their grandpa. If he was there, before the two brothers, all they had to do was be outside his range and he would never know it before the shot revealed their position. Deciding on the site of the ranch was easy; the hard part would be finding several different hides and waiting without being detected, especially by Grandpa.

Some twenty hours later after arriving in Las Vegas the brothers' first stop was the Casino Circus. If their dad was there he would be in the poker room at the Texas Hold'em table. Since the World Series of Poker Main Event concluded two days before their arrival their dad would be spending the next five days playing the hold'em tables and visiting the Mustang Ranch. Casinos always placed their poker rooms a little ways away from the rest of the casino. This was due to the unique characteristics of each. With a little luck, they thought, he would be there.

Unfortunately, when they arrived he was not to be found at the tables so they decided to go and cruise the roach motels at the ends of the strip until 10 p.m.; after that he would most assuredly be at a poker table. Their dad had perfected this style of play over the last twenty years; wait till later when the players had been drinking for hours and then swoop in and fleece their winnings. Never did he break them of all their money; this usually made for very strong feelings even in the protected confines of a casino, but just taking about fifty percent of their stack. It usually took his pigeons about four days until they would figure out what he was doing and then it was time to move on. After striking out at the motels also they returned to the casino just short of 10 p.m., hoping their dad was already there.

At this time of night casinos are rather crowded, no matter what day of the week, resulting in an approach being made easy. The only problem that existed was the crowd always thinned out the closer they got to the poker tables. Each brother came from opposite sides of the casino with Blake being the first one to spot him at the five-

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stud table. Their dad liked to play five-stud because, not to win money, it afforded him time to analyze the pigeons at the hold'em table. Blake gave the sign to let Kyle know he had spotted their dad and then both departed the casino back to the truck. Now came the time to find his 1969 Caprice, Dad's other car, in the parking lot and wait till about 2 to 3 a.m. when he was finished.

Just like clockwork Ron Walker emerged from the casino at 2 a.m. and proceeded back to his hotel with his two sons in tow. After taking about fifteen minutes while driving east up the strip they finally arrived at the "Do Drop Inn," with a comedic sign out front stating "Rent by the hour, day, or week," and "Always Has Vacancies"; typical they thought. Having achieved their first objective now was time to scout the firing zone by departing toward the Mustang Ranch. After driving up the Great Basin Highway for approximately thirty miles the brothers turned down a dirt road toward the west. The road meandered down a small valley, about two miles across, to the west between two knolls rising up from the valley about two hundred feet.

It was the perfect night to approach without the lights on since the moon had been full two nights ago. After driving in about a mile, and concerned about the road having sensors, Blake pulled the truck up a gully on the south side. Immediately upon stopping both Blake and Kyle hopped out of the truck, pulled out their kbars and proceeded to retrieve pieces of sage brush to camouflage the truck. The heavy concentration of sage in one area would look out of place but the trade-off would have been easy to spot a robin's egg blue step side Chevy truck sitting up a gully in the desert. Then Blake went back to the road and proceeded to remove any evidence of their truck's tires leaving the road. Not knowing how much further down the valley their objective was each one donned a full pack and carried with them a gallon of water each. Without discussion they headed straight up the knoll until they reached the top and then turned due west according to their knife's compass.

Movement across the desert was almost effortless since the sage brush was widely distributed with clumps of grass between the

plants. Moving along, just over the ridge from the side the ranch would be on, the brothers periodically peered over to check their progress. Just as the sun came up they spotted the end of a landing strip, in the middle of the valley, with a wind sock on their end and three cessnas sitting there. Directly in the middle of the strip was the ranch house used for the entertaining of guests. They estimated their trek had taken them about ten miles up the valley. The terrain was perfect and every indication was that guests flew for their visits and were not allowed to drive. Analyzing the firing lane they did not attach any wind markers since the wind sock would give them evidence of the wind condition at the target. From their direction the closest shot would be just over a thousand yards and as far away as twenty-five hundred yards. The only problem was the knoll on the other side of the valley; Grandpa could easily get over there without the two brothers spotting him but that would be a chance they would have to take. Maybe he would get careless and reveal himself if he made it there in time to prevent the inevitable.

Evaluating where their grandfather's skill level would be in comparison to themselves, they determined a long shot for him would be around eight hundred yards; this was due to his age and never observing him take a shot further than the shot he made on the buck when Blake was six years old; six hundred yards. This put his hide in approximately the area of a football field. Now was the time to sit and watch. If their objective did not arrive today then tonight Kyle would head back to the truck and take it back out to the highway to search for another road into the area that would bring the truck closer to the hide just in case a fast escape was needed.

Things are working out for me, thought Blake Elliott, as the train he was on headed on went through Dallas without stopping, and on to the west. He now knew his arrival at Las Vegas would be in two days just before sun up. Hopefully, he thought, this train will have to stop on the east side of Vegas, to allow another train to come through the main line, so he would not have to jump from it while still moving. At any rate he needed to get off quickly and start the thirty-mile trek as quickly as possible for he was sure the brothers were

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already there. With the train only slowing to twenty miles an hour when it reached Las Vegas the old man made his jump, all the while praying he would not break a leg or hip out in the desert east of the city. After rolling down the mound the tracks were laid on he gave his body a once over, with his hands, and then headed north in a light jogging pace toward I-15. He knew if the sun came up before he reached the interstate highway there would be no cover to hide the rifle he was carrying, and that would require waiting until that night about twelve hours later.

Traffic at 7 a.m. was sparse on I-14 east of Vegas so he didn't waste any time in getting across. After that the rest was walking up and down small hills for the next thirty miles with the occasional fence crossing. Figuring his arrival on the south side of his objective sometime around 2 a.m. tomorrow he set out quickly. Nevada's deserts are sparsely covered with sage brush with just dirt and rock being the normal terrain. He was in surprisingly good shape, he thought, for an old man just turning eighty-five years old. Anybody would have been amazed at his navigation skills at crossing I-15 and heading northeast without a compass or a map and arriving when he predicted at the spot he needed to. He knew his grandsons would be on the south side of the house with the wind taking their scent away from the objective, just like he instructed them years ago. Blake Elliott would use this to his advantage since all he needed to do was go north until their scent found him and that was exactly what happened.

Just after midnight the scent of an automobile was detected by Blake Elliott. Ah, he thought, they have found another road up here to provide their escape in case of pursuit; good thinking. Following his nose for about a half mile and just as he thought, there it sat, with sage brush piled around it, his grandsons' pickup. That means if he heads north northwest he should run across their scent too. It was imperative he knew exactly where they would have the hide so he could act accordingly. After placing an ace of hearts on their front seat he carefully stalked his grandsons which required the greatest care because of what he knew about their actual jobs, not the one he

was told, in the Navy resulting in him exerting more energy over the next one thousand yards than the previous thirty miles. Just where he figured, there they were at about fifteen hundred yards from the end of a runway. Retreating to the east he circled the end of the runway at a distance of a mile virtually ensuring his non detection and finally arriving at a position due north of his grandsons at twelve hundred yards from the end of the runway by 6 a.m.

During the daytime, while they waited for the target to show up, planes flew in and out periodically with passengers coming and going. Every time a plane did leave it would circle the area in a widening spiral pattern apparently looking for anything in the surrounding terrain that might give them trouble. Each time planes arrived, all three men concentrated looking through their spotting scopes to see if he, the target, had arrived. Even though this was revenge they still went into combat mode: calculating distances for potential shots and starting to call the human being a name of an object, indicating it was something less than human and making sure no mistakes were made. This was a method of dealing with the guilt every time they took a life. Blake was especially applying this method since, due to the distance, he would be taking the shot.

During the night each theorized how their grandpa would make his attempt. Was he still in Arkansas? If not could he have made it to Vegas, since he does not drive, by now? Is he already somewhere out there ready to take the shot if presented with the opportunity? Where the planes are is the best opportunity for a shot; out in the open and a pretty good distance to cover in order to attain shelter. It was decided Kyle would scan the surrounding area looking for Grandpa and Blake would concentrate on the planes and find the target. The day dragged on slowly up until 5 p.m. when the planes started coming and going rather quickly. With no sign of Grandpa, Kyle started concentrating on the planes just to make sure the target did not get away. Since the strip possessed no landing lights the brothers were thinking, well tomorrow is another day, when a plane came in for a landing just at dusk.

All three men spotted the plane at the same time. It was circling the field in preparation to come at the runway from the east. As the

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plane made its final approach men could be seen inside clearly; three maybe four men plus the pilot. As usual an SUV came from the house down to the end of the runway where the planes are parked and waited for it to turn around and come back to the wind sock. Each of the men's hearts began to race and the two started preparing to take the shot just in case their objective was on board. This was the hardest part, preparing each time a plane landed. After a certain point of time it starts to affect shooters' mental ability to take the shot, known as hide fatigue. Finally the plane slowed as it approached the parking area. Both Blakes mentally reduced their heartbeats down to about the forty-five beats per minute range and gradually reduced their respirations down to four a minute. All three of their hearts leaped as Ron Walker emerged from the plane and strolled carelessly the forty feet to the parked SUV. Both Blakes gradually squeezed the triggers. As Blake Walker felt his rifle buck at the ignition within the cartridge he saw through his scope the target crumple to the ground as his head exploded. Then just an instant later a puff of dirt appeared where his bullet was aimed.

"Grandpa is out there, did you see him?" barked Blake.

"No he must be further than we thought because the target went down and the rifle report came about two seconds later. He had to be out there around twelve hundred yards," responded Kyle.

At the ranch house all three men could see people coming out rapidly. It was getting difficult to get an accurate picture of the situation, since the sun had just set, but it appeared they all possessed guns in their hands. Shortly thereafter Blake and Kyle observed their grandpa's position since he began systematically putting bullets into the planes on the ground followed by shots to force the people emerging from the ranch house back inside. Far beyond where they determined Blake Elliott's abilities were, he was making shots from about fifteen hundred yards well beyond a pre 64 model 70's effective range; what an incredible shot. It appeared that Grandpa was trying to provide them with cover for their escape, so taking the hint they policed the hide and made quick work getting back to the truck.

Jake D'Angelo was standing about ten feet from the guest whose head exploded. He could remember it distinctly. His head exploded and then about a second later he heard the first of two rifle reports; the first from the north and then one from the south separated by about a half second. Instantly he pulled out his radio and called the ranch house for support. His men had not waited for the call over the radio, having just bolted outside after they heard the first rifle shot. However just after emerging outside they experienced gun fire which drove them back inside.

"Get on the phone and call in for support. The shooter has put bullets into all the planes," the men inside the house heard over the radio. This is just perfect; they hit us just at sundown and took out our planes and now we will have to wait till sunup for plane support, thought Jake.

"Call in to the city and have Tony bring some boys out by the road," Jake said over the radio. Within just a few minutes of the call eight men were on their way from Las Vegas to the ranch not knowing fully what had just happened.

Not risking detection, the two brothers drove the ten miles back out to the highway slowly with no lights on. Both thought it would have been a good time to have borrowed their night vision goggles. Since it was dark neither realized their grandfather had left an ace of hearts on their seat of the truck and it got brushed out on the ground where they had parked the truck. After taking approximately forty minutes to get to the highway they waited, back from the road about a hundred feet, until no head lights could be seen in either direction. Surely, they thought, the men at the house would call for support and they could not risk being seen by anybody. Both noticed the rapidly approaching vehicles coming from the south and were mesmerized at the rate of speed they were traveling when they passed the brothers' position. Thinking something was wrong Kyle pulled the truck out on the highway right behind them, without the lights on, and did everything he could to keep the old truck close behind.

Both vehicles turned left up the road leading to the ranch with the brothers close in tow. After going up the road about two miles both

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vehicles stopped and the men exited. Like a military unit, the four men from the first vehicle made a bee line for the northern knoll with the others heading for the southern one. With only one weapon, other than knives, the brothers decided to follow the group of men heading toward their grandpa after they disabled both vehicles by cutting their gas line. It was difficult for the brothers to keep up since the men were traveling at a high rate of speed through the sagebrush. Blake and Kyle figured they would make it to their grandpa's position, if he was still there, by midnight for sure.

The four men appeared to have two things in their favor: first it appeared these men had been trained by the military of some sort and second it also appeared they had practiced this maneuver before. Both brothers were in awe of their adversary's abilities to remain undetected since they realized it would have been very difficult for them to follow had they not trailed the group from their departure from the vehicles. After traveling up the valley along the top of the knoll for about seven miles the four men spread out into a picket line separated by about two hundred yards and waited for the sun to rise. Their objective was if the assailant tried to sneak out that way tonight then they would have him. The two brothers held up around six hundred yards back from the closest man. Blake and Kyle thought to themselves, certainly Grandpa would know this and would definitely head west and hold up in the hills for about a week and then go home, but they were not sure. Right now they would just wait and see if their suspicions were correct.

Shortly after he put the men back into the house, Blake Elliott policed his hide and then headed to the hills ten miles to the west. That would be a good place to hold up until no one was looking for him and then he would head back home the way he came. Just before sunup he arrived at his destination not knowing the drama that was unfolding behind him.

Just fifteen minutes before the sun rose over the horizon the four men moved toward the west scanning every possible lane of fire for their adversary. Watching them take almost two hours to cover the last two miles each brother was fully convinced these men had been

professionally trained and they wondered if it was going to be necessary to take them out. It proved to be very difficult but the men found their grandpa's hide, though it gave them nothing as to the identity of the assailant. Plus he covered his tracks so well that it appeared to produce no exit trail and after looking for any sign the men made tracks down the hill to the ranch house.

On the other side of the valley, the other four men had proceeded up to the point where the brothers had taken up position and found nothing also. While searching for their exit trail, by completing half circles to the south of their hide, they eventually stumbled across the other road which led them to the spot where the assassins hid the escape vehicle. The spot also produced no evidence to the identity of the attackers with the exception of the playing card "Ace of Hearts," lying there on the ground. Thinking it was important, they kept it for Mr. D'Angelo.

All the while the brothers were watching the men on the north side of the valley; periodically Kyle would put his attention to the other side. Intermittently he could see the men searching and eventually finding their hide, but he knew it would produce no information as to their identity. Then, virtually at the same time both groups of men went down the hill toward the ranch house and reported to the man who was at the plane standing next to their father the previous night when he was shot. Being satisfied that Grandpa had exited the area and was safe, they made quick haste back to the truck and were on their way to San Diego.

Jake D'Angelo waited impatiently for the report from his son and seven men. He was furious and someone was going to pay for what he or she had done. Eventually the eight men came down and reported they found nothing with the exception of the playing card. Speaking up Tony D'Angelo said, "One shot was made at fifteen hundred yards and the other was at twelve hundred; this is obviously done by professionals, which makes them most likely military trained."

"Oh really," said his father Jake.

"These guys, whoever they are, knew their stuff, a very clean hit, and the card may be an identifier of the shooter," replied his son.

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“Find everything you can about this gumba lying out on the back porch, but first get rid of his body,” ordered Jake.

Not remembering where he learned of the Ace of Hearts Tony D’Angelo knew he had seen it before and it was only a matter of time till he remembered. His dad was extremely angry and the family could not stand by and have someone affect their business in this way. His buddies still in the SEALs would certainly help him find this out. Nobody had used a marker since the Vietnam War so how old could this shooter be? thought Tony.

Mission

All the immediate family was at their mom's funeral with the exception of her two sons and her grandpa. While it was progressing Blake and Kyle were heading south on I-15 just passing Barstow on their way back to North Island in San Diego. Unbeknownst to the brothers their Lieutenant had called two days before and left messages on their mom's answering machine recalling them from emergency leave. Aunt Nancy had listened to it this morning and already assumed her nephews had gotten the message the day before and neglected to tell the rest of the family. She could not figure out where her father had gone since he did not even know his granddaughter was dead.

When entering the front gate at Naval Air Station Coronado the two brothers were informed by the officer of the day (OOD) to report immediately to Lieutenant Decker. What could this mean since they were not due back for another twenty-three days? the brothers thought as they looked at each other. As they made their way across the island to their duty station the OOD called Lieutenant Decker and informed him the two men he was looking for had just reported back on base and were given explicit instructions to meet with him ASAP. Just two days ago Lieutenant Decker had received orders from CINCPAC Fleet to take his team along with the other team to Quantico, Virginia at the FBI training ground for training in seven days. Now he only had four days and finally his two last men were contacted and back on board.

"Reporting as ordered, Lieutenant," the brothers announced as they knocked on the lieutenant's door.

"Come on in," said the lieutenant.

"We are being deployed in three days to the east coast for training and in the mean time I want you two and Petty Officer Stedman to be

on the range every day until then polishing your skills,” he continued. Billy was already honing his skills having received the order two days ago. Billy instantly recognized something more than his friends’ mother being in an accident had occurred. Knowing the intricacies of Blake and Kyle’s personalities he did not waste his time trying to ascertain what occurred when they had gone home but would call his parents that night.

“Hello, Coronado Rifle Range Gunnery, Sergeant Russell speaking.”

“Gunny, how is it going...just in case you don’t recognize the voice it is Petty Officer D’Angelo.”

“Yes I remember you, how are things going being a civy now?”

“I am working for my father out in Vegas. Listen, gunny, I have run across a strange sniper trivia question and I know this is a favorite subject of yours. Who used to leave an Ace of Hearts as a marker?” asked Tony D’Angelo.

“An Ace of Hearts, that is going back a ways,” replied the gunny. “Oh, I know, it was used by Blake Elliott back in WW I. How did you come across that?” replied the gunny.

“I just met a strange guy and I wanted to verify if he was a real sniper. Thanks so much, gunny, we will have to get together when you come to Vegas,” Tony said as he was hanging up.

Standing there waiting for a platform assignment and their suit to be issued the brothers were shocked to hear the gunnery sergeant talking on the phone about an ace of hearts.

“Who was that you were talking to?” asked Blake.

“Oh that was an old buddy of mine who got out last year to go and help his father in the family business in Vegas,” replied the sergeant. “Oh, that is right, Blake Elliott is your great grandfather, wow such a small world,” he continued.

Had Grandpa left a marker, they thought to themselves, and now they know who he was? The brothers instantly left the shooting range heading for Lieutenant Decker’s office.

Entering the headquarters for the team the brothers went quickly to the lieutenant’s office. Knocking on the door Kyle said, “Permission to enter, Lieutenant.”

“Granted,” came from within the office.

“Lieutenant, we need to call home, it is an emergency,” said Blake.

“What kind of emergency?” asked the lieutenant.

“We cannot really say,” said Kyle.

“You two know the rules, no contact with the outside once a deployment order comes through, and besides if you cannot tell me then it must not be too important,” commanded the Lieutenant. He continued being very irritated. “Get out of my office and get back to the range.”

“Pops, I have a name and it will not be long until I know his location,” said Tony into the phone. “Find out where a man named Blake Elliott that was a sniper in WWI lives and if any of his relatives are snipers also. That may give us a clue to who the other shooters were,” Tony instructed the seven men in front of him. Analyzing the playing card in front of him he thought there is more about this card but he just cannot remember it right now, but it would come eventually.

“How can we warn Grandpa?” the two brothers said, walking back to the rifle range.

“Grandpa is a pretty sharp character: he sneaked around us at the ranch house; he made it from his place in Arkansas without the use of a car, and he provided us with cover to exit the area,” said Blake.

“No one will be able to approach his place without detection and he anticipated every situation and planned accordingly. I think he can take care of himself and I pity the fools who try it,” Blake continued. As the two brothers continued their practice at the shooting range the same scenario ran through each one’s mind; how did he make a fifteen hundred yard shot? The first one might have been a little luck but the planes and the deliberate attempt to drive, and not wound, the men back into the house; that was phenomenal.

The vantage point Blake Elliott chose provided virtually perfect security. No one could approach without being seen or heard. No one could come up behind without being heard or smelt. Even though the situation was perfect he never allowed his guard to drop. After no

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pursuit occurred in his direction for three days it was time to head back to Arkansas. Good old Rock Island Railroad, made going into and out of an area virtually undetectable. The main reason was no one these days would think of that type of approach, thought Blake as he traveled back to Arkansas the same way he came.

“Boss, we have found where your boy Blake Elliott lives, it is just outside of Malvern, Arkansas, but this guy must be in his nineties by now,” came over the phone.

“I will be on the road in a couple of hours heading your way so meet me in Little Rock tomorrow at our private club,” said Tony. Turning to his dad Tony said, “I am going to Little Rock to follow up on a lead we found.”

“It is about time, it only took your people five days,” responded Jake sarcastically.

“Make sure your boys know I am not happy with the delay. I want to know if someone is trying to run me out of business or was this just a coincidence. This needs to be done and a clear message sent. Have you found out anything about the gumba they shot?” he continued.

“He also lives in Arkansas, Little Rock to be specific. I will find out more when I get there, Pops,” replied Tony.

Both teams’ members were curious as to why they were being sent to the FBI training ground in Quantico, Virginia when they started boarding the C-130. It however was not part of the general conversation since any verbal speculation would bring a severe and immediate reprimand from the lieutenant. Since all their gear was being loaded on the plane also they knew it would be a long time before they were back in San Diego. They were heading to the place where all units, both civilian and military, were trained in urban warfare, and the three snipers were curious as to their roles in the upcoming mission since an urban situation did not lend to using their abilities very well. In fact an urban setting usually got them killed since it afforded virtually no cover when approaching the target.

Amazingly enough, when the teams exited the C-130 at an Air Force Base close by the training ground, at night, they were immediately loaded onto what looked like prison buses since they

only had windows, with exception to the front, about six inches high and about eighteen inches wide at the top of the cab on both the sides. After traveling about an hour the buses stopped at a building that was situated somewhere in the woods at what they thought was the FBI training ground. The building reminded the brothers of the barracks they were in at boot camp; Quonset huts that were about one hundred and fifty feet long forty feet wide with an open barracks on one end and offices plus a community bathroom on the other. Just like in boot camp the barracks possessed four rows of beds with the exception, to boot camp, there were no bunk beds. Additionally, the strangest thing occurred, a woman was there to greet us. After everyone was inside Lieutenant Decker addressed the men: "You are not to leave this barracks at any time unless directed by myself. We are here to be trained by, pointing to the woman, Mira, in urban warfare for our upcoming mission. This training will last two weeks with us being deployed, to parts unknown, at the end. Our training will also be conducted at night so our first night here we will be meeting down the hall in thirty minutes to start our orientation so get your gear stowed immediately."

Just after the 1972 Olympics, where the members of the Israelis Olympic team were killed, Israel formed an assassin group taken from the best Mossad had to offer. Since the exposure of their organization, when members killed the wrong person, they have been disbanded as a group but the spirit of their intent still remains. This groups purpose was to let anyone one in the PLO, or other Palestinian groups, know they can be gotten to at any time and any place. With the recent increase of unrest in the Middle East the Israelis have been exploring other ways to renew this type of terrorism and finally their puppet master has become the puppet. Just recently the President of the United States deployed marines to Beirut and now it appears that others were going over there too.

Unlike the hit squad the Israelis used in the seventies, this one would be focused on just the use of snipers. Unlike most of their missions, they would be going out in groups of threes; three sets of snipers and their spotter. Since their abilities to sneak in stealth fully

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to the hide were greatly diminished the snipers would proceed under each others cover for approximately three hundred yards then on their own for another hundred yards ultimately to find an elevated position to cover the others as they leap frog through the urban setting. Then after the kill was made, of their subject, the team trailing would act as a gauntlet, much like Korea, and cover their exit and eliminate any followers.

Since Hogan's Alley, the town the FBI set up at Quantico, is occupied with regular training during the day time the snipers and their teams made their approaches at night through the woods. The two weeks provided both training on approaches but also habits of the leaders in the PLO including ways to identify them since none wore any insignia indicating such.

Mira was amazed, as the training progressed, at the abilities of the three snipers. The two brothers operated almost exactly alike in each situation presented with the exception of the younger one being a much better shot. Much to her dismay the last sniper, Petty Officer Stedman, was extremely similar to the brothers except he was not related by blood to the two brothers.

"Lieutenant Decker, how did these young American Soldiers develop their skills?" said Mira inquisitively.

Lieutenant Decker described, at length, the three snipers' background to the Mossad Officer. "When they were young, about six or seven years old, the Walkers went to stay with their grandpa out on his place in Malvern, Arkansas. His name is Blake Elliott and he was a sniper in WW I; actually served with Sergeant York. He taught them everything he knew about hunting, fishing, living off the land, stalking a prey, and most importantly about shooting. They were so good at shooting the vast majority of the food eaten by the family was at their hands. Petty Officer Stedman was their childhood friend when they lived in Little Rock in the early 1960s and then in high school west of Little Rock in the 1970s. All three were inseparable until the oldest, Petty Officer Kyle Walker, enlisted into the Navy where he was identified as an expert shot in boot camp. Just recently our mission was expanded and the two youngest were

recruited. An interesting point you might want to know is Blake Walker has made ten out of ten shots at fifteen hundred yards under full duress when he qualified for the team and he believes his limit to be at two thousand yards but I would not be surprised if it was further.”

“Why does he use his own weapon over the M-4?” asked Mira. The lieutenant then informed her that Petty Officer Walker has perfected his loads between projectile and gun powder to achieve shots well beyond the M-4’s capabilities so, surprisingly the Navy is not going to argue with him on it or at least for now. “There is one other thing you might find interesting about the three is they seem to have a non verbal type of communication even at distances of over a thousand yards. One will be in a jam and the others will know it and be in the right place at the right time to eliminate the threat.”

“When we get to Beirut will you allow Mossad to analyze the three psychologically?” asked Mira.

“I will pass your request up the chain of command but I would not count on it since the knowledge of these three’s abilities are very much classified,” replied Lieutenant Decker. “Oh by the way, we are ordered to board the USS Nimitz at Dam Neck, Virginia tomorrow at three a.m. so be ready to go by eleven p.m. tonight. We will get our full briefing on board,” said the lieutenant.

“I already know,” replied Mira. The teams were assigned to ride along with the carrier task force leaving for the Mediterranean tomorrow.

“Hey, boss, we have found out something interesting about the corpse. His ex-wife was run off the road about two weeks ago and then died. The interesting thing about this is she was the granddaughter of our shooter,” said the man.

“How about the dead woman, did she have any children?” asked Tony.

“We have not found that out yet but we do have an address on the shooter. He lives down a dirt road about fifty miles from here,” replied the man.

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“See what you can find out about the children and leave me two of your boys so they can accompany me on my visit with the gumba in Malvern tomorrow,” concluded Tony.

As Tony and his men drove down the dirt road in the Mark V Lincoln Continental they observed this road was not driven over very much. Probably just enough to keep the grass beat back. The road seemed to get more wash boarded the further they went. Tony was fully irritated when they finally arrived at the place where the gumba is supposed to be after passing a house two miles back. Electricity came this far back but stopped at the driveway to the cabin with no power lines running to it. Whoever lived here had to be old and possibly senile since the place was in the last stage of decay.

Blake heard the car approaching long before it got there. The noise it was making, as it traversed the road because of the wash boards, was not related to any one that usually comes down the road by his visitors. He promptly grabbed his rifle, at the first hint of trouble, a box of shells and moved over to the window loading the rifle as he went. After waiting about a minute a black car pulled up into his driveway stopped and two men got out stretching their muscles and looking intently at his cabin. Slowly he pushed the rifle’s muzzle out the window with him leveling the crosshairs on the joker getting out the passenger side.

“Hello, is anybody home?” said Tony as he exited the passenger side of the Lincoln.

“What do you want?” replied Blake.

“I am looking for an old sniper who used an Ace of Hearts as his marker in WW I,” replied Tony as he started walking toward the cabin’s front door.

“Son, I would not come any closer. I do not know who you are or who you are looking for but this is private property and you are well beyond the spot where the sheriff comes to on this road,” replied Blake.

“Old man, can you point me in the direction of Blake Walker?” said Tony.

“Do not know who Blake Walker is or the sniper you are looking

for so unless you would like me to start taking little pieces off your body with my rifle you get into the car you came in and get,” Blake said sternly. As Tony pivoted and returned to the Lincoln he felt something like a horse fly bite his left ear and then a rifle report. Both men dove to the ground hollering don’t shoot we are leaving.

“I just wanted you to know I could do it now git before I do a little more target practice.”

“Boss, let me come back tonight and fix this gumba,” said the man in the back seat.

“This guy is beyond any of yours’ abilities. Get me back to Little Rock. I need to talk to pops,” retorted Tony as he reached up and touch the quarter inch notch on his ear that was missing. Pops is not going to like this Tony thought to himself. This is going to take a team of mechanics and he might have to get some of his old buddies from the Navy to help on this job; some were always looking for work like this. Getting Blake Elliott is going to take some time and plenty of recon since he possesses other skills than just being a shooter.

The only time Blake or Billy had been on an aircraft carrier was just to fly on and catch a helicopter going to some other ship. This time they were going to ride it to the Mediterranean at about fifty five miles an hour ultimately arriving at about one hundred and fifty miles of the coast of Israel and aboard the USS Iwo Jima in three days. Once they entered the Med the rest of the trip to the helicopter carrier Iwo Jima to refuel, aboard a couple of CH-46s, and then to the Marine Corp Barracks in Beirut, their ultimate base of operations; all done before sun up and with no lights; all to disguise their arrival.

It was the eeriest landing everyone on board had ever experienced with the exception of Mira. Blake watched her intently since he never had been in such a close association with a woman like her. Mira’s gracefulness intrigued Blake as she moved and yet the movements also gave you the impression of something very threatening. She displayed almost no facial expressions except to the trained eye. Looking into her dark brown eyes Blake could detect deep seeded emotion only seen in other snipers that seen many

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targets eliminated by their shots. She acted like an experienced woman in her forties but he thought she could not be much older than him. So far she had provided the strategic information about the mission the teams were now involved in but why was she still with us? Soon, he thought, it will become evident since there has to be some other reason why she was still with them.

The departure from the helicopter on the roof was even more precarious than the landing. All the lights were out at the barracks, even in the stairwell leading into the building. Just before the landing all on board the CH-46s donned their night vision goggles so they can see when exiting the helicopter. The night was perfect, for this type of landing, with no moon and an overcast condition even eliminating the stars from even shining through. Nobody would have seen them even if they possessed night vision goggles since the barracks did not have any buildings within seven hundred yards. Once in they made their way down the stairwell all the way to the basement where the lights were on. Upon entering the open room in the basement, where all their briefings and debriefings would be conducted, Blake heard the lieutenant say, "Your names are on the doors to your assigned rooms; stow your gear and get some sleep. Blake, you and Ted come into my office as soon as your gear is stowed."

All three of the snipers' rooms were next to each other in a row with their spotters being their roommates. Blake and Ted quickly stowed their gear and headed for the lieutenant's office.

"I wonder why he wants to talk to us and not the others," said Ted.

"Only time will tell," said Blake as they arrived at the lieutenant's door.

"Permission to enter," said Blake as he knocked on the door.

"Enter," came from within and as they complied Blake noticed the lieutenant's office was also his stateroom. Right behind the two petty officers Mira, the Mossad officer, followed them in and shut the door. Motioning to the four chairs around a table the lieutenant said, "Take a seat and let's discuss some adjustments to our operation."

It seemed Mossad had some serious doubts about the snipers

abilities to identify the leaders of the PLO and leave the underlings alone explained the lieutenant. He further explained that Blake would be the primary shooter for their objectives and Mira would be accompanying them on the mission to facilitate the identification.

“Whoa, Lieutenant, it is bad enough we are going to be exposed to detection when we move through the buildings, but now we are going to have an anchor along to babysit?” Blake said frustratingly.

“Mira has taken out more PLO members in the last five years than you two will in your whole naval career. If anything she will be babysitting you since she is an expert at moving undetected in an urban setting. You guys would leave her behind in the open but out there is her comfort zone and besides it is an order. We are going to rest up for two days and then we will go on our first mission. Intel gives us positions on targets every afternoon and you will be going out without the support of the other snipers initially until we identify a top boss, then all will go,” said the lieutenant.

Mira had been observing the conviction of Blake through the whole discussion. She knew he had reservations as to her abilities and could tell his concern not only for himself but his spotter and her. She could tell by the way he carried himself there was some scaring from his recent missions but other deeper scars being from the distant past. She was hoping the American Admirals would allow Mossad to test the snipers but just in case she would do her own evaluation privately. Hopefully these missions would be done quickly and all survive what was to come in the near future.

“Pops, the woman related to the corpse we talked about before has two sons in the Navy named Kyle and Blake Walker. I am going to contact a friend at Coronado who would know if these two were the other shooters or not. We also need to recruit a specialist to do the guy in Malvern; he is beyond my boys’ and my capabilities,” said Tony.

“Do what needs to get it done,” answered Jake.

“Coronado Rifle Range Gunnery, Sergeant Russell speaking, may I help you,” came over the phone.

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“Gunny, it is Tony D’Angelo again. I got another sniper trivia question. Do you know the grandsons of that sniper we talked about earlier? Their names are Blake and Kyle Walker,” asked Tony.

Silence came over the phone and then Sergeant Russell responded, “Leave whatever you are doing alone; in fact, do not ever call me again and you better hope NCIS does not come and visit you.” Wow, thought Tony as he heard the click indicating the line was cut and he guessed they knew who the other shooters were.

“Pops, I’ve found out who the other shooters were. It seems the gumba that got shot has two sons that are snipers in the Navy. Tracking these guys down is going to be extremely difficult because of who they are affiliated with. We may be able to draw them out with the old man in Malvern, however it is going to be difficult to take him alive. This whole thing looks personal to me and not an attack on our business,” said Tony.

“Even so the word is out how unprofessional the idiots you used are and now we need to build confidence in our clients again. I am sending you Fredo Demarco to assist in getting the old man and also to set the trap for the two sons. He will arrive in Little Rock in five days so you stay there until you have what we want and then bring the package to Vegas,” responded Jake.

Of all the team members not one possessed the nerve to have a conversation with Mira with the exception of Blake. Blake, Ted, and Mira spent extensive amounts of time with each other over the next two days waiting for their turn to proceed on a mission. Mira showed them avenues of approach through the streets of Beirut following the boundaries of each subgroups territorial influence. During these discussions Blake could see the immense knowledge she possessed on Beirut and he wondered how she came about such knowledge; was it trial and error or taught to her or a combination of both. He wondered how many combatants had she personally eliminated. The Israelis possessed the most formidable soldiers in the Middle East since they were constantly in battle with the PLO and they were also known for using women so it was difficult to grasp her experience to the full until he finally asked.

“How old are you, Mira?” asked Blake.

With a coy smile she responded, “Why do you ask?”

“There is something about your eyes that intrigues me. I have not seen the look you have in anyone else besides seasoned snipers. I also thought you could not be much older, if any, than me,” he answered.

“I just turned twenty-two and have been in Mossad for four years now,” she answered.

“How did you come about the knowledge you are providing to Ted and I?” he asked.

“My older brother was Mossad and he used to teach me how to fight, when he was not on an assignment, and all about Beirut. After he was assassinated by Amin Moussoui four years ago I have worked my way up to get to this point where I can be part of his demise,” she answered.

“I certainly hope that he is one we will get Intel on soon so I can settle the debt for you,” responded Blake.

“Oh, you will and very soon. The problem with these guys is they never sleep in the same spot twice. This makes it very difficult to effectively eliminate them. My superiors were very impressed with how the operation went in the western pacific and it was determined to try your teams here. For years we have terrorized the PLO leaders to the point they are watching us closely. In fact they have a price on my head because of the Lebanese scum I have personally eliminated. We call it in English ‘Rock the Cradle’ since it is designed to make sure they have a very disturbed sleep. My attempts to get close to him have failed and now it’s your turn. Now I pray that my existence continues until my revenge is achieved,” confided Mira.

“If you can get me inside of two thousand yards I will definitely send him to Allah,” Blake whispered.

The two days went by quickly. Billy was the first to go out but, as per their operation instructions, he was not given the orders to take out the target. Since they knew eventually someone would be watching they would only eliminate a subject on a periodic basis with no defined pattern. Hopefully this would keep their secret for at least ninety days since their goal was to eliminate twenty targets with Amin Moussoui being one of the twenty in that period of time.

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Kyle went out on the second mission. They did get into a skirmish but not with the intended target. Traveling through Beirut along the borders of each sub-groups territory was difficult since these guys shot at anything that moves. At the end of each mission LT Decker would take the three sniper teams and Mira into his stateroom and debrief them all on the operation. So, by the time Blake went out he already possessed a good grasp as to what would be going on.

Thirty minutes after sundown Blake, Mira, and Ted slipped into the night. Blake was surprised at the weaponry she carried; an Uzi, a Glock, and a Kbar knife. He could not smell or even hear her as expected since her skills appeared to be at least equal with his. The Israelis are certainly very well prepared for any situation and he was hoping the Palestinians were the opposite. They had an assignment, if it presented itself, but tonight's primary mission was just to learn each others abilities in an effort to create a unified and cohesive team. Gradually and methodically Mira moved through the streets with her sniper team, just like a leopard, and with their support team some four hundred yards behind.

Blake and Ted watched and learned by how she moved so gracefully. It was at this point he started referring to Mira as the leopard by the way she stalked her prey. She stood, when erect, five feet six inches and not much more than one hundred pounds. Even in the dark Blake could see the feminine outline of her body with muscles flexing as she led the way down the dark streets. She refused the use of night vision goggles since she was very much attuned to her surroundings through all her sensors. Blake thought there are even more things he could learn from her. His appreciation and respect grew by the second as he reflected on how her brother was murdered and the incidents involving her since she became Mossad.

Before starting the mission Lieutenant Decker outlined the three vantage points that are available to overlook the position their target was supposed to be at tonight. Mira did indicate sites Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie look good on paper but until they actually arrived at each spot and observed the targets location it was not set in stone. This was the first time Blake heard random gunfire as he, and his team, made

a stalk to a hide. Mira sensed his nervousness and whispered in his ear, "They're randomly taking shots at nothing just in case they are being stalked; the only time we need to worry is when you hear shouting in the gunfire." Unfortunately the three hides chosen before the mission were well within a subgroups area of influence. This made approach very difficult since it required going right through the heaviest concentration of combatants. This was found to be true with point Alpha since it was surrounded by PLO soldiers.

"Lieutenant, point Alpha is surrounded by unfriendlies proceeding to Bravo," Blake said into his radio quietly. Alpha was the closest hide to the target's expected position with Bravo being further and Charlie the most distant at eighteen hundred yards. Initially Blake thought this is going to be a cake walk, even at site Charlie, however while traveling through the streets he was analyzing the wind patterns. Since Beirut was littered with large and small buildings plus an almost constant breeze out of the west he realized it would be extremely difficult to hit the target outside of a thousand yards; site Alpha was at eleven hundred yards. Now they were on their way to Bravo which is fifteen hundred yards from the target.

As they moved toward site Bravo the voices and the sightings of unfriendlies gradually decreased. Concentrating on the objective became more and more difficult for Blake as he watched, intently, Mira continue in the lead with complete confidence toward their objective. He wondered how he was going to continue on other missions, with her, as his feelings for her were transitioning from awe and respect to deep concern and love. When they arrived at site Bravo Blake realized he could not remember what route they took to get there and now he was dependent on Ted and Mira to know how to get out once the shot was delivered. From now on he would need to keep his guard up and to completely concentrate on the task at hand and not on Mira. Site Bravo was, at one point in time, a five story apartment building with around three hundred units. The North East corner of the building was gone due to Mossad's attempt to eliminate a PLO leader with a helicopter launched missile eighteen months ago. It had been abandoned ever since then thus providing an almost detection proof hide.

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Mira led them to a stairwell on the southwest side of building. Blake touched Mira on her left shoulder and whispered into her ear, “Are you sure this building will hold together long enough for us to get out safely?” Then he had a flashback to when he said almost the same thing to his grandfather about his cabin some sixteen years before. Mira pivoted and whispered into his ear, “It held me three months ago for seven days but you two guys may exceed the weight limitation in the building,” as she chuckled. While she was whispering his heart was almost pounding out of his chest due to the close proximity of her lips to his ear. Without noticing his excitement, or so it seemed, Mira pivoted once again and proceeded to climb the stairs.

Arriving at the third floor she led them to an apartment on the southwest side to view the target zone. Carefully both Ted and Blake pulled out their spotting scopes to determine if the apartment would work. Being satisfied that it would not Blake suggested to Mira, “Why don’t we go to the roof and see if it will work next and if not then work our way back down,” with her responding, “This building has only one stairwell and we need to stay as close to the ground floor as possible since a rapid escape will definitely be needed once the shooting starts.” Fortunately for them the apartment directly above the one on the third floor was perfect. It provided a clear view of the target area. Both Blake and Ted instantly started looking down range for any tells of wind conditions on the projectile’s flight path.

In the jungle or out in the open all they had to do was observe vegetation for signs of wind disturbance but in an urban setting it required improvisation. As they traveled to site Bravo the two American soldiers noticed the vast amounts of litter on the streets; this is the tell they would use to determine wind conditions. Everything tell down the flight path indicated swirling wind and this is why, Blake thought, he uses small and extremely fast bullets. Just around mid-night the activity surrounding the area where Intel indicated their target was going to be tonight began to pick up culminating with the arrival of an old Armored Personnel Carrier. “Lieutenant, are you in position, package is about to be delivered,” said Blake into the radio.

“Go,” came back across the radio and Blake instantly brought the rifle up to his shoulder and chambered a round. Mira watched both Blake and the APC to determine if the objective was present and to begin her evaluation of the American sniper.

She observed his respirations were slowing down and he lined up the scope with the target, but did not look through it. She was thoroughly familiar with how to kill in hand to hand combat, small arms combat, and using explosives in combat but this was all new; killing at a great distance. Within just a few seconds of the APC’s arrival several men jumped out and rapidly headed for the doorway about fifteen feet away.

“Number three is our target,” said Mira. At that she then closely observed the sniper go through the motions to take the shot. His eye moved rapidly up to peer through the scope, he slowly exhaled to a point just before he would have removed all the air out of his lungs and then the rifle went off without, what appeared, him even pulling the trigger. Then in rapid succession he chambered another bullet and fired, in what seemed like less than a second later. It was the strangest thing; he fired, with the speed of a cobra, the second bullet before the first one even arrived at the target.

All three watched to first bullet arrive with the subject’s chest moving toward their location and crumpling down toward the ground. Then the second bullet hit him squarely in the forehead resulting in everyone behind him being sprayed with blood mixed with brain tissue.

“That is a kill, let’s get out of here,” said Ted.

“No you must kill as many as you can,” said Mira.

Grabbing Mira by the arm and looking intently into her eyes Blake said, “No, let’s move.” That brief moment of peering into her eyes he could see the hatred she possessed; what occurrences in her life had caused her to have so much hatred he would need to find out.

Even at fifteen hundred yards they could hear the small arms fire mixed with shouting easily as they bolted for the stairwell.

“Package delivered, exiting the area on route Bravo,” Blake said into his radio. Each escape route was directly opposite in direction to

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the barracks for about a thousand yards then a half octagon pattern back to the barracks. With any luck they would meet up with the team in about three minutes. Getting out of the building was no problem but after that, because at the rate of speed they were traveling, detection by another sub group was a serious risk. When they were about forty yards from the building, all of a sudden, Mira dove down behind a burned out hulk that once was a car. Every block had at least ten of these hulks which provided them needed cover at just the right time.

It was amazing to see Mira's instincts work so efficiently. Just around the corner and to their right three old APCs were proceeding, at a high rate of speed, toward them. As Blake ran from the building he strapped the Weatherby to his back with the sling and pulled out his Uzi. The Israeli-made machine gun was perfect for this type of warfare. Ted and Mira already had their Uzis out in preparation for the inevitable. Hopefully these guys would blow by them and they could get out of the area before the combatants realized the building was presently empty, thought the three. Just as they hoped the APCs continued down the road and stopped about twenty yards from the building. The three pivoted around their cover always keeping it between them and their attackers. Six men exited each APC and started firing at the open door; the one the three had just gone through not more than forty seconds ago. Mira then jumped out from behind their cover and started shooting their attackers in the back until her clip was empty and then proceeded to load another without ducking for cover.

Blake and Ted were in shock at what they just witnessed. As Blake realized Mira had just emptied her clip he raised up and shooting over the car mowed down the remaining five. At that point Mira slid her bolt home loading the chamber and started firing again until this clip was emptied. While she was loading another clip Blake grabbed and pulled her tightly against his chest and said in a calm and comforting voice, "Hun, we need to get out of here before more show up." Her eyes went from fierce hatred to tears in an instant and then went limp in his arms.

“Hun, we need to go; can you walk?” said Blake. She nodded yes and ran alongside him as they exited the area toward their cover team.

“Lieutenant, we have been met with resistance,” said Blake into his radio, not telling him the truth of the situation.

“You have more unfriendlies between us; move five hundred to the east and continue exit,” replied Lieutenant Decker.

Blake wondered what had made her freak out like she did; he knew the three of them would be having a long discussion about what had just happened sometime before the next mission. The exit route, the lieutenant provided, was without incident as they slowly made their way back to the security of the team. They could hear, what sounded like, fierce fighting going on in the direction of the building Blake made the shots from. Both men wondered what they were shooting at since the individuals they were looking for were in no way near the current shooting. By the time the sniper team had joined back up with the rest of the team Mira had recovered from her hysteria and no one was the wiser of what had just occurred shortly after they departed the building.

“All right, let’s move slowly back to the barracks and do not shoot at anyone unless I give the order. We do not want to look like an invasion force,” said Lieutenant Decker. At that Mira took the point position leading the sniper team out in front about four hundred yards. After avoiding detection for the next five hours the team finally arrived safely back at the barracks.

“All right, Petty Officers Walker and Sylkowski, and you too, Mira, stow your gear and come to my stateroom in fifteen minutes,” ordered the lieutenant.

When Blake and Ted arrived at the lieutenant’s stateroom it appeared Mira had already been there for a few minutes. She was sitting in a chair with what appeared to be displaying no emotion except to Blake; he knew she was concerned if he and Ted would not backup her story. Then the funniest thing happened; the lieutenant said, “You made the kill using two shots to make sure and as you exited the building three APCs were outside waiting on you. That is

why Mira emptied two and Blake emptied one Uzi clip, eliminating the attackers. Now go and write your reports stating such.” Blake and Ted looked at each other realizing Mira had told the lieutenant the truth and he did not want the truth in the incident report.

“That is all,” finished the lieutenant and the three departed his stateroom.

Just after the three exited Blake whispered to Ted to take a walk and then gently took Mira’s hand and guided her back to the sniper team’s bunk room. The hallways and briefing room was empty due to the team being out all night and now they were either showering or getting some sleep. Without opposition Mira complied with his lead.

“What happened out there?” Blake said softly.

“I do not know, something just came over me,” she answered.

“I think it is more than something just came over you. I am going to need more than just something came over you before Ted and I go out on another mission with you. We were lucky. You could have brought a whole bunch more down on us and possibly got us killed,” Blake said more firmly.

“Okay,” she said and went on to explain.

“I was allowed to become Mossad at a very young age because of two reasons: (1) I can speak their language fluently and (2) I look Palestinian.”

Initially, Mira’s assignment in Mossad, she was to live among and infiltrate the PLO. During the first two years of her assignment she was able to eliminate members of the PLO since they never suspected the Israelis used women at that time. Then she made it to Amin Moussoui’s group, the focus of her hatred for all Palestinians. The last Palestinian she tried to kill, for some reason or another, did not die from the wounds inflicted. The victim was found by Amin who hid the lieutenant until he was well enough to identify the assailant. During this time Mira thought he was dead and continued operation as normal. After about a week after the attack Amin knew Mira was the traitor in his organization but he did not knowing she was Mossad. During the next few months he watched Mira ever so closely but was unable to determine anything because she was very

good except for the one mistake. One day out of the blue, Mira thought, Moussoui confined her and started his interrogation of her. For the next four months he tortured her day after day repeatedly with Mira divulging who she was or who she was working for. The torture got so excessive she finally passed out. Amin, not realizing she had just passed out, thought she was dead so he untied her sources of restraints and set in motion a plan to cover her corpse.

After laying there for about two hours Mira came to and gathered her senses. Trying to stretch her aching muscles she realized the ropes around her hands and feet were loose. Pulling her hands out of the ropes she sat up and quickly she untied the ropes around her legs then swiveled off the table putting her feet on the floor. Instantly pain shot up her legs through her spine all the way to the crown of her head and crumpled to the floor. It was then she remembered the previous four months Amin Moussoui had been hitting the bottom of her feet with a wooden dowel about two inches in diameter. This was a tactic started by the Vietnamese to interrogate and keep prisoners from running. It had been very painful when administered but now, when pressure was put on the feet by standing, the pain was almost unbearable. Eventually, after the pain subsided partially, Mira crawled over to the door, of the window less room, and found it slightly ajar with no sentry outside. Not taking time to wonder why she crawled as fast as she could down the hallway to an outside door. Again, as she passed through the door, she found no sentry.

The road outside was abandoned but she could hear gunfire in the distance. Slowly the pain subsided to a tolerable point where Mira was able to get up on her feet and she proceeded to stumble across the street into a two story building. This is where she was able to collect more of her resolve to live over the next few hours; all the while wondering when they would be back for her. Four hours later she had her answer an Israeli helicopter came in and leveled the three story building with a missile. She knew then they would not be coming back for her and she found out later that Intel had been provided with information as to the location of Amin Moussoui, resulting in an order to take him out; which just happens to be the very building Mira's body was supposed to be in.

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Two days later she made it back to Israel and spent the next six weeks recovering from the ordeal. Since her cover was blown and apparently Amin Moussoui is very much the wiser of Israel's plans she was assigned to lead a new phase in operation Rock the Cradle. After hearing the horror of her ordeal Blake was very much sure he had fallen in love with the mysterious Israeli woman named Mira and she knew it. After cautioning her about another incident like last night and Mira giving her assurance it would not happen again, he moved toward her, stretching his arms out, and embraced her so tenderly she went limp in the security of his arms. For the next thirty missions, in thirty days, everything worked perfectly. Twelve additional PLO lieutenants were removed with the team of Blake, Ted, and Mira delivering eight of the confirmed kills. Mira did not once show any signs of unprofessional behavior.

For the thirty-fourth mission Lieutenant Decker called both support teams and all three sniper teams into the briefing room around 7 p.m. that night. He informed all present that Intel had reliable information as to the location of PLOs number three man Amin Moussoui. Hopefully tonight, thought Mira, she would have her revenge both for her brother and herself. Blake also thought tonight was the night to settle the issue for the woman he loved and his heart sank when the lieutenant told him she was going because she knew what he looked like.

Talking softly into her ear Blake said, "I do not want you to go, just show me a picture of him." She replied, "No one has ever been able to get a picture of him." His heart began to beat intensely for Blake did not want the woman he loved to be out on such a dangerous mission. Making sure the target was eliminated on the first try is critical since they would most assuredly not get another chance at such a big fish. His brain screamed at him to tell Mira he loves her and that he did not want to see any harm come to her ever again at the hands of Amin Moussoui. Without being able to muster up the courage to tell her he hoped, that night, he would not have to make the decision between killing Moussoui and saving her life.

At 9 p.m. Lieutenant Decker called the three sniper teams into the briefing room to assign them call signs. A need to keep the

information coming across the radio straight dictated that Blake's team would be Condor, Kyle's team would be Hawk, and Billy's team would be Eagle. Promptly at thirty minutes after sundown Condor's group left the barracks, looping around to the east in a thousand yard circle to eventually ending up at the target's location; Beirut's harbor. This location would provide ample hides for snipers to set up and prepare to eliminate their objective. Just like in Korea, the sniper teams followed a leap frog pattern of coverage all the way to the harbor.

This was by far the longest hump they made thus far on a mission, in Beirut, and eventually arrived at the harbor at 4:30 a.m. Since they would not be able to go back to the barracks in darkness SEAL team six would be there just after sunup to evacuate the teams back to the USS Iwo Jima. Each snipers team's assignment was to find a hide overlooking warehouse C-46 at the harbor at comfortable distance outside of eight hundred yards and wait till Moussoui came out in the morning. Hopefully this guy is not a late sleeper thought Blake since they would be completely exposed once the sun comes up.

After all the intricate movements Mira used to get them safely to the harbor Blake realized they would not have been able to arrive there undetected without her guidance; they had moved between at least fourteen different sub-groups. The warehouse, C-46, was included in a row of similar warehouses situated almost in the middle of those warehouses. Upon arrival Mira guided Blake and Ted to what appeared to be a three story office building with an excellent view of the objective over the roofs of three rows of warehouses at a distance of about eleven hundred yards from the target. To get a clear view the three went all the way to the roof.

"I do not like this; we are completely exposed from many directions and to make it doubly worse they might also have a sniper out there. The roof they were on possessed no structures to hide behind and the parapet walls were only eighteen inches high," whispered Blake.

"This is the only building with a clear view on the front of the warehouse and still outside the designated safety distance," retorted Mira quietly.

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“Ted, you need to be absolutely sure we are not observed before I take the shot. I do not want to let someone put a bullet in my back,” said Blake. “Condor in position eleven hundred from target on a bearing of zero nine seven degrees relative,” said Blake over the radio.

“Eagle at nine-fifty at one two five degrees relative; Hawk at nine hundred at zero seven two relative,” came over the radio in succession to Blake’s report. Both Blake and Ted put on their night vision goggles and began scanning the area for all the possible places where an opposing sniper might be. Even though they found no evidence to such they were still extremely nervous at their predicament. Mira sensed this and said, “To date Mossad has no information as to the PLO having any soldiers that possess abilities to shoot past three hundred yards.” Blake was barely able to develop an almost unnoticeable smile for her.

Just ten days ago Amin Moussoui started to take notice of the systematic elimination of his lieutenants by what appeared to be snipers but he did not know their origin. He knew the only real way to protect himself from snipers is to use a sniper of his own. This is when he requested his superiors to bring in a sniper to protect not only him but many of his lieutenants. Finally, he thought, the leader of the PLO provided him with a Russian Muslim sniper named Zarick Slovko.

“I want you to recon the area and locate all possible locations an opposing sniper would use to observe this warehouse front. Once this is done select a position which will provide you with a lane of fire on the three best locations to cover my exit tomorrow morning,” ordered Amin Moussoui.

“I feel something wrong,” said Condor One over the radio.

“I feel the same thing,” replied both Hawk and Eagle. This amazed Mira since this was the first demonstration of the phenomena Lieutenant Decker had described to her about six weeks ago. After making a mental note she continued scanning the area for an opposition sniper. Slowly, licking its rays over the horizon, the sun came up at 7:17 a.m. All three snipers started to show signs of extreme nervousness since the sun’s rising made them extremely vulnerable.

There you are, just as I thought. Zarick could see the outline of three individuals on the roof of his number one spot he selected for a sniper to be. He could tell that two were frantically searching the surrounding buildings for any threat. Because of this he knew they would only provide him with about two seconds, once he exposes himself, to take the shot. Soon Amin would be leaving as scheduled at the prescheduled time; 7:32 a.m.

“I feel something to the southeast of my position at about seven hundred yards,” whispered Blake into his radio and loud enough for Ted to hear.

“Roger, we are covering you,” came back on the radio.

“I have movement coming in front of the objective,” reported Condor over the radio. Instantly Mira began to focus her attention at the warehouse preparing to identify the target. Strangely, thought Mira, she too could sense the presence of danger in the direction Blake reported earlier; perhaps she too was developing the connection displayed with the three snipers. Blake then moved into a sitting position chambering a bullet and resting the rifle onto the parapet wall in preparation of taking the shot.

Zarick, after seeing the opposing sniper prepare for his shot, chambered a round in his stolen M-4 and started slowing his heartbeat and respirations down in preparation to eliminate the sniper in his sites. He thought, just two more minutes until Amin Moussoui came out and dashed to his vehicle. With the sun fully up over the horizon he could see the sniper, in position, with a woman crouching to his right at about six feet and the snipers spotter in the middle of the roof scanning the building he was in.

“Number two guy coming out the door is Moussoui,” said Mira.

“I have him,” replied Blake as he started slowing down his heart beat and his respirations in preparation to take the shot. Just then Amin moved more rapidly toward the waiting vehicle and Zarick came out from cover shouldered his weapon and prepared to shoot.

“Bogey, Bogey, Bogey,” replied Ted to Blake and into the radio. Then, on instinct, Mira rose up and moved into Zarick’s line of fire just in time to feel the bullet, meant for Blake’s head, strike her in the

back. As Blake was squeezing the trigger, to eliminate the target, he felt someone fall on him, causing the projectile to go astray, missing Amin completely.

Zarick knew once he took the shot he would be open to return fire from the support the sniper would most assuredly have. Dam, thought Zarick as he saw the projectile not hit the sniper but the woman.

Mira had taken the bullet meant for Blake in her right shoulder blade, causing her to crumple on top of him and then roll to her left onto the roof. Blake was horrified as he saw the woman he loves roll to his left and lay motionless on the roof. In a rage he pivoted in his sitting position and started rocking the window where Ted was indicating the shot came from.

“Lieutenant Condor Two, we are taking fire, one person hit, and package was not delivered. Request you close on our position in preparation for departure,” said Ted over the radio.

“Roger, Eagle and Hawk close on Condor’s position, we will be there in three,” answered the lieutenant.

“Home Plate, we are executing exit plan Charlie and we have wounded,” continued Lieutenant Decker. That was the signal for SEAL team six to bring their assault crafts into the harbor to retrieve the teams and give support for their exit.

“Mira, can you hear me?” said Blake with a crackly voice after he emptied his rifle’s four remaining bullets into the location of his attacker. She lay motionless on the roof with blood oozing from the hole in her back. Then Blake’s training took over and he rapidly examined her for any other wounds. Knowing that her spine had not been struck he rolled her over onto to her back and quickly ran his hands over her chest looking for an exit wound. Still motionless, with exception of her labored breathing, Blake again said in a crackly voice, “Mira, can you hear me?” Still no answer and it was at that moment he realized they were still exposed and shouting mixed with gun fire was rapidly moving in their direction.

With one smooth movement Blake put her limp body over his left shoulder and bolted for the stairwell leading to the ground.

“Condor is moving down to the street,” said Blake over the radio. As he was descending the stairs Mira gave an intermittent moan which elevated both his and Ted’s hopes that she would not succumb to her wounds.

“Lieutenant, we are down,” said Blake over the radio.

“Three zero seconds out,” replied the lieutenant.

“Be advised, unfriendlies about two hundred yards out and closing fast on our position,” reported Blake.

As the team arrived at Condor’s position both Hawk and Eagle converged with them virtually at the same time. Upon seeing their arrival Blake emerged, followed by Ted, from the building with Mira still on his shoulder. Two of his teammates approached Blake rapidly, with a gurney, for him to put Mira on. Gently he laid her down on the gurney for his teammates to carry.

“Walker, Walker, and Stedman take six additional men and cover our exit for plan Charlie,” ordered the lieutenant. With that the team moved toward the approaching boats in a predetermined manner.

The route would take them, running full out, through several rows of warehouses for about six hundreds yards to the water. As they retreated the twelve soldiers took their turns, by twos, laying down cover fire at the approaching combatants. These guys are poorly organized, thought Blake, since they appeared to be running and shooting at random with nobody trying to get ahead of the team to prevent their departure. Slowly, but surely, the combatants closed the distance.

“Home Plate, we are moving into the open, take over cover fire,” reported the lieutenant over the radio.

Just as the soldiers covering their retreat, to the boats came into the opening about a hundred yards from the boats, the SEALs started rocking the direction they came from with the fifty calibers machine guns mounted on the bow of the boats. Thank God they were there thought Blake about the SEALs as he ran, in full sprint, to the safety of the boats. In preparation for a quick departure they only had one man holding the boats to the pier and as the last men boarded each soldier was firing in the direction of their pursuit laying down an impenetrable wall of lead. With so much cover fire the boats left the harbor unmolested.

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Once Mira was on board, the first boat, the two hospital corpsmen started working on her wound. With the Iwo Jima about fifty miles off the coast they put her into a Stokes Stretcher in preparation, once they cleared the harbor, for her to be airlifted out to the Iwo Jima and the doctors on board. The boats, the soldiers were on, would take at least two hours through the ten foot seas at maximum speed. Then Blake heard over the radio, “Home Plate, subject is stable but still in need of an airlift.”

“CH-46 will be at extraction point Zulu in two minutes,” came back over the radio. Even though she was on another boat Blake knew she would be alright by what he heard over the radio and he resolved, at the earliest possible moment, he would tell her how he feels.

“Who was it, Zarick?” demanded Amin.

“All I could see were two men and a woman carrying Uzis with the sniper having a rifle that I could not recognize,” answered Zarick.

“What do you mean a rifle you do not recognize? The Israelis use the M-4 just like yours,” retorted the angered Amin.

“I know all the sniper rifles used around the world and this one is not one of them,” retorted the sniper. He continued, “They must be Israeli since they had Uzis.” So the Israelis are behind the killings, thought Amin.

“Let’s go and see if we can recover the spent cartridges from the sniper’s gun at his firing location,” said Amin as he motioned for Zarick to follow him.

Arriving at the building Zarick led Amin Moussoui to the spot where the sniper took the shots.

“Let us hope he was in too much of a hurry to police his brass,” said Amin. Sure enough Amin hopes came true; lying there on the tar and gravel roof were four spent cartridges. Zarick picked up the four spent brass placing three in his pocket and examining the fourth very closely.

“This is a Weatherby cartridge and it appears to be a .25 caliber. I have never heard of any sniper using this type of gun. It is undeterminable with this evidence as to the nationality of our sniper, but my guess is still Israeli since they would definitely try to hide who is responsible,” said Zarick.

“Let’s go back to the warehouse. I need to discuss some things with Ooza and Hammed,” commanded Amin Moussoui.

By the time Amin arrived back to the warehouse his two commanders, Ooza and Hammed, had returned from pursuing the snipers.

“Sir, we were unable to prevent the escape of the cowards who tried to kill you. They left the harbor on three boats just ten minutes ago,” reported Hammed.

“What kind of boats?!” shouted Amin.

“They appeared to be American assault crafts,” said Ooza very sheepishly.

“This information is no help. It could be the Americans or it could be the Israelis.”

“Ooza, I want you to set up observers around the Marine’s barracks and watch for men leaving after dark. Hammed, I want you to do the same thing along the border with Israel and report back to me every morning of what you observed through the night. It is important for the watchers to be in position just at sunset and staying there until at least 3 a.m.,” ordered Amin.

Arriving at point Zulu Mira was mumbling even more and drifting in and out of consciousness. “Is Blake all right?” she kept repeating.

“He is fine, you took the bullet ear marked for him,” answered the corpsman. Just a few minutes later they could hear the CH-46 approaching point Zulu from the east and it was then boat one turned its running lights on.

“Boat one, we have you in sight. Hold your position as we hover and lower the cable,” came back over the radio.

“Aye, aye, holding our position, package is wrapped and ready to go,” answered Lieutenant Decker. Even though they were in pretty rough seas the transfer of Mira to the helicopter went off without a hitch.

Even though Mira’s concern for Blake’s welfare was passed on to him, his worrying about her condition made the trip out to the Iwo Jima seems like forever. Fifty miles of up and down in twenty five foot swells, from top to trough, made their trip slower and worse for

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moral of the men on board. Then as they arrived Blake experienced a revelation, in his hurry to get Mira out of there he left his brass on the roof of the building. This, he thought, has to be reported to the lieutenant immediately but it would have to wait until he arrived at home plate since Lieutenant Decker was on the number one boat.

The USS Iwo Jima LPH-2 is an interesting boat. Not only does it have a landing deck up top, for helicopters and vertical take-off aircraft, but also its stern opens up to let landing boats to move in and out of its belly. As they approached home plate the LPH shut its propellers down to allow the safe entrance of the three boats into its belly. Immediately upon the disembarking of the boats Blake approached the lieutenant and said, "Lieutenant, in my excitement to get off the roof I forgot to police my brass."

"Oh do not worry, son. We figured it might happen, at one point or another, since you are the primary shooter and that is why the Navy allowed you to continue using the Weatherby. Nobody in the world recognizes it as a military sniper weapon thereby making it virtually untraceable back to us," replied Lieutenant Decker.

"By your leave, sir," answered Blake and he took off in a full sprint up two decks to the make shift hospital, located in the sick bay, to find out how Mira was.

"How is the Israeli woman who came in with a gunshot wound in her right shoulder blade?" asked the winded Walker.

"And who are you and why do you need that information?" commanded the head nurse.

"I am Petty Officer Blake Walker and the bullet she took was meant for me."

"Oh, you are the one she has been asking about. She will be fine but right now she is in surgery to remove the bullet and piece back together her shoulder blade. Thirty days and she will be back to normal. She did, however, keep asking if you had been hit and where you were continually even after we told her you had not been hit," answered the nurse.

"Can I wait here till she is through and wakes up?" asked Blake. "Go and get cleaned up and eat something; she is going to be in there for at least a couple of more hours," ordered the nurse.

Four hours later, after Blake had put his gear with the rest of the teams, ate some chow, took a shower and he arrived back at the hospital just thirty minutes after the surgery was completed. So far Mira was the first casualty the make shift hospital has treated from Beirut. Not having a proper recovery room Blake was led to a section of their emergency room where Mira laid with monitors hooked up. She was still asleep but the nurse said she should be waking up real soon. Blake just stood there captivated by her smooth round and slightly tanned face with dark eye brows. To Blake it did not matter how the time dragged on because he was with her and she would recover from her wounds. He wondered what possessed her to move and take a bullet for him could she have reciprocal feelings for him.

Slowly her eyes started moving behind her eye lids as if they were straining to open. Blake softly said in her ear, "I am here, my love, please wake up." He saw the slight formation of a smile emerging on her smooth lips and then she said something.

"What did you say?" came from her mouth, almost inaudible except to a trained ear.

"I said please wake up, my love."

"I thought that is what you said," Mira answered groggily but with a little bit more volume and clarity. "I love you too," she continued. His heart began to pound in his chest as he listened to her words.

"I hope you remember this when the anesthesia wears off," responded Blake.

"Oh I will."

"Sleep, my love, I will be back in a couple of hours to see you again," he said, kissing her forehead. At that he bolted to the Combat Information Center (CIC) and specifically Lieutenant Decker to find out when they would be going back to Beirut. He was pretty sure it was later that night but maybe they would be held on board until tomorrow night to give the team a chance for some rest before going back into action.

Sure enough the lieutenant was in CIC. Approaching him Blake asked, "When are we due to go back to Beirut, Lieutenant?"

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“The admiral wants to meet with you, me, Ted, and Mira when she wakes up fully. We need to discuss this sniper and how this is going to affect our mission. The doc says she will be up to talking tomorrow so we are here for at least one more day, but the rest of the team will be going back tonight so you might want to go and say good bye to your brother and Billy,” answered Lieutenant Decker. Without showing any expression Blake’s heart did somersaults as he left CIC and headed to the galley where the rest of the team was eating.

“How is Mira doing?” asked Kyle of Blake when he approached the team in the galley.

“She woke up about thirty minutes ago and then went back to sleep but she is doing fine. She did not receive any irreparable damage from the bullet,” answered Blake.

“In case you have not heard you are going back tonight but I am staying for at least one day to meet with the admiral.” He continued, “Also you and Billy watch your backs, we have another sniper out there because the bullet Mira took was delivered at about seven hundred yards.”

“I bet you are just broken up over having to stay here with Mira,” Kyle said while chuckling.

“I will see ya when I see ya,” Blake answered as he left the galley and made the journey back up to Mira.

Blake had no concept of time as he watched Mira sleeping in the hospital bed until the nurse brought a roll away cot into the room and opened it up next to her. She then handed Blake a set of sheets, a pillow, and a wool blanket.

“Sick bay can get pretty cold at night,” she said as she exited through the sick bay hatch. Suddenly Blake’s adrenalin wore off and he found it very difficult to stay awake but he did manage to get to the cot before he fell asleep completely. Later that night Kyle came by to check on Mira, before he caught the CH-46 back to Beirut, and put the blanket on his brother. She was awake and staring at the man lying on the cot next to her bed.

“Thank you for what you did for my brother. Ted says it would have been a head shot if not for your actions,” said Kyle quietly.

“I just could not let him die that way and I could not picture myself going on without him,” answered Mira.

“Does he know how you feel?” asked Kyle. She nodded yes and he said goodbye because they were being sent back to Beirut in two hours except for Blake and Ted. At that she went back to sleep knowing she would see his face a little bit more before he went back to Beirut.

Mira woke up the next morning to find only the doctors their in the sick bay.

“Where did Petty Officer Walker go to?” she asked the doctor.

“He just went down to the galley to get some chow. Are you up to having some visitors? There are an admiral, a lieutenant, and a Mossad officer here to meet with you and the snipers,” said the doctor. Mira nodded yes and the doctor made the call to CIC. Thirty minutes later the room Mira’s bed was in was full of men and all wanted to discuss the shooter who put a bullet in her back that was intended for Petty Officer Walker.

Lieutenant Decker started the discussion with, “What does Mossad know about a shooter in the PLO that uses an American made M-4?”

The Mossad officer answered, “We have heard there is a Russian born Muslim sniper named Zarick Slovkoﬀ in the area. We have not been able to confirm if he is working for the PLO yet.”

“This would have been some very good information to know before somebody was injured or even got killed. Fortunately for you it was one of yours who took the hit,” shouted the admiral.

“I want the file on the shooter today before we go back to Beirut,” ordered Lieutenant Decker. Then the Mossad officer pulled a manila folder out from his jacket and handed it to the admiral.

Russia had long been suspected of assisting the PLO just like the US was supplying the Afghanistan rebels in their resistance against Russia. Zarick Slovkoﬀ was a Russian trained sniper that had acquired his M-4 in Afghanistan from a dead freedom fighter. Mossad has determined his abilities to be exceptional for a Russian sniper however they would put his effective range at about one

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thousand yards. The file also estimated his kills are at fifty five with at least ten being opposition snipers in Afghanistan; a statistic that gave them significant concern.

Blake spent the rest of the day and night, up to his departure time of midnight, with Mira in sick bay. She was recovering very fast from the wound. Tomorrow she would be flown back to Jerusalem to recover at her home and also to report to her superiors at Mossad. He could sense her genuine concern by how she described the sum total of her knowledge about Beirut and what to watch for. Blake reassured Mira, neither the sniper nor the PLO would be able to get to him and before they see each other again Moussoui and Slovkoﬀ would be having direct discussions with Allah.

Right on schedule the black Hawk helicopter lifted of the flight deck returning the three to Beirut. Lieutenant Decker informed Blake, Ted and the other sniper teams they would be meeting in his stateroom to discuss the adjustments that would be made to mitigate the threat of Zarick Slovkoﬀ. During the wait the lieutenant wanted Blake to come up with some tactics they could use to eliminate the sniper.

Up until then Blake's experience came from the elimination of targets which did not have the skill to fight back or at least initially. There was always the exit from the danger zone, once the kill was made, to deal with. This was the time when the unconfirmed kill's snipers rack up since hitting one target usually required the killing of at least twelve more when exiting. His confirmed kills, the ones Ted was an eye witness to, totaled twenty two thus putting the unconfirmed at over two hundred. It was at that point he wondered what was going on with his grandpa. Did he make it home safely? If he did, was the man at the Mustang Ranch still after him?

"I have called this meeting to discuss who Intel believes is a sniper named Zarick Slovkoﬀ, the one that put the bullet in Mira. Blake, why don't you bring the others up to speed," ordered the lieutenant.

"Our sniper uses an American made M-4 rifle that he possibly acquired while fighting for the Russians in Afghanistan. By Russian

standards he is very good but not up to the abilities we have. That is not saying we should not be concerned but he presents a serious threat when we are in the shooting position. The question is how we handle this threat. My suggestion is to send our missions out as normal with the exception of Ted and I will leave first and sneak into the site where the team and the sniper team will be heading. This will enable us to anticipate his moves and eliminate him. The flip side is you will be completely dependent on Ted and mine abilities to neutralize him before he neutralizes you.”

“This means, Blake and Ted, you will be going out every night instead of every third night,” responded the Lieutenant. They nodded yes.

“If we get another chance at Moussoui all will be going out,” said Lieutenant Decker.

“Why is it taking so long?” yelled Jacob D’Angelo over the phone.

“It has been over thirty days since Fredo Demarco arrived at your location,” he yelled again.

“Pops, this Gumba lives out in the middle of the woods down a long dirt road. He is in his nineties and is still sharper than a pin. Fredo says we need to let him get comfortable so he will relax his guard. Otherwise he will know we are coming and it will be a blood bath and primarily on our side. Fredo has been watching him now for at least three weeks and is mapping out all his habits. He says the earliest we should try would be in another ten days,” answered Tony.

“You tell him he better not be screwing with me. He is not the only mechanic in the shop. Tony, you remind him of that fact,” demanded Jacob.

“Pops is not very happy with you and he says you better not be screwing with him,” said Tony.

“You know, Tony, you are a lot more level headed than your father. I love Jacob very much but he is not going to live forever. He seems to forget I have saved his bacon on numerous occasions. We will get this guy but taking him alive is a whole lot more difficult. I could have killed him by now very easily. But our instructions are

alive because he wants the grandsons too. We will get this gumba but the lack of information about the others gives me serious concern. You need to find somebody out in San Diego that knows something and fast. I do not like the unknown especially when it comes to snipers,” responded Fredo. “Now let’s discuss my plan.”

“The gumba goes for water twice a week and not on a regular schedule. Those stupid dogs always accompany him where ever he goes. So, first we need to do something to the dogs but make it look like it is natural. I do not think those dogs get their shots on a regular basis so we need to get a dog with PARVO and drop it off in the vicinity of the cabin. This will eliminate the dogs within a week. Then I will lay in wait for him to go for water and put a dart him down by the river.” Tony asked what PARVO was since he had never heard of it. “PARVO is a virus dogs get from cats,” explained Fredo. “It attacks dogs’ intestines, making them experience a slow, painful death over about seven days. The best place to find a dog with PARVO is to wait outside a veterinary office and eventually one will show up.”

It took Tony’s men three days to acquire the dog they needed. Later on that night Fredo snuck in close to Blake’s cabin and let the poor wretched animal loose to infect those stupid beagles. Sure enough it took fours days for the dogs to die, devastating Blake. He raised the beagles from puppies some eighteen years ago. By the time he realized what was happening it was too late since PARVO needs to be caught and treated by a veterinarian within forty-eight hours for the dogs to have a chance at survival.

Two days after he buried the dogs Blake headed down to the creek for his water supply. Fredo Demarco was waiting. Just after he went for water four days ago Fredo began digging his hide in preparation to put a dart into Blake Elliott.

“Well it is time to go and get the water, Jake,” Blake said to the horse. Things were not the same since he buried his two favorite dogs and Blake contemplated whether he would acquire any replacements. Walking down the path to the creek his mind began to wander thinking of times when his great grandsons spent those three

summers with him. It had been over forty days since those strange men came to the cabin and he had almost forgotten about them when the strangest feeling came over him. Within just a few seconds later he felt something sting him on his butt and everything began to spin. The last thing he remembered was the sound of a lot of men running through the leaves down by the river until he woke up on board a small twin engine plane.

“Hey, Tony, the gumba is waking up,” said Fredo. Barely becoming coherent from the tranquilizer the dart had injected into him, Blake was trying to concentrate on where he was. This was a new sensation since he had never flown in an airplane before. He could hear the roar of both engines turning as the plane flew along in the most beautiful blue sky all the while wondering where they were taking him.

“I am sure glad you did not kill the gumba with too much of the tranquilizer because Jacob would have been very much displeased with you,” said Tony.

“How much longer is it going to be till we arrive at the ranch?” asked Tony.

“We are going to land in a few minutes to fuel up after that in about another three hours,” answered the pilot.

“Is this the guy who put the bullets into my planes?” continued the pilot angrily.

“Yep this is the guy,” responded Tony.

“Tell me about your great grandsons Blake and Kyle,” asked Fredo.

“My grandsons’ names are Todd and Jeremy,” answered Blake.

Placing his index finger under the base of Blake’s skull, at the top and right side of his neck, and pressed in with the force of a hydraulic jack he said, “Your great grandsons not your grandsons. If you try that again I will visit every one of your family and take care of them just like you,” answered Fredo.

Wincing from the pain Blake responded, “If you want to see the next calendar year arrive I recommend you turn this plane around and let me go home. Once they hear about what has happened to me your

lives will not be worth a plug nickel. Once I saw what they did to a coyote that killed their favorite dog. They must have shot him over a hundred times, nicking a piece of flesh off about the size of a dime with each shot. That coyote howled for hours until it finally died.”

As he told them the fictitious story he could see the genuine fear building in their faces. Blake chuckled inside because he taught his great grandsons one shot one kill and never would they be that cruel to an animal trying to exist. But it served its purpose now, they were extremely nervous, and that may be just the edge Blake and Kyle would need. After landing, out in the middle of nowhere, the plane fueled up and took off heading west northwest.

“Hey, why didn’t you kill me and get it over with?” asked Blake.

“My pops wants all the shooters so you are going to be the bait,” answered Tony.

“There is something you do not realize. My grandsons can be deployed for months on end with no one in the family having any knowledge of their whereabouts. We cannot even get a message to them should someone die. You could be holding me for a long time before they even realize I have been taken. Then there is all my sons once they notice I have disappeared,” laughed Blake.

“That is okay, my pops has the patience of Job,” retorted Tony. All the way to the Mustang Ranch Tony and Fredo kept trying to get information out of Blake to no avail.

It was a little after five p.m. when they arrived at the ranch. As Blake was taken off the plane he could see the three planes he put bullets into the engine still sitting where they were a month and a half ago. Chuckling he said, “Having a little engine trouble with your planes?”

“Not as much trouble as you are going to have,” retorted Tony as he backhanded Blake across his forehead.

“Pops, this is the gumba who shot Ron Walker,” said Tony as he led Blake into the private room Jacob D’Angelo used when in Las Vegas.

“Where did you get this old man, in a nursing home? How am I going to show our customers this guy and have them believe he was the shooter? Do you want me to look stupid?” Jacob said angrily.

“This is the guy. The bullet that killed Mister Walker came from the north where the hide only had evidence of one person. His two grandsons shot from the south, but missed, because the hide possessed evidence of two persons being there,” muttered Tony.

Blake spoke up confidently. “I tell you what, Pops, if you take me back home and forget my two grandsons I will not tell them what you have done. You see, you have no idea who you are dealing with because, I will just tell you this, their skill levels far exceed mine and they also have access to a group of soldiers who are at the top of their profession. I can tell your boy here, Tony, was a SEAL at one time and maybe Fredo too, but that would not even qualify them for what my progeny does in the Navy. So, as Clint Eastwood used to say in the Dirty Harry movies, do You Feel Lucky.” As Blake related this to them he could see the fear welling up in their eyes and, at one point, thought they just might listen to him.

“Put this gumba on ice and contact your friend at Coronado to get a message to the Walker brothers, Tony,” said Jacob D’Angelo almost sheepishly. At Jake’s command Tony took Blake down a long hallway to a set of stairs leading down to the basement. There he placed Blake into a wine closet fastening the handcuffs to a chain attached to the cement basement wall.

It never ceased to amaze Blake how stupid criminals can be. The storeroom was about fifteen feet wide by thirty feet long with the wall he was chained to at the farthest point from the door. There were ten wine racks fifteen bottles high and about forty bottles long. Amazingly enough, Tony had failed to remove his glasses and take them with him thus providing Blake with a means to pick the handcuffs currently restraining him. Promptly he reached up grabbed his glasses and broke off the left side arm and dropped it between his legs and then placing his glasses back on. A few seconds later Tony came back through the door walked over to Blake and took his glasses.

“What happened to your glasses?” asked Tony.

“Oh they have been broke for two years now,” replied Blake with a face as innocent as a dove. Taking his glasses Tony left the storeroom locking the door behind him.

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I may be here for a while since it may be a while before the grandsons find out and I might as well enjoy myself with a little wine, thought Blake as he picked the handcuffs lock. He knew these guys would make sure he was dehydrated; just in case he was able to get loose he couldn't run very far. That was enough to justify drinking two bottles of wine a day and he hoped he picked the most expensive ones to boot.

Blake related to Ted everything Mira instructed him about Beirut. It would require all their concentration to go out, without cover, undetected to a spot where either Kyle or Billy would show up at in a few hours. Anticipating the PLO might have someone watching the barracks now, Lieutenant Decker arranged for a helicopter to come in and land with the lights off about an hour after sundown stay on the pad for fifteen minutes and then fly away. This would be enough of a distraction for Blake and Ted to get out into the surrounding buildings without being seen. Hopefully it would work, they thought, as they left the safety of the barracks into the dark streets of Beirut.

Since they were alone both men moved as stealth full as a leopards moving only about thirty feet a minute; carefully calculating every dash to another structure for cover. Now their senses were acutely tuned to the surroundings carefully listening to every noise and every smell drifting their way. Blake could hear, in his mind, Mira's instructions repeating over and over again. It was amazing how the two men moved like a perfectly synchronized machine giving each other instruction through their posture. Every time they encountered an enemy combatant it became apparent to them they knew danger was there before evidence of such presented itself. From concentration their clothes were completely drenched in sweat as they arrived at the location four hours and a mile and a half later.

"On station," Blake said into the radio. Now it was Kyle's turn but he would be there in only thirty minutes. The hard part to come is when Kyle has made his shot and Blake and Ted must make it home without the cover of the team.

Kyle and his spotter Quinton moved out from the barracks around

two a.m., heading along a parallel path Condor took four hours earlier. When Kyle approached his brother's location he and Quinton became extremely careful. Their objective was to approach and not be detected by anyone even Condor.

"Making final approach," came over the radio. Blake and Ted then began to concentrate on the various lanes of approach. They knew if they could detect the sniper team another sniper out there would have a good chance of spotting Hawk. Lieutenant Decker, before the mission, had ordered them to not take up positions on the roofs of buildings unless there was no other building, within twelve hundred yards, that could observe them.

Ted constantly scanned the area surrounding, for what they had determined to be the best places for a sniper, each vantage point for any signs of an opposition sniper out there. Blake, on the other hand, watched the streets below in an effort to spot his brother making the approach to their hide. Neither one was able to detect anything out of the ordinary. Then the report came over the radio, "In station," said Kyle.

"Nothing at objective ranger," Kyle continued.

Nights in Beirut would be perfect if not for all the fighting. There was always a gentle breeze coming in from the Mediterranean Sea providing needed cooling and a comfortable odor of the sea. This allowed snipers to put their flank in the direction of the breeze since any odor emitted by the enemy would be detected. In addition, most of the buildings were in some state of falling down providing for loose debris that could not be traversed quietly: even by the most seasoned stalker.

Each sniper knew very well that any locations provided by Intel could very well be a trap set up to draw the Americans out. Objective ranger was no exception. The surrounding area was riddled with possible hides for a sniper. As the sun rise gradually approached the snipers intensified their searching. Soon the target would emerge from the building and another PLO lieutenant would be gone.

"I have movement at objective ranger," reported Kyle.

"No opposition located," replied Blake.

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“Once package is delivered execute plan Charlie,” Lieutenant Decker said over the radio. As three men came out of the building, seven hundred yards from Hawk, through the open door way, left by an assault sometime in the past, Quinton reached down and whispered in Kyle’s ear, “Last one is our target.” Kyle began to go through the sequence to eliminate the objective: slowed his breathing and heart rate; brought the M-4 up to his shoulder and placed the cross hairs on the subject, and squeezed the trigger. A half second later the subject crumpled to the pavement and Blake began frantically searching for the opposition after hearing the rifle report.

Kyle then rolled to his right away from the window just in case the sniper had spotted him and now was lining up his shot.

“Target eliminated,” came over the radio.

“No opposition sighted,” responded Blake. It was then Hawk one and two exited the area via plan Charlie and it was up to Blake and Ted to cover their flank.

It seemed strange to Blake and Kyle that no one was trying to find the sniper who had just shot their commander. The men standing next to the target simply grabbed his arms and rapidly pulled the body back into the building they had just emerged. There was no shouting mixed with gunfire heading in their general direction. For Hawk and their support team the return to the Marine Barracks was just like a walk in the park.

Condor however waited an additional two hours to make sure they were not detected and then stealth fully left the building. The sun was extremely bright that day and moving took even longer than the night before since now all of Beirut was up and outside in the streets. Several times Condor was required to hold up inside a building for an hour to allow opposition forces to depart the area. This made it extremely nerve wracking since it had been almost twenty four hours since they were able to sleep. Because it was taking an extremely large amount of time to get back to the barracks Blake keyed his radio and said, “It will take us at least another four hours to make it back. Condor will hold at present location and then proceed to objective tango at two zero hours.” Affirmative came back across the radio.

“Ted, why don’t you get some sleep and I will take the first watch,” said Blake softly. Sitting there watching the outside for any sign of danger Blake could not help but think about Mira and his grandpa. She would surely be in Israel with her family by now and he wondered if he would ever see her again. If they got sent back to the states without seeing her how would they contact each other? Both of their addresses are classified by each of their governments. Then when it came time for him to catch some sleep his dreams were of Mira being shot in the back by Zarick Slovko standing just ten feet behind her laughing.

“Time to move to objective tango,” whispered Ted, causing Blake to jump up from his laying position and pull out his kbar in preparation to attack.

“Easy, Blake,” said Ted in a calm and soothing voice.

“Oh, sorry, Ted, you woke me up right in the middle of a nightmare,” said Blake. “What time is it?” he asked.

“Twenty hundred hours.”

“Let’s get a move on, we have about a half mile to traverse,” commanded Blake. After last night’s experience the two soldiers were able to move quickly to their objective and within an hour they reported in. “On station, make your approach,” said Blake over the radio. His good friend Billy Stedman would be coming tonight and he wondered if tonight’s mission would be just as easy as last night’s.

Something was definitely wrong; two nights’ missions coming off without a hitch and no sniper out there, Blake thought as they made their way back to the barracks. Did the PLO think the sniper was eliminated? It was very dark that night and the opposition sniper was over seven hundred yards away. Or, were they sucking them in with the easy kills to get them to drop their guard? If that was true what a waste of men but that would be typical of terrorists.

Just like the night before the snipers came in and the target emerged right on time and was quickly eliminated. When they exited the area no one put any form of pursuit with Condor being able to go home with the team. The same was true for all the twenty-nine missions that occurred after the sniper shot Mira with Zarick Slovko not once showing his face.

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“Intel gave us the location of Amin Moussoui, which means we are all going out tonight using the same approach pattern as Korea. All personnel meet in the briefing room at nineteen hundred hours,” said the lieutenant at breakfast.

Blake’s heart did somersaults when he saw Mira walk into the briefing room at eighteen thirty hours. Everyone on the team was walking over to her asking how she was. He greeted her also and wondered if they would have time to talk privately before the mission.

Trapped

“Be ready to depart at twenty-three hundred hours. That is all; dismissed,” commanded the lieutenant. He continued, “Petty Officers Stedman, Walker, Walker, Sylkowski, Salazar, and Manning, come to my stateroom in fifteen minutes.”

After they were dismissed Blake searched all over the briefing room for Mira but she seemed to have disappeared. He wanted to speak to her very desperately before the mission since there may not be another opportunity to talk for a while. With his heart aching Blake went over to Lieutenant Decker’s stateroom and entered. There she was the focus of his heart and she knew how he felt by looking back into his eyes. Mira looked extremely fit and the time with her family did wonders for her mental state. Her face glowed like a new bride. Within seconds their alone time was over without speaking a word as the rest of the sniper teams came in followed by their lieutenant.

“Mossad acquired some information for you about Amin Moussoui and Zarick Slovkoﬀ,” stated Lieutenant Decker.

“The contact that has been feeding us locations of key personnel is Sanja Moussoui Amin’s brother. Tonight he provided us with Amin’s location once again but everything indicates it to be a trap. In anticipation of such we are going to have at our disposal three gun ships and three Blackhawks, from the Iwo Jima for a quick extraction, if the mission goes south,” reported Mira. She continued, “Condor, you will be heading for the El Sid hotel overlooking the old train station. This will put you above all the surrounding buildings so if Zarick is out there waiting you will be able to take him out. If Amin is there we want him taken out but Zarick Slovkoﬀ will be with him so he must go first. Any one of you three take the shot when presented

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with one. We want Sanja Moussoui unharmed so make sure of your shots because the two Moussoui's look very similar."

"Dismissed, except you, Petty Officer Blake Walker," ordered the lieutenant. "Officer Mira Mier has some additional information for you," Lieutenant Decker said as he left the room with the others.

As the door was shut behind the lieutenant Blake moved to her, wrapping his arms around her soft body, saying softly, "I love you and I want to marry you."

Mira went limp in his arms and then tenderly reached up and kissed Petty Officer Walker, saying, "Yes, yes, of course yes." She continued, "My love, I am flying out to the Iwo Jima to their CIC to observe and also advise for this mission. I will see you out there for the debriefing afterwards since this will be your last mission in Beirut. Please be careful out there; everything indicates this is a trap."

"I will," said Blake as he embraced her as if it would be for the last time.

"Get those Gunships and Blackhawks going. Operation Rock the Cradle is going south," ordered the flight officer over the radio. Mira ran in a dead run from the CIC on the Iwo Jima up to the flight deck determined to get on one of the Blackhawks.

"Hey you are not supposed to be on the flight deck during ops," said the sailor as Mira sprinted to the three helicopters preparing to take off. When she flashed her Uzi at him the other sailors preparing to stop her parted rather quickly and with the grace of a gazelle she leaped into the third Blackhawk's door as it just lifted off.

Promptly she moved up behind the pilot and gave him orders to put her down on hotel Alpha. He was about to argue with this stranger until he saw the Uzi she carried in her right hand.

"Which Blackhawk did the woman board?" came over the radio.

"That would be mine Blackhawk Alpha," answered the pilot.

"Blackhawk Alpha, you tell her that she is not to leave the helicopter and is no way authorized to participate in any of the fighting," came over the radio.

"Aye, aye, sir, she has been duly informed."

The information had been very sketchy as they monitored the radio traffic of the team. It had been ten minutes since any contact with Condor had occurred and now the rescue mission was heading in because a trap had been indeed set for them.

“Ma’am, it just came over the radio that Condor is still in play but his radio has been knocked out. Put on the head phones back there against the wall and you can listen in to all the radio traffic,” said the pilot.

Placing the head phones on, Mira heard on the radio.

“Cradle Rocker: sniper is down; Eagle One is down and Condor One still with us. Commencing the rocking of unfriendlies below,” reported Hawk to Lieutenant Decker.

“Home Plate, we have casualties on Hotel Alpha and Bravo. Recommend you send birds with assistance to those locations. Will be meeting you on the roof of Alpha with ten, Bravo with ten, and two on Charlie in two zero minutes.”

“Lieutenant, Hawk, we are proceeding to Hotel Alpha to assist Condor. Unfriendlies still approaching your location rapidly from the north but at half force; will be at Hotel Alpha in five minutes.”

“Feet dry in ten minutes,” returned the pilot.

The remainder of Ooza’s men had experienced enough of their friends being shot from above with the remaining five dashing inside the El Sid and up the stairwell heading to the roof.

“We must hide,” said one.

“No, we must capture one of the Americans, otherwise they will kill us all,” said another. Agreeing with the last they climbed the stairs to the roof very cautiously since the Americans could have booby trapped the stairwell.

“Feet dry in five minutes,” Blake heard over his radio partially unconscious. Shaking the cobwebs out of his head Blake gathered his strength to sit up and look over the parapet at the train station. There were several men running around with in front pointing toward the roof where he shot the sniper and the others in his direction. Still half dazed he could not make out which, if any one, was Amin.

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“Condor still in play and radio is working. Spotter dead and I have taken a hit in my leg. Femoral artery partially severed but bleeding is stopped now,” Mira and others heard come over the radio.

“I am on the south side of Hotel Alpha setting up package delivery,” reported Blake.

“Feet dry in two minutes still five minutes out,” said the pilot.

“Now this is what you are going to do. Bring this ship into a hover over Hotel Alpha at twenty feet and I will go down by the rope,” ordered Mira.

“Your orders are to stay on board and not to get into the fight,” responded the pilot.

“You have men down there wounded and possibly dying, and besides if you do not I will shoot you,” commanded the Mossad Officer. Moving to the door Mira put on her safety harness, hung a slip rope and prepared to dive out the helicopter in two minutes.

“Feet dry, gunship’s fly cover, extract from Hotel Alpha and Charlie with none on Bravo. Divide up accordingly,” ordered the pilot of Blackhawk Alpha.

As the five reached the roof access door one held his arm up to stop the others from spilling out onto the roof. From his position he could see bodies of the four friends, sent there by Ooza, lying motionless just outside the door.

“The American must still be alive, let’s go down one floor and come up on the other side,” said the one in the lead.

Kyle and Quinton hit the first floor of the building and bolted out into the street in a dead run. Kyle could hear the sounds of an intense battle going on; he thought it was probably the team. He knew the run to Hotel Alpha would take about a minute and a half and he comforted his brother by saying into the radio, “Condor, we will be there in three minutes and will approach your position from the stairwell you used,” said Kyle.

“Roger, I heard someone come to the top of the stairs about a minute ago but has subsided now,” answered Blake.

Coming from the south over the railroad station Blake could hear the approach of rescue helicopters. It sounded like six with one

approaching rapidly to the El Sid. With the precision of a brain surgeon the pilot took the Blackhawk from traveling over eighty miles an hour into a hover in the span of about a quarter mile. Then a roped dropped down to the roof followed by a soldier descending head first. Blake thought no US soldier repels that way until he recognized who it was.

“Coming into hover now. Be advised will recover in ten minutes. Two ships at Alpha and one ship at Charlie,” said the pilot over the radio.

“Eight of you men head to Eagle’s position and prepare to be extracted in ten minutes,” ordered Lieutenant Decker. “The rest of you follow me in a staggered retreat formation,” he continued.

Mira took a risk in anticipating the skill of the pilot when she dropped the rope, as they were coming into a hover, and then went out head first, as she was trained to do, controlling her descent and precisely stopping about a foot above the roof. After quickly releasing the rope she pulled out her Uzi and sprinted to where Blake was leaning up against the parapet trying to bring the rifle up. Realizing he was in a vulnerable position, being clearly seen from both roof access doors she grabbed his uniform on the top of the shoulders and dragged him thirty feet to his left eventually getting behind a large roof mounted air conditioner all the while moaning with pain the whole distance.

“I heard several men come to the door on the west side of the roof but they went back down. Kyle and his spotter are coming along with part of the team. They will be extracting from here,” said Blake as Mira dragged him to cover behind a HVAC unit.

“We have ten minutes for you to hit Moussoui,” said Mira. As she heard another noise come from the east access door she rolled next to Blake hiding behind the AC unit.

“Hawk, unfriendlies are at the east door now,” reported Blake over the radio.

“Roger, at the bottom of the stairs,” responded Kyle.

“Quinton and I will be at the top in a minute,” he continued.

“Mira is here with me, just come to the top and watch the roof toward the east,” answered Blake.

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“The American is up here somewhere. He must have moved behind one of the air conditioners,” said the PLO soldier; taking the lead he rolled out the ajar door toward a large HVAC unit to their left with the other four following suit. Seeing what just happened Mira opened fire at the combatants just missing behind them strafing the roof.

“There are five of them,” said Mira.

“Bring my traitorous brother out here,” ordered Amin. There appeared to be some fierce fighting going on the roof at the El Sid. Stupid Zarick had gotten himself killed but he had his traitor and soon the American snipers will be dead; such a great day for Allah riding the earth of so many infidels.

“Brother, I just wanted to let you know how you have failed. This was all a trap set by me and now your traitorous eyes will get to see me live, the Americans die, and your head cleaved off,” Amin said to the traitor standing before him. “Bring my sword,” ordered Amin.

Blake looked over the parapet as best he could and sure enough the two men were still standing out there.

“Mira, I cannot tell which one is Amin. Can you take a look?” asked Blake.

“I cannot tell either at this distance and since it is dark my binoculars are useless,” answered Mira. She continued, “I guess you are just going to have to do both of them just to make sure.” Just then the emboldened combatants started firing their Ak-47s into the HVAC unit Blake and Mira were hiding behind. None of the bullets made it through but it did put a lot of Freon out hissing and spitting everywhere. As they paused to see the result Mira stepped out and returned the favor putting twenty holes in the one they were hiding behind.

It was at that point Kyle and Quinton arrived at the top of the stairs. Since his rifle was useless here Kyle strapped it over his shoulder and pulled out the Uzi. The combatants stepped out once again and started firing into the AC unit again but this time Kyle had them in his sights and shot two in the legs sprawling them out on the roof.

“Lieutenant, come up the east stairwell but be advised there are three unfriendlies at the top,” said Kyle.

“Now that Kyle is covering us, let’s move over to the parapet so you can take the shot,” said Mira. At that she helped Blake slide over the ten feet of roof and brought the Weatherby up to his shoulder. Blake could see that something funny was going on and it appeared that one man looked like his arms were restrained behind his back and the other was holding a sword.

Realizing that he was bleeding profusely now, since the wood had fallen out of his thigh, Blake said, “Mira, I need you to put pressure on my leg because my femoral artery has been severed.”

As she put pressure on the wound Blake moaned as the intense pain radiated through his whole body, taking him to the brink of collapse.

“Amin is the one on the left with a sword,” reported Mira. Responding to the information Blake fought back the intense pain and started his shooting sequence. Resting the Weatherby on the parapet wall he lined up the crosshairs on Amin’s chest. Since it was twelve hundred yards and he was in intense pain the decision was to do a chest shot. Blake thought this may not kill him instantly but the percentages were higher of actually delivering the projectile considering the circumstances. The intense pain prevented him from being able to slow down his heart beat and respirations so he intentionally aimed to the left about six inches to compensate for the slight pull that his heart beat cause when he took the shot.

“Now, my traitorous brother, it is time for you to experience Allah’s judgment,” said Amin as he raised his sword into a striking position. As Amin took the swing to cleave his brother’s head off something stung him in the center his chest just left of his heart and then exiting out his back directly through the spinal column. Sanja was staring into his brother’s eyes when his face changed from severe rage to an expressionless stare and then crumpled to the ground. About a half second later Sanja knew what had occurred when the rifle report came from the direction of the hotel El Sid’s roof.

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As Blake began to pull the trigger the world started spinning in his scope and he passed out before he heard the rifle go off. Because he went unconscious and relaxing his grip on the rifle it bounced off his shoulder and landed on the roof. It was at that moment the three remaining PLO soldiers ran for the east stairwell to get out of the fight.

Kyle momentarily took his eyes off the remaining combatants as Blake took the shot leaving them an opening to get out of his field of fire. Unfortunately for them Lieutenant Decker was heading for the roof in the same stairwell with the three combatants not making it past the fifth floor.

“Home Plate, extraction zones are clear you can begin your approach to Hotel Alpha and Charlie,” ordered the lieutenant as he reached the roof. Once Kyle was on the roof he ran to Mira at his brother’s side.

“Move your hand away and I will relieve you,” said Kyle. Seeing the rest of the team arrive onto the roof he hollered at the Hospital Corpsman to bring his kit and get an IV into him; he had lost a lot of blood.

“Home Plate, be advised, we have three wounded one on Alpha and two on Charlie. Both targets are eliminated; recommend gunships level the train station,” said Lieutenant Decker.

Mira could only sit there as the Blackhawk came back and hovered above the roof with about two feet between his landing gear and the roof. The only man she has ever loved was lying on the roof bleeding from his leg in an unconscious state. A normal man would have succumbed to his wounds long ago but Blake had fought with the pain and eliminated their objective to boot. In less than a minute all were on board the Blackhawk heading back out to sea and ultimately to rendezvous with the Iwo Jima.

Eliminating Amin Moussoui and Zarick Slovkoff came at a high price. Petty Officer Stedman had taken a bullet in the back, from Zarick, at C-4 thereby paralyzing him. Billy was conscious the whole time but could not understand why he felt no pain but still could not move his legs. Billy’s spotter Red Manning died on the way to the

Iwo Jima from his wounds after receiving to bullets to the chest. And Blake had his femoral artery severed almost killing him from blood loss. After stabilizing Blake and Billy both were flown from the Iwo Jima all the way to Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego. The team would take a week to get back to Coronado since it was not so immediate for them to return.

Since both Billy and Blake were in the hospital and a complete debriefing would be required to satisfy both Mossad and the US Navy the debriefing was scheduled to occur in three weeks back at Coronado. Mira heard the news with eager anticipation since Blake was MEDEVACed rather quickly not allowing her the time to set up a way of contact with him.

As the Iwo Jima left the Mediterranean Mira could not help but think to herself could not this ship go any faster. She was relieved when, once they were out into the Atlantic the team boarded a CH-46 to head for the USS John F. Kennedy and then on to Dam neck Virginia where they would catch a P-3 Orion waiting for them; eventually arriving in Coronado a week after Blake and Billy.

Upon arrival Kyle found a note in his mailbox requesting him to come and visit with Gunnery Sergeant Russell at the rifle range ASAP.

“What is this note all about?” asked Kyle as he entered the rifle range office.

“Come on into my office and shut the door behind you,” directed Sergeant Russell, motioning Kyle to follow him into his office. “Kyle, just before you were deployed I received a call from an ex-SEAL I know from Vegas and he first asked about your grandpa and then later about you and Blake. He called back and left this phone number for you to call when you get back. He also said it was a family matter,” said Sergeant Russell. He continued, “What did he mean by that?”

“If he calls back do not tell him we are back or that you have delivered this message,” answered Kyle.

Kyle then worked quickly, since he was going to take Mira over to see Blake and Billy. Calling his Aunt Nancy he asked, “Can you get a message to Grandpa for me?”

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“I do not know where he is and I have not seen him in about six weeks,” said Nancy as she cut Kyle off in mid sentence. It was not uncommon for Grandpa to disappear on occasion but this was just too much of a coincidence. He would have to discuss this with Blake.

Balboa Hospital was a large facility that handled all the serious medical cases in the Pacific realm. Located in Balboa Park in San Diego it took a little bit of time to drive over from Coronado. Mira could see something was giving Kyle stress, other than the traffic, during the drive prompting her to ask what the problem was. Kyle responded it was a family matter.

When they arrived they found Blake in a private room on the third floor. He was elated to see both of them but especially Mira. Blake had been pressing the doctors to release him so he could try and contact Mira. The doctors informed Blake that he would have to wait until the following Monday so the paperwork could be processed to give him thirty days rest and relaxation medical leave but in the meantime he was getting a weekend pass. This was great news, along with rapid recovery Blake was having, to both Kyle and Mira. While they were waiting on his pass the three went upstairs to visit Billy Stedman on the fourth floor.

Blake had been up to visit Billy several times and he was not dealing well with his paralysis very well. Billy’s spinal cord had been severed by the bullet as it passed through the C-5 vertebrae. Until Kyle informed Blake and Billy, about the success of the mission, neither knew whether Amin Moussoui had been eliminated. This was good news to both of them because they knew then their efforts had not been in vain. After they promised Billy they would both take leave and accompany him home to Arkansas when he got his medical leave the three departed the hospital.

“We need to drop Mira off at the base because I have something you need to know,” said Kyle.

“I guess this is a good time to inform you, Mira and I are getting married so you can tell her as well as me,” responded Blake.

“You do realize that will remove you from the team,” responded Kyle solemnly.

“Yes I do,” answered Blake confidently.

“How is that going to affect you at Mossad?” Kyle asked Mira.

“I do not know but it does not matter. I am through fighting,” answered Mira.

“Okay,” said Kyle as he related the meeting with Sergeant Russell. “No one has heard from Grandpa in six weeks and there was a note for me to go and see Sergeant Russell when I got back. I assume you have the same note. It is a phone number to call a Tony D’Angelo in Las Vegas about a family matter.”

Sitting there in the basement was extremely boring. They only brought water and food down once a day at a regular schedule or so it seemed. This allowed him lots of free time to drink some wine and listen to conversations going on in the house. Every day he could tell they were becoming more and more agitated from what seemed to be a lack of response from his grandsons. One conversation he overheard very clearly was the one, when he had been there what he thought was three weeks, with Tony being screamed at by his father because there informant at Coronado said the two brothers were still gone.

As their tempers continued to grow he decided it was time for him to escape. Anger has a tendency to make ones not think right and therefore he could exploit their weaknesses. At the four week mark, at least he thought it was four weeks, Blake decided it was time and he would leave two hours after they brought down his daily feeding. The lock on the door was easy to pick since it was a cheap house lock probably not costing more than \$10 at Wal Mart. When they had taken him to the basement Blake had noticed at the top of the stairs was also a door, with a window in it, leading to the outside on the west side of the house. As he approached the stairs he realized they had not been feeding him every twenty four hours since the sun was clearly shining through the window. He realized now he needed to determine, before he left, exactly how long he had been there. Blake then quickly returned to his cell locking the door behind to wait at least five hours so he would have the cover of darkness when he left.

After what seemed to be five hours Blake cautiously picked the

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lock once again. Cracking the door so he could see down the hall he saw no light coming from the door above. He could not hear any noise from above as he crept down the hall and he hoped that everyone was occupied or asleep. The stairs led up to the ground floor with an opening to the left, to the rest of the house, and the exit door to the outside right in front of him. He fought off the urge to exit the building realizing he needed to know exactly how long he had been held captive in the basement. The room where he met Jacob D'Angelo was on the east side of the house down a back hallway that did not go to the front of the house where the entertainment was. With virtually no sound being made in the back of the house Blake snuck down to the boss's room.

He still remembered the large roll top desk sitting against the wall that Jacob was sitting at when he entered. Before Jacob had closed the top on the desk Blake committed to memory the numerous papers and a couple of ledger's sitting inside on a shelf. The ledgers, he thought, would be good to have just in case. There was also one of those Farside calendars sitting on the desk which would give him the date if Mister D'Angelo pulled the pages off each day on a regular basis. As he opened the desk Blake could hear outside the approach of a vehicle. Working quickly he looked at the date October 10th approximately six weeks after they had kidnapped him. So they were feeding me every thirty six hours, he thought, to confuse and disorient him. Grabbing the ledgers he shut the top and made a quick exit back to the other side of the house. When he passed the kitchen Blake quickly went through the drawers to find some knives and a case of bottled water and then quickly exited the ranch house heading west to the place in the mountains he held up some eight weeks ago. Blake's plan was to hold up there and in about a week and then head back to Arkansas by the train.

Luck was on Blake's side since they neither noticed he or the ledgers were gone until twenty nine hours after he left. By that time Blake had arrived at his spot in the hills to the west of the ranch house about ten miles.

Tony was the one who regularly fed the prisoner and he was the

one who found Blake gone. He did not want the wrath of his father so he was not going to tell him until Jacob came back from his business trip. Summoning Fredo Demarco to the office Tony instructed him to find Blake and kill him because it did not appear he was going to be useful in luring his grandsons back to the ranch.

Fredo Demarco's background in sniping was Vietnam. Having been in country from the beginning he pulled four tours of duty; more than any other sniper except one. While he was in Nam, the North Vietnamese posted a forty-thousand dollar bounty on his head which resulted in many freelance operators taking up the hunt for him including a couple of US citizens who were not successful. Having achieved seventy two confirmed kills he was one of the more prolific shooters Marine Recon put out only being second to a man named Nolan Jones from Ogden Utah with eighty seven confirmed kills.

In Vietnam Fredo's weapon of choice was a pre-1964 Winchester Model 70 3.08; the prelude to the M-4. He was also familiar with Blake Elliott since he was one of the first snipers used by the US military. After retiring from the Marine Corp in 1980 he was selling his services to the highest bidder and most frequently the D'Angelo family. This was due to him meeting Tony at the rifle range over on North Island in San Diego.

First Fredo conducted an inventory of what seemed to be missing in the house. The first thing Tony noticed was the missing ledgers; Tony is not going to be happy about this thought Fredo. In the kitchen they discovered a missing case of bottled water and a couple of kitchen knives. Fredo knew then his prey was not dehydrated, like he was supposed to be, and possessed weapons for defense. At first, following Blake's trail was simple but after about four hundred yards into the scrub brush instantly his trail went cold.

From the point where the trail disappeared, Fredo moved outward in a spiral manner at a distance increasing by three feet each time until the trail was reacquired. This was a common tactic used by trackers. The trail reappeared at a spot north northeast at about ninety feet from the point Fredo lost the trail. Blake's trail continued out for a quarter of a mile, in the same direction, and then disappeared also.

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Following the same sequence as before but this time the trail was not reacquired even after Fredo had moved out a half mile. Being frustrated, after wasting three hours, he then went back to the point where he reacquired the trail and continued his spirals out looking for another trail; thinking Blake left a false trail to discourage and confuse him. After spiraling out another quarter mile and in a northwest direction he reacquired the trail once again but heading north northwest and again it died after he followed for about a half mile. After searching for Blake's trail for approximately eight hours Fredo radioed Tony.

"Tony, this guy really knows his business because he has me running down false trails, and my estimation is if he does not want to be followed he will not be followed by anybody. These tracks I have found are not his trail but rather a ploy to waste our time by leaving numerous false trails. I am coming back to look at some maps in my truck," reported Fredo. Damn, thought Tony as he contemplated how he was going to explain this to Jacob. Fredo knew by following Blake by his trail was probably giving him a good laugh since, in his professional opinion, Blake Elliot knew his bacon when it comes to covering your trail. Since it was easier to put down false trails than to find and follow them Fredo was going to find a better way. Fortunately for Fredo he purchased a topographical map of the state of Nevada so they would sit down and figure out how the old guy got there and left without being detected last time.

Topographical maps show the changes in elevation the land has in a given area by showing elevation lines. Some also reveal roads and other modes of transportation; that was the type Fredo purchased as per his habits when in a new area. At his home he has a growing collection of these maps. His map revealed the little valley the Mustang Ranch was situated in ran all the way to some hills to the west at about ten miles. To the south and across the interstate was a railroad's southern most east-to-west mainline and it appeared to have a side track, for the purpose of waiting out trains traveling in the opposite way, which required trains to stop; the perfect spot for someone to catch a ride.

Fredo then informed Tony as to what he knows. Since they had not found any vehicle back in Malvern he deduced the only way he could get out to Vegas was hopping a train. After showing Tony his reasoning they agreed to look for possible exit routes Blake would take. The mistake he made was not to immediately head for the railroad tracks about ten miles to the south. He more than likely went to the western end of their valley to hold up and then head south in about a week. Tomorrow Fredo would go up the valley to the west and survey the rocks for Blake Elliott from a distance; hopefully undetected. Just in case Tony positioned twelve of his men to the south and west, with night vision goggles, to block the escape.

“Coronado rifle range, Gunnery Sergeant Russell speaking.”

“Gunny, has the message I gave you been delivered?” said Tony.

“No, they have not come back. I thought I told you not to call me anymore. Have you had a visit from NCIS yet?” responded Sergeant Russell irritatingly.

“Thanks, gunny, and no they would not have the balls to visit me,” responded Tony as he hung the phone up.

“Let’s run back to the base and see if you have the same note in your mailbox,” said Kyle.

“Okay but during the drive let’s bring Mira up to speed on our situation since she is Mossad and might have some good suggestions,” responded Blake. Informing her of the whole story from Grandpa Blake Elliott and summers spent with him, to Dad killing their mom and then the circumstances at the Mustang Ranch outside of Las Vegas during the drive back to Coronado, made it seem just like seconds. She was amazed at their family dynamics and agreed the killing of Dad was justified however now with the owners pursuing them and even knowing Blake and Kyle’s names really complicated matters. Either the men at the ranch needs to be eliminated or convinced it is not in their best interest to continue the course they are on. Thinking to herself this adds much light to her analysis of the two brothers.

When they entered the building the team is housed in at Coronado everyone was happy to see Blake and wanted to know about Billy.

Kyle informed them Billy's condition and his room number and suggested to them to go and visit. After the usual formalities Blake went over to his mail box and found the same note Kyle had received. It was then time to visit the gunnery sergeant once again and find out about this man in Vegas.

"Gunny, we need a little bit more information about who gave you this message," said Blake as they entered into the empty rifle range office.

Speaking cautiously the sergeant asked, "Who is the woman?"

"Never mind her; she is ok and with me," retorted Blake.

"His name is Tony D'Angelo and he used to be a sniper with SEAL Team 4 two years ago. The last time I saw him shoot, at the rifle range, his abilities put his range at eight hundred yards tops. Plus his dad has a reputation of being a mob boss," answered the sergeant.

"Does not sound like too much a problem for us," answered Kyle confidently.

"He is not your problem but the person associated with him is. About two years ago, just after his discharge, Tony called me up with a problem and I referred him to an old friend of mine, Fredo Demarco," said the sergeant.

"That name sounds familiar," said Mira. Both brothers looked at her in a strange way. "At Mossad we know all the United States key personnel both past and present with the exception of you two," Mira said defensively. She continued, "Fredo Demarco was your number two sniper in Vietnam."

"Who was the best and why had the sergeant never taught them about these two guys?" asked Blake.

"His name is Nolan Jones," answered Mira.

"It sound like to me she has all the knowledge you need so if you do not mind I am finished with this situation," said the sergeant as he shuffled them out the door of the rifle range's office.

"He is right, I do know more about Fredo Demarco than anyone in your military with the exception of Nolan Jones, and that is only because he was the sniper that trained Demarco," answered Mira.

"Okay, we have until Monday to strategize our plan so let's check into a hotel for the weekend and work it out," said Blake.

“Great, I know a little place up the coast at Del Mar that would serve our purpose,” responded Mira.

Blake looked at Kyle very strangely as they both were learning new and disturbing things about Mira Mier. After leaving Coronado, Mira directed Kyle to drive up the coast on I-5 heading toward Del Mar. The hotel she was familiar with, having stayed there a few times, was called the Jack Rabbit Inn. It seems she used this place, on several occasions while visiting the area, since it is a flea infested dive with rooms that can be rented by the hour and you sleep with the bed slid up against the door. Confidently Mira said in response to the scowls the brothers were giving her, “Nobody will look for or find you here since this place does not keep records and only accepts cash.”

“First let’s go down to Barnes and Noble and see if we can get a topographical map of the area,” suggested Kyle. The map would be essential in making a stealth approach. Both brothers wondered if their grandpa was still alive and if so what did the D’Angelo family want with them.

At first glance the map provided a glimpse of how their grandpa made his way to Las Vegas. Reflecting back they remembered how he instructed them on how to travel via the railroads. Located to the south, about ten miles, was an east west mainline, with a side track, about a half mile past Interstate Highway 15. This is why he never purchased a car since Grandpa was quite the expert in hopping trains and getting anywhere in the United States quickly and undetected.

Under further analysis the map also revealed the valley in which the house set in ran to the west and terminated at some hills that rose about fifteen hundred feet above it. If Grandpa made an escape from the ranch he would most likely head for the hills since it would provide a good vantage point to observe any movement for as far as his vision would allow. Even at his age Grandpa still possessed exceptional vision.

“Before we leave on Monday let’s call them and give them some disinformation,” said Mira. She continued, “I can route the call to this D’Angelo character through my office in Jerusalem. By staying

on the phone long enough to allow them a trace you will tell them your return back to the states will occur in ten days the earliest. Plus you will require them to put your grandpa on the phone to verify he is still alive. Then we will leave here for Vegas just after Blake gets his leave thereby giving us the opportunity for surprise.”

“Mira, have you told us everything you know about Fredo Demarco and Nolan Jones?” asked Blake.

“No, and I do not know how much more I can tell you but Mossad has used Fredo in the past, but not Nolan since he is affiliated with another agency,” answered Mira. She continued, “I have a suggestion.”

“Let’s hear it.”

Mira then illustrated her plan. “More than likely the D’Angelos has Fredo there to protect them against you two. If this is the case you can draw him away from the house to the west. Blake can hold up in those hills, pointing on the map, and wait. The advantage is Fredo knows nothing about either of you and the abilities you possess. Kyle, you can lead Fredo past Blake at a distance of eighteen hundred yards. He will feel safe at that distance since he knows of only one person with the ability to make a shot at that distance and that is Nolan Jones. During that time I will sneak into the ranch and convince Jacob D’Angelo the necessity of leaving you and your family alone.”

Blake instantly perked up and thought to himself wondering how she knew this Jacob character since the only name they had was Tony D’Angelo.

“What makes you think this Jacob D’Angelo will listen to you?” asked Kyle.

“I can be very persuasive,” Mira responded. She continued, “We have one problem though, how are we going to acquire some weapons?”

“That is no problem, we have several rifles and handguns in the truck,” answered Kyle.

“Where?” asked Mira.

“The pistols are in the doors and two rifles are hidden in the sidewalls in the bed,” answered Kyle.

After returning to Balboa Hospital on Monday to pick up Blake's leave orders Mira used a pay phone in the hospital's lobby to call her headquarters in Jerusalem on what appeared to be an 800 number. She requested they route the call to the number given to Blake and Kyle by Sergeant Russell and then handed the phone to Blake.

"Mustang Ranch, how can I help you?" came over the phone.

"This is Blake Walker calling for Tony D'Angelo please," responded Blake.

"Hold please and I will get him."

"Mr. D'Angelo, you have a call from a Blake Walker on line five," said the receptionist over the intercom.

Finally, thought Tony and he proceeded to attach an electronic device to the telephone. After waiting about thirty seconds Tony picked up the phone. "Hello, Mr. Walker, this is Tony, what can I do for you?"

"You left me a note concerning a family matter," answered Blake.

"Oh, yes I did, your grandfather has been a guest of us for the last six weeks and he needs to be picked up from our establishment," responded Tony.

"I cannot pick him up until I get back in the United States and the earliest that will be is in ten days, but that can also change if I get extended," answered Blake.

"That is unacceptable," said Tony.

"Let me speak to him since you are the first one I called after receiving your message," responded Blake.

"He is currently busy," answered Tony.

"Okay, I will call back in twelve hours to talk with him and by then I might be able to determine if I can get back earlier but I doubt it," responded Blake as he hung up the phone.

"If he has the right equipment he should have been able to trace the call to Jerusalem," Mira said.

Great, thought Tony, wondering how he was going to explain this to his dad when he gets back that night.

"Fredo, you need to find the gumba today before Pops gets back tonight," Tony ordered over the radio.

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“You might as well start working up your explanation because it is going to take at least a week to track the gumba down,” answered Fredo over the radio.

“You must be back here by 4 p.m. so I do not have to make the explanation alone,” ordered Tony. Great, Tony thought, as his phone tracer displayed the phone number with a country code of “011.” Damn, that means he is out of the country.

After their conversation concluded the three departed for Las Vegas after retrieving their camping gear and a few other items from the base at 4 p.m. Since they pretty much knew the terrain already, surrounding the ranch house, the plan was to cross country to the hills west of the ranch house that night and get Blake set up for the trap that was to be set. When Kyle leads Fredo away from the house tomorrow then later that evening Mira would invade the house and make the offer or eliminate the D’Angelo family. This time they would approach the house just off Interstate Highway 15 from the south giving them about a ten mile hike to the mountains.

Tony spent the rest of the day trying to figure out the explanation. Fortunately for him there was a blood tie there. Jacob D’Angelos plane arrived thirty minutes after Fredo arrive back at the house; at 5 p.m.

“Pops, I have good news and bad news. The Walkers will be back in the US soon since they called earlier today. I traced the phone call to Jerusalem so they are definitely out of the country. The other news is the gumba escaped two days ago,” Tony said with the bad news part being said quite rapidly. Tony knew his father was extremely hot when he said nothing and his jaws were clenched so hard he could have cut a railroad spike in half.

After gathering his composure Jacob said, “Fredo, find the gumba and kill him,” as he climbed into the Lincoln Town Car and headed to the house.

“Did he take anything with him?” asked Jacob.

“Yes, he took a case of water and two kitchen knives,” answered Fredo.

“Did you bother to check my desk and see if anything was missing

from there?" asked Jacob with an irritated voice. Neither of the men responded because that was the first thing they checked but did not want the wrath of Jacob.

After arriving at the house Jacob went immediately to his desk and opened it revealing an open space where the ledgers once were. Slamming the roll top back down on the desk he hollered at Tony and Fredo, "I do not want to see either of your faces until you have his body and my ledgers, do you understand?" Immediately Tony and Fredo left the room.

Twelve hours after the first phone call to the ranch, Blake placed another call to the ranch routed through Mira's office.

"Hello, Mustang Ranch, how may I direct your call?" asked the receptionist.

"Blake Walker calling for Tony D'Angelo," responded Blake.

"Please hold as I find him for you," came back over the phone.

Tony went into his father's room and said, "He is back on the phone, Pops." Tony quickly hooked up the tracing apparatus and then put the phone on speaker.

"This is Tony, it is good to hear from you again, Blake."

"Let me speak to Grandpa please so I can confirm you have him," came over the speaker phone.

"You are not going to speak to him until you arrive here," said Jacob.

"Who am I speaking with now since I know Tony's voice?" answered Blake.

"I am Tony's father and the one you must deal with. When can you come and get your grandfather?" answered Jacob irritatingly.

"Like I told Tony I will not come and get him until I get back in the country and also talk with him. You have forty-eight hours to produce him or that will be the last time we talk," Blake said as he hung up the phone.

"It has the same country code as before so he is calling from Israel, Pops," said Tony.

"Fredo, you get out there and bring the gumba back alive, and the ledgers, and you have forty-eight hours to do it so I suggest you leave first thing in the morning," said the angry Jacob D'Angelo.

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With forty-eight hours until they needed to call again they left Las Vegas up Interstate Highway 15 toward Utah till they reached their demarcation point. After hiding the truck, once again with sagebrush, off the dirt road that was heading in the direction of the hills west of the Mustang Ranch House they retrieved the weapons hidden in the truck and revealed the night vision goggles and radios they had borrowed from the base donned them and headed north. Instead of being in the point position, as she was in Beirut, Mira yielded to their superior expertise in the open and followed closely behind the brothers. They moved quickly for the first mile until Blake spotted several men spread out in front of them in a picket line about four hundred yards apart. This event caused them to wonder so they held up for an hour discussing the problem and also to give Blake's leg a rest.

Were these men part of the D'Angelo family? If they were, why were they out there; could their plan to make them think they were still out of the country have failed or the alternative it had worked but Grandpa had escaped and they were there to block his exit. Then Mira noticed they were not looking in their direction but actually watching to the north toward the hills. It was then they realized their grandpa had escaped and was holding up in the hills. That knowledge lifted their spirits considerably and now Mira might not have to go into the ranch after all.

The closer they got to the men they realized, with the night vision goggles, sneaking stealth fully by them would be easy since there was four hundred yards apart and the moon and stars were hidden by sporadic cloud cover. Once they were past them they picked up the pace making the last nine miles by four o'clock in the morning eventually holding up at a distance of a half mile from the base of the hills. Hopefully, when the sun comes up, they will be able to locate their grandfather or him locate them as they made the approach.

"Blake, you see that rock ledge at three four five degrees true and up about one hundred feet from the base?" said Kyle.

"Yep," said Blake.

"It looks like a good position from which you can observe the valley below very well. Set up there and wait until I bring Fredo

across in front of you. I will make it look like I do not know he is following me and try to bring him straight at you. Hopefully it will work but if it does not do not hesitate to use the radio," instructed Kyle.

"I think I should still go into the ranch and have a heart to heart talk with Jacob D'Angelo," Mira said confidently.

"Oh by the way, how do you know his name was Jacob when the only name mentioned was Tony?" asked Blake curiously.

Hesitantly she said, "Mossad has used both Tony and Jacob D'Angelo on occasions and yes I know them personally." She continued, "So I will have a very good chance of success with them and avert the need to eliminate them." Just before sun up Mira and Kyle left Blake to find Grandpa and get in position for the trap.

Mira first headed north and then due east following the top of the mound on the north side of the valley. Kyle went due east and eventually worked his way to toward their hide the used when their dad was shot. Little did he know this was the same path Fredo was taking except in the opposite direction.

In an attempt to get Grandpa to locate him Blake made his way to the hills pretty much standing up and making all kinds of noise. The night before with their goggles on all three scanned the area for any hostiles and discovering none. They were fairly confident Grandpa would be pretty close to where the valley terminated at the hills. Having seen him about nine weeks ago Blake knew his eye sight was still pretty good and should be able to recognize him up to a mile in distance. Blake had also brought some cologne with him, not to wear, to use as a distraction just in case someone was tracking him. He then pulled it out of the zip lock baggy and sprayed some in the air and letting the wind carry it to the hills where he believed Grandpa was. The wind usually comes out of the west, in the desert, but early mornings produces a slight breeze to the west until the sun passes about forty degrees of its arc; this is cause by thermal reactions as the surface of the earth warms up.

Blake's first pass took him about three quarters of a mile east of the hills and some mile and a half in distance traversed resulting in no

sign of Grandpa. He then came back south at a distance, from the hills, of half mile and spraying the cologne every one hundred yards and still no sign of Grandpa. After repeating the process and spending about four hours he arrived at the base of the hills and still no Grandpa. Blake had been working through the pain but his leg had finally given out and so he sat down to rest.

“I thought you would never get here,” came from behind a large sagebrush plant thirty yards away and causing Blake to almost leap out of his pants.

“How long have you been watching me?” stammered Blake angrily.

“Ever since you three split up this morning; oh by the way, who was the young lady?” asked Blake Elliott.

“She is someone I met in Beirut, and why did you see the need for me to walk eight miles spraying the cologne to get your attention,” asked Blake, sitting back down and rubbing his right leg?

“What is wrong with your leg, you have been limping on it for the last two hours,” asked Grandpa.

“A piece of wood went through my leg in an explosion eleven days ago in Beirut,” answered Blake.

“I am sorry then for making you walk all that distance. How did you know I was here anyway?” asked Grandpa.

Blake went on to tell him the whole story. Concluding he said, “After we spotted some men out in the desert to the south last night in what looked like a picket line, we knew you had escaped since they would not allow me speak to you when I called back last night,” answered Blake.

“Son, we need to get up the hill a little bit since the guy that has been looking for me will be back soon,” said Grandpa.

“I can do you better than that. Kyle will be leading him to within eighteen hundred yards of a rocky cliff to the south about a half mile,” said Blake.

“So that is your plan. Well it is not going to work because I have observed him on several occasions and he knows his business,” answered Grandpa.

“His name is Fredo Demarco and he is an old forced recon marine from Vietnam,” responded Blake.

“I have heard that name before, he is a real piece of work,” Grandpa said as he sighed.

“No way is he going to fall for the trap you are setting. We are going to have to adjust the plan. How soon do you expect Kyle to be coming back?” he continued.

“He should have arrived at a half mile west of the ranch house at day break and then he would start heading back, leaving a difficult but not impossible trail to follow, all the while not letting Mister Demarco get a shot at him. That should put him back here in about another hour,” answered Blake.

“We need to hurry so let’s get up to that ledge and set up a dummy,” spoke Grandpa as he took off in a trot to the ledge.

When they arrived at the rock ledge Grandpa gathered up sagebrush limbs and debris, making a pile on the ledge. Then he went and found a rock shaped like a head and set it on the ledge facing east. Then he placed the sagebrush in such a way that made a low profile view of what looked a body laying there. After he was satisfied he then took a piece of pipe he found and put it in such a way to imitate a rifle barrel. This is when he informed Blake of the alternative plan.

“I will sit back here in the rocks barely visible to lure him in. Fredo will think you are laid out in a shooting position so he will make an attempt shot at you but will only hit the rock. You are going to move back north a quarter of a mile and wait there until he takes his shot, thereby revealing his position, and then you will take him out. That should give you an ample view and an unhurried shot,” said Grandpa.

“It sounds good but what about Kyle?” asked Blake.

“All he has to do is still follow the plan that you came up with,” answered Grandpa. At that Blake moved to the north about four hundred yards and tucked in behind a large sagebrush tree that he added more limbs to while he waited.

“Fredo, there is something about nine hundred yards up the valley on the south side and it appears to be human,” said Tony.

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“Tony, why don’t you take three of your boys and head toward the hills on the north side of the valley. I will go up the south side and follow this gumba if he leaves,” answered Fredo. He continued, “When you get within a mile of the hills start watching for Mister Elliott, and once he is found try to flush him to the south.” At that Tony took three men and started up the valley on the north side just over the ridge.

Mira was within two miles of the house when she started hearing something coming her way and they were not trying to hide their presence. From the noise she could deduce three maybe four humans, since no animal would make that much noise, and they were coming directly at her. Tucking up under and behind a large barrel cactus she became completely hidden from their view. Oddly enough she had picked up, earlier that day, what looked like an axe handle she found during her trek there; a perfect noiseless weapon for close in combat.

As they came closer she could see Tony D’Angelo was in the lead followed by three of his apes. They apparently thought no one was watching since their posture indicated complacency as they strolled in a westerly direction along the top of the hill. She could only deduce they possessed a firm idea as to the location of Blake Elliott and was fixated on getting there quickly. When it came apparent, to Mira, they were going to pass right by her she knew a proactive approach would be appropriate since her discovery was inevitable. Taking the axe handle in one hand and the Glock 9mm, provided by the Walkers, in her left she prepared to cripple Tony and disarm the other three.

Tony passed the cactus on her right side; perfect for wrapping the axe handle across his knees. Just at the right moment and from a crouching position she place the axe handle on both legs just below the knees equally with all her strength. Since he was in mid stride the blow brought him to his knees. The handle made a crack sound as if a board had been snapped in half. Not realizing what just happened but experiencing intensive pain Tony went down to his knees and then rolled forward, screaming as he did, clutching his legs just below his knee caps. The other three were in complete disarray as

Mira stood up with a broken axe handle in her right hand and the Glock in her left, saying, “Boys, I want you to pull out your pistols slowly and then drop them to the ground in front of you. Also, if you make any threatening move I will kill you first and then both your buddies, so if one dies you all die,” commanded Mira. Yelling at Tony she said, “Shut up, you were always a whiner. For a person that was a SEAL once you are pretty stupid. I wonder if you can be defrocked from being an ex-SEAL.”

“I think you broke my legs,” Tony said, still wincing from the pain. He continued, “I need a doctor, I heard my legs break.”

“Tony, stop your whining, all you heard was my handle break and not your legs. Who in their right mind put you in charge, you are only good for grunt work,” retorted Mira. Up until that point Tony’s eyes had been full of tears and unable to see his assailant but now he recognized the voice as being Mira Mier.

“My dad is going to make you pay for this; there is no place you can run where he will not be able to find you,” Tony retorted angrily.

“I tell you what, Tony, we are going to have a conversation with your father but not for a little while yet. All right, you apes, move over here by your boss and sit down,” ordered Mira.

Moving around, at a safe distance from the apes, to where the guns lay she proceeded to pick them up emptied the bullets on the ground and then tossed them as far as she could much to the complaint of the three apes.

“That gun cost me four hundred and forty dollars, you had better hope it has not been damaged,” said one of the men.

“Oh you can kiss that gun goodbye, but if you still have complaints I can make sure you are with it for all eternity,” Mira said laughingly. “Just get comfortable, we have a few hours until we head to the ranch house.”

Kyle was purposely putting himself out there to be seen when he noticed the two men standing about nine hundred yards away having a conversation. Kyle was thinking to himself these guys would be idiots if they had not spotted me by now. After about five minutes one guy headed to the north side of the valley followed by three men from

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the house. The other man, appeared to have a rifle, looked like he was coming, in a round about way, toward his position. On further examination Kyle observed the rifle he carried appeared to be an M-4 and the man must be Fredo Demarco since he appeared to be in his mid to late 40's and his movements indicated a man of high confidence in his abilities. It was then Kyle put the man in tow by leaving a trail, a difficult one by snipers standards, to lead the sniper in the direction of Blake.

At first Kyle left a marginal trail then no trail at all and then resuming the marginal trail once again some two hundred yards down range. Since the trail was difficult to follow he would stop from time to time to let Fredo catch up.

At first Fredo Demarco assumed the man spotted watching them was Blake Elliott. However as he trailed him something started to give him an uneasy feeling. He asked himself why he is making it easier for me to follow this time. That was completely out of character. He then called on his radio for the twelve men to south blocking the exit to meet up with him in two hours and some two miles from the hills. Instinct had told him a trap was waiting for him at the hills and that meant the Walker brothers were out there and this gumba he was chasing was probably one of them. This concerned him since there was no reliable information on them other than Gunnery Sergeant Russell at Coronado knew them meaning snipers.

For the first mile and a half Kyle could sense his pursuer was working hard at following him but now for the last three miles it seemed almost casual. Something was going wrong and he needs to warn Blake and Mira. The radios they were using were an open band with no encryption so anybody could be listening if they were tuned to the same frequency. Hopefully Blake has found Grandpa and apprised him of the plan. Then he remembered the click signal and he gave four short clicks by keying his radio; Mira would not understand it but Blake would.

Sitting there was getting quite boring when his radio startled him. Kyle had just given the something is wrong signal across the radio. Acting quickly Blake moved back up to Grandpa to discuss the

situation with him. Arriving there in less than five minutes Blake said, "Kyle just gave a warning signal across the radio. Something has changed and we need to figure it out."

"Could this Fredo guy have called in support?" asked Grandpa.

"He usually works alone but maybe he thinks it is a trap and has called in support," responded Blake. Blake then got a puzzled expression on his face as he pulled his binoculars up to scan the horizon.

From their vantage point, with binoculars, one could see at least five miles in each direction. First he turned his gaze to the south and sure enough there were men heading toward the hills and it looked like the men they snuck through last night. After telling Grandpa he then turned east and spotted Kyle easily, about two and a half miles away, and then concentrated on finding his pursuer. Following at a distance of about a mile, maybe a little less, was a man. As he was telling this to his grandpa he noticed the man discontinued following Kyle and started heading in a direction of the men from the south. Fredo Demarco had somehow figured out he was being led into a trap and has called for backup.

As Blake was finishing off the report to Grandpa, Blake Elliott said, "I will be back shortly," and he moved off rapidly toward the twelve men approaching from the south. To help his grandsons he first needed a weapon and the closest and easiest one was to the south. All he needed to do was to get to them before Fredo Demarco joined up with them. As Blake watched him leave he was amazed at how nimble and quick their grandpa still was at his age.

Blake was real busy now as he watched his grandpa closing the distance between him and the other men and Kyle heading in his direction. He then realized this trap was out and other plans needed to be formed so he quickly went down the hill in the direction of his brother so they could join forces. Since he observed Fredo vectoring south toward the approaching men he was not too concerned about being quiet. It only took fifteen minutes to close the two mile gap with Kyle.

"There are men heading in our direction from the south and Fredo

stopped following you about an hour ago and headed on a collision course with those men,” said Blake. He continued, “On top of that Grandpa took off about forty minutes ago heading for the men from the south armed only with a knife.”

“Let’s get to the high ground quickly,” responded Kyle and they covered the distance back to the ledge in less than ten minutes.

“My leg is not going to allow me any movement for a little bit,” said Blake as he sat down in the bushes in back of the rock ledge. Both men pulled out their binoculars and concentrated their attention to the south, trying to spot the men and Grandpa. Fredo Demarco was still about a mile away from the twelve men but there was no sign of Grandpa.

Blake Elliott had closed the distance between him and the men rather quickly, ultimately setting up to assault them as they passed by. Only one man would be needed to acquire a weapon. Using the ground formations as an advantage he came across a wash, created by rapid rain runoff, which was four feet deep and with shear sides. As he moved along it to the east he came across an animal trail, most likely made by deer, crossing over and providing an easier way to cross it than the alternative. The trail was just after a bend in its direction thus providing a blind for someone to lay in wait. The men should come across here since the other option would be extremely difficult and dirty.

Fifteen minutes later, after Blake Elliott had found the cross over, the twelve men walked along the edge of the wash on the south side until they arrived at the game trail. Grandpa tucked up against the side, hiding his presence from their view. Then one by one they crossed the wash. Blake kept hoping the last one would have a rifle but if he did not he was still taking his weapon. Finally the last one proceeded to cross the wash as his comrades continued on their trek, on the other side, toward Fredo. Sure enough, thought Blake, the last one does have a rifle and moving swiftly and quietly as a leopard he came up behind the man, as he was climbing up the bank, and opened his throat just above the rib cage with the kitchen knife. The only response the man could give was a gurgling sound like water washing gently over stones.

Both Kyle and Blake were watching intently as the twelve men disappeared one by one and then reappeared about thirty seconds later, with the exception of the last one which was three minutes after the eleventh. That was strange, thought the brothers. Then it was even stranger since he did not hurry to catch up with the group but continued to lag behind by about one hundred feet all the way to them meeting up with Fredo Demarco still some two miles from Kyle and Blake's location.

"Here is what we got. Three snipers are out there most likely holding up in the hills to the north about two miles. We are going to spread out and move very quietly until we get within a mile of them," said Fredo. Then he suddenly scanned the men in front of him and asked, "Where is Tommy?"

"He is right there," the men said, looking all around but not finding him.

"He was with us, boss," said one of the men.

"When was the last time you saw him?" demanded Fredo.

"About two miles ago when we crossed a little wash."

"Now we are down one rifle. That is just great. Okay, Burt, let's change clothes," said Fredo to the puzzled man.

After the clothes were exchanged and put on Fredo outlined his plan for them; the men were to spread out with forty yards between each one. They would sneak toward the hills, giving brief times of exposure for the Walkers to see. More than likely the Walkers were spread out and so they would need to locate each one. "When we get inside of a mile I am going to disappear from their view and move to the east about four hundred yards, but you will continue in the original direction. The object is to get them to start taking shots and thus revealing their position, and that is when I will get the first one." He also told them the Walkers' range could not be more than twelve hundred yards so outside of that they should be pretty safe.

Blake Elliott was sitting there and giggling on the inside, having heard all the instructions Fredo had given his men. He would definitely eliminate a few men as they closed the distance to his grandsons since they were going to be separated by forty yards. In this terrain after ten yards they could not see or hear each other.

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Blake and Kyle watched Fredo join up with the men from the south. Interestingly enough the one following did not join the group at the merge. Each brother deduced that Grandpa was the man and had somehow eliminated one of the group. From their vantage point they could deduce there were two snipers in the group; one was Fredo and the other was someone they had no information on.

After what looked like a battle plan meeting, they spread out in a picket line about forty yards, separating the twelve men with Fredo on the east end and the other sniper on the west end, and started approaching their position. The brothers' plan was when Fredo was at two thousand yards Blake would take him out. The shot would be a difficult one since the wind was now out of the west and gusting between eight and ten miles an hour across the projectile's flight path. Fortunately there were no rock formations in the path where heat would be rising up causing thermal currents, and the humidity was very low, making the bullets fly farther and flatter.

Slowly and methodically the men approached. When they were at a mile and a half they no longer could see the presence of their grandpa, meaning that he was about to do something. Hopefully, they thought, he would be trying to take care of Fredo. When they were at a distance of one and a quarter mile it appeared that one of them disappeared, and it was at this time Blake and Kyle moved apart by some two hundred yards, preparing for the inevitable.

Since Blake Elliott was trying to move into position to eventually eliminate Fredo, he moved gradually west, following whom he thought was Fredo. He knew sneaking up and trying to take Fredo with his knife would be virtually impossible, so he needed to take care of the men closest to Fredo. His first plan was to take out the man two men away from Fredo and assume his movements, in the picket line, toward his grandsons. Then he would take out the next one from the side and then wait to eliminate Fredo when he was preparing to take his shot.

Fredo had realized, when Tommy was gone, that someone was following them. As the men moved forward he gradually crept back behind his men about two hundred yards and then moved laterally to

the west to get in behind whoever was trailing. He finally got into position when the lead men were at a mile and a quarter away. He knew his M-4 would be useless in this situation, so strapping it over his shoulder he pulled his Walther PPK .380 from its holster, thinking to himself he was going to get great satisfaction out of taking out a sniper of high caliber and at such close range. He hoped it was the great Blake Elliott since that would be a nice addition to his resume.

Blake then realized his grandpa would be working in on Fredo since he was the greatest threat to the three of them. When the men got to the two thousand yard mark, Blake changed his plan to start taking out the others, thus distracting Fredo. Lining up on the eastern most man he went into his shooting sequence: slowing his heart rate, concentrating on his eyes to determine when the heart is between beats, and slowing his respirations. For Blake, the length of time between beats was approximately one and a quarter seconds, which was plenty of time to take a shot. When the shot arrived at its intended victim, followed by the rifle report two seconds later, the approaching group of men started showing signs of distress.

“Who got shot?” said one of the men.

“I thought he could not shoot out past twelve hundred yards. Fredo must be lying to us,” said another.

“He is using us for bait,” finally said another. Fredo could see and hear his men losing it and blaming him for it.

Blake Elliott used this opportunity to get what he thought was Fredo. Moving laterally to the west to take out Fredo, he prepared to take the return shot. Thinking the men would not suspect a person running from the incoming rounds, he ran toward Fredo, emerging eventually at a man that possessed a rifle but was crouching down scared out of his mind that he might be next. Blake eliminated the man anyway, but as he did a pistol went off to his left. It was then everything went into slow motion as blood flowed out of the wound he had just received in his left arm and continued on into his chest. Lying there on his side he managed to lift his head up just enough to see Fredo Demarco standing there pointing the pistol at his head, and then the lights went out.

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After Blake had taken his shot he rolled to his left into another position to focus his attention back on the other men. It was then he heard a shot followed by another shot two seconds later and then followed by another shot fifteen seconds after that. Looking through his scope Blake could see someone standing on the western most man's position. Immediately he took a snap shot at the man and rolled to his right, this time passing up his original shooting position.

Fredo realized when he felt the sting in his right arm that someone out there was actually a superior shot since the bullet had traveled some two thousand yards, and after hearing the rifle report about two seconds later after the bullet's arrival it was confirmed. It was not a mortal wound but now his shooting would be severely impaired, having a wound in his shooting arm. Ducking down he immediately pulled out a handkerchief and tied it around his upper arm in an attempt to stop the bleeding. With Blake Elliott lying there dead he crept along the ground under the sagebrush to the west approximately one hundred yards, and held up to see if the shooter was going to give him a look. If not the sun would be setting here in about an hour and a half; he would then head back to the ranch house having attained his objective, the killing of Blake Elliott. He realized that he still did not have the ledgers, but after dark he would go back and see if they were on the corpse some one hundred yards away.

Since Blake had snapped off a shot he was not able to verify the round and hit its target. The man was no longer there but he could have exited the area without being seen easily. It was then Blake saw the funniest thing: the rest of the men took off running, in a sprint, back to the east. He could not help but laugh at the sight, but he also realized if Fredo was still alive he would not be the one running. Deciding that the fight was over for that day, Blake waited for the sun to go down before doing anything further other than taking opportunity shots.

After the sun set Blake donned his night vision goggles and headed in the direction of Kyle. He was not worried if Fredo possessed similar equipment since the goggles were classified and not available to the public as yet. This would give him and Kyle a

huge advantage when tracking Fredo down at night. Once he and Kyle were back together they agreed it was time to go and find out who was no longer with them. Both of their guts told them Grandpa was dead at the hands of Fredo Demarco. He would certainly pay for this once they caught up with him.

Leaving the safety of the rocks they moved out in the direction of where Blake had taken the pop shot, since this was also the direction of the three pistol shots they heard earlier. Since it was dark and Fredo was probably out there, it took them two hours to traverse, quietly, the two thousand yards. Their arrival was disheartening for both because their grandfather lay there next to one of the men dead. Grandpa had one shot in his chest and the other in his forehead. For all intents and purposes it appeared he died quickly without suffering too much. They would have to come back and get him once this was all over. Now it was time for Fredo Demarco to pay.

Observing the foliage closely the two brothers could see someone had left there in a hurry and he was also bleeding. This was going to make tracking him easy. Both the blood and foliage trail went straight for the Mustang Ranch house, back down the valley about eleven miles.

Just after the sun set, Fredo moved quickly back to Blake Elliott to see if he had the ledgers with him. It was difficult to find them since it was a relatively dark night with the moon not rising for another four hours yet. It took him more than an hour to locate the body, and when he did noise from someone coming in his direction made Fredo quickly search Blake's body eventually locating the ledgers he was looking for. Moving quickly Fredo was determined not to slow down until he reached the ranch house.

"Okay, Tony, it is time for us to go and visit your father. First I want you to tie up your boys," tossing him a fifty foot nylon cord, "with their hands behind their backs and tightly to each other," ordered Mira.

"I need someone to help me to walk all the way back to the house. I still think my legs are broken," complained Tony.

“Shut up and tie them up before I kneecap you the Italian way so you will limp for the rest of your life, never being able to do more than a mediocre walk,” ordered Mira.

After inspecting the knots Tony had put on the cords used to tie the men up, she then ordered him to start walking toward the house. It was slow going since he was limping and did not have night vision goggles; she also did not get hers out and let Tony know she possessed a pair. In the desert at night many things come out to feed especially when the nights are warm. Mira made sure she followed Tony back about fifteen feet just in case they came across a rattlesnake lying in wait of prey. The longer he walked the better his legs felt, resulting in him stopping his incessant complaining.

“Mira, how did you come by being here? Are you working for the Walkers?” asked Tony.

“No, I do not work for the Walkers, but I do know who they are and by now I imagine your boy Fredo is dead,” answered Mira.

“You have to be kidding, no one can take down Fredo. That is why my pops trusts him more than anyone else including me,” said Tony.

“You heard those rifle shots about an hour before the sun went down; well think about it, did it sound like an M-4 or a Weatherby?” asked Mira. Tony had a cold shudder run through his body as he realized she was right. He had not thought of it that way.

“Tony, we are going to offer your father a deal he cannot refuse,” said Mira.

“Oh yeah, what is that?” asked Tony childishly.

“The deal is he leaves the Walkers alone, and you and he get to live. It is as simple as that,” responded Mira.

“You actually expect him to let them go?” asked Tony.

“Actually yes, you just remember I can get to you anywhere at anytime and so can my friends at Mossad. You and your father have been useful to Mossad but not that useful,” answered Mira.

“He has his reputation to maintain,” retorted Tony.

“Well it’s his reputation or yours and his life. There is one other thing you may want to consider, the Walkers’ skills are far better than

Fredo, and because they are in the Navy you will never know where they are at and which direction they will be coming from. Oh by the way, the hit was personal and not business,” responded Mira. She concluded, “Let’s get a move on. I want to talk to your pop before midnight.”

When they arrived at the ranch house Mira closed the distance that she was walking behind Tony.

“I do not want to shoot you out here so do not make any sudden movements. Also, if any of your men approach us you warn them to drop their weapons and head straight to the house. This will make sure that both of us stay alive; at least a little while,” said Mira. As they approached the house not a soul came out to greet them. It appeared, to her, that all the grunts were out chasing down Blake Elliott.

This was the first time she had been in a house of disrepute, thought Mira as they entered the back door where Blake had exited his prison by. She was happy they finally got there about 11 p.m. and Jacob would still be up.

“All right, Tony, you lead me to your father’s meeting room,” ordered Mira as she placed the butt of the pistol in the small of his back. Tony walked slowly down the hallway to what appeared to be the other side of the house, eventually stopping and knocking on a door.

“Pops, it is Tony, are you still awake?” asked Tony.

“I hope you have something to show me,” hollered the angry Jacob D’Angelo, and he continued, “Come on in.”

Tony went through the door quickly with Mira right behind him, pressing the Glock harder into the small of his back. She closed the door behind them and said, “Hello, old friend,” as she stuck her head around from behind Tony. Shoving him toward the other side of the room, she instructed Tony to move over beside his dad.

“Mira, you have a lot of nerve coming in here like this in my own house,” said the irritated Jacob. He continued, “What is this all about?”

“I have come on the behalf of my friends, the Walkers. I understand you have a problem with them and have sent Fredo after

them. My professional opinion is: Fredo is probably dead and if he is not he is probably on his way back here with my friends in close pursuit,” said Mira.

“I do not see how that is my problem if Fredo is dead because there is always someone else,” responded Tony.

“You fail to see the seriousness of what is going on. I am the only one standing between you and the Walkers. If you do not accept my deal then I have no way of stopping them from killing you and Tony,” answered Mira.

Jacob was taken aback by her statement and moved slowly to his left to sit down. It was at that point they heard a bunch of men running down the hallway to Jacob’s meeting room. Mira sprang to the other side of the room and behind the D’Angelos, just arriving at her destination when the door opened and several men came in panting heavily, trying to catch their breath. Since Mira was a small woman the men did not even see her when they entered the room. Panting, one man said, “Boss, we were ambushed.”

“What do you mean you were ambushed?” asked the irritated Jacob.

“We were following Fredo’s directions and all of a sudden they were shooting at us at over two thousand yards, killing several and possibly Fredo too before we could clear the area,” answered the men. It was at that point they noticed the woman standing behind their bosses.

“Now do you comprehend what I have been telling you, Mister D’Angelo?” said the emphatic Mira.

“Okay, Mira, I agree to the terms,” said Jacob, thinking to himself, at least for now.

Mira then ordered all the men to come into the room and she moved along the perimeter to her right with Jacob in front of her and the Glock in the small of his back.

“When we get out the door I want you to lock this door behind us,” Mira instructed Jacob. With the men locked in the room Mira moved Jacob down the hall to the other side of the house, stopping at the door when they heard the report of a rifle.

Following Fredo was extremely easy. He was moving fast and bleeding everywhere. As time went by he was slowing down from the loss of blood and physical exhaustion. His pace picked up when he arrived at the edge of the meadow where the ranch house was. With only twelve hundred yards to go Fredo thought he was safe and his confidence continued to grow the closer he was to his objective. When he was just one hundred and fifty yards from the house something reached up and stung him on the left side, just nicking his pelvis, tumbling him to the ground. One second later he heard the report from the rifle. It was not a mortal wound but it hurt like hell.

Gathering his strength Fredo got up once again and continued his run, as best he could with the wounds, toward the house with another bullet hitting him on the opposite side and through the pelvis bone again, sending him tumbling to the ground. Again it was not a mortal wound but now his pain was tripled.

“Hun, cease fire, the deal is struck,” came over the radio.

“This is personal and Grandpa is dead,” responded Kyle.

Fredo got up one more time and made a desperate attempt to make it to the house, resulting in the next shot going through his right knee. He dropped like a rock unable to run anymore. It was then the brothers took off into a trot heading for their victim, covering the distance in about five minutes. During that time Mira led Jacob D’Angelo to the same spot, hoping she could stop the killing of Fredo. Arriving there at the same time Mira said, “The deal is struck and they are not coming after you anymore.”

“He killed Grandpa,” they both responded together. Fredo could only lay there and moan, eventually passing out from the pain.

Moving around Jacob, Mira approached the man she loved with kind eyes, saying, “It is over, let it go.” The kind voice brought Blake’s mind back from the depths of hatred since it was he who shot the man lying before them to pieces, deliberately picking him apart.

“It better be or this will happen to you,” said Kyle, looking at Jacob D’Angelo.

“Yes, yes, most assuredly it is over,” responded Jacob. Both men turned their backs on him and began walking back to their truck some fourteen miles away.

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“You will take care of the bodies,” Mira ordered Jacob.

“Yes I will.”

“You will also compensate the Elliott family for their loss and figure out some way to cover up how he died,” ordered Mira again. Then departing Jacob D’Angelo, Mira followed the brothers at a distance for a short time, making sure no one was going to pursue them, eventually catching up at the top of the hill overlooking the valley below.

Nolan

They arrived at the truck just as the sun perked up over the horizon. After taking about thirty minutes putting all the guns back into their hiding places, they got in the truck and headed back to Vegas to find a hotel room to get some sleep. All three welcomed the sleep but it was far from restful. Both men dreamed about what they had just done to Fredo over and over again.

“Hun, why don’t we go and get married while we are here in Vegas,” Blake said softly into Mira’s ear. This shook Mira from the sleep she was having since it came completely out of the blue, and besides she thought she was dreaming.

“What did you say?” Mira asked.

“I said why don’t we go and get married; we are in Vegas,” asked Blake again.

“Are you sure about this, there are a lot of ramifications with this prospect,” asked Mira.

“Yes, I am as sure as anyone can be. If it disqualifies me from the team then so be it. I just can’t go on without you in my life,” responded Blake.

“Do you want to wake up your brother so he can be there?” asked Mira.

“No, no, I don’t think so. I have already told him I was going to marry you and he was not happy at the news. He is concerned about my place with the team,” answered Blake. At that they slipped quietly out of the hotel room and drove down to the edge of Las Vegas Strip and got married by Reverend Elvis.

“I watched him make a shot over two thousand yards. He also deliberately put bullets into Fredo Demarco at a thousand yards in a dead run, purposely nicking and crippling him,” reported Nolan over the phone.

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“That is impressive,” responded the man at the other end.

“One problem though. Blake and Mira just got married,” continued Nolan.

“That is a problem. I will see if it can be worked out and get back to you,” responded the man.

“Yes, sir, do you still want me to talk with him?” asked Nolan.

“Yes and get back to me at the end of the week,” ordered the man. He continued, “He still has twenty-eight days of leave so follow him and his brother to wherever they are going.”

Arriving back at the hotel room they found Kyle awake and watching the TV show *Get Smart*: the brothers’ favorite show to relax by.

“Where have you been?” asked Kyle.

“We actually went and got married by Reverend Elvis,” answered the elated Blake.

“I sure hope you thought this through since you know it will disqualify you from the team,” responded Kyle.

“Yes, my brother, I did. After Beirut I do not know if I want to do it anymore,” responded Blake solemnly.

“We still have twenty-eight days of leave so why don’t we go to Little Rock for a week to take care of Mom’s place and then go somewhere else for the remainder of the time,” Kyle said.

“I think I can swing some time off, but first I must check in,” said Mira.

“I am going to need some private time to call in. Why don’t you go to the restaurant out front and eat some brunch and I will join you in a few minutes,” said Mira. The brothers left and she called Mossad headquarters in Jerusalem.

“Hello, Jerusalem Hotel, can I help you?” came over the telephone.

“This is Mira, let me speak to my father,” ordered Mira.

“Hello, hotel magistrate Jacob Mier,” said Mira’s father.

“Good morning, oh I mean evening, Dad,” said Mira.

“I understand there are some events that have occurred in your life,” responded her father.

“How did you know so quickly?” asked Mira.

“I have eyes everywhere, my daughter,” answered Jacob. “I am only going to tell you this just once, because you are my daughter, your freelancing stops,” ordered the angry Jacob Mier.

“Yes, sir, I understand,” responded the sheepish Mira.

“Congratulations on your recent marriage, but you know, because of this, you cannot ever come back to Israel under the current government. You are now assigned to our office in San Diego, and if your husband is transferred you will be transferred also to the same place. Do not tell him you are still Mossad. I will be coming to the US in the near future so we can meet then,” ordered Jacob Mier.

“Yes, sir, I understand, and thanks, Papa.” Mira Walker concluded the conversation.

Arriving at the Denny’s out front of the hotel ten minutes after her husband and brother-in-law did, she proceeded to get some much need nourishment.

“My company has let me go so I do not need to return there,” said Mira as she sat down at the table with her husband. Blake thought that was great news but Kyle did not. Once they ate the needed nourishment they departed, heading for Arkansas in the Chevy truck. This time they were not in a hurry so they arrived at their mother’s trailer two and a half days later.

Promptly on arrival Kyle called their Aunt Nancy to let her know that he and Blake were back from the sudden deployment they had been sent on.

“We could not get a hold of you. The Navy would not tell us or contact you about anything. So I paid the telephone bills just in case you guys came back and needed it,” said Nancy. She then went on to inform them that Grandpa had departed suddenly just like they had and missed their mother’s funeral also. However, they now knew where Grandpa was. He apparently suffered a heart attack and died out in Las Vegas three days ago at a friend’s house. A Jacob D’Angelo was having the body shipped back here for a funeral in five days. There was an additional surprise, Grandpa had invested money in Jacob’s business ten years ago and since he was dead the money belongs to the family.

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“We will be here just a week to settle Mom’s estate and then be heading back to San Diego,” said Kyle. After hanging up the phone he related all that had occurred to Blake and Mira.

“You can stay here but Mira and I are going up to Roland to stay at Maumelle Bed and Breakfast during our stay here. I hope you do not mind,” said Blake.

“Oh no problem, I understand completely,” responded Kyle.

“I am going to call the Stedmans to see if Billy is here and if not when he is due to be home,” said Blake. After the call Blake told Kyle that Billy was coming home in four days and that he had been asking about them.

Friday came quickly to Kyle and the newlyweds. Billy was excited when he saw all three of them at the Little Rock Airport to greet him. Blake informed him about the sanitized version of the death of their grandpa. Billy had never met him but felt he knew him implicitly from the conversations the three had. Kyle invited him to the funeral that was to take place tomorrow in Malvern but Billy said he was not comfortable about going out. After some convincing he finally agreed and Kyle would come by in the morning to pick him up. While they were in the airport still all the televisions came across with a broadcast of breaking news. The Marine Corp Barracks in Beirut had been bombed and half the building had been destroyed. It was not yet known how many casualties there were but it contained almost a thousand marines and about twenty naval communication personnel. The two brothers then turned off their pagers since neither wanted Blake’s or Kyle’s leave to be disturbed.

The funeral for Grandpa was quiet with only a small group of family and friends. His friend from Vegas and his son was there but none of the three Walkers talked with Jacob and Tony D’Angelo. At the graveside service Mira noticed a short black man in his fifties walk up during the service. Whispering in Blake’s ear she said, “That is Nolan Jones,” slightly pointing in Nolan’s direction. Blake nodded and wondered how he had known his grandfather.

Nolan waited to approach the Walkers until after all the attendees had given their condolences to the family and left. Walking up to the

four Nolan said, "I am sure Mira has let you know who I am. I only need to talk to Blake and Mira," he continued and at that Kyle went and took Billy Stedman home.

"Come over here to my car so we can have a discussion," Nolan continued as he led them to a limousine that had not been there at the cemetery at the start of the graveside service.

Once they were inside the limo Nolan informed them he had observed everything that occurred out in Nevada. He was also in the area during the missions in Beirut and his superiors were quite impressed with Blake's skill and how well he and Mira had worked together. Blake should not be concerned about losing his position with the team and they would be working together on some special projects in the future. Finally he said, "Here is a credit card. Why don't you two go and have a great honeymoon on me."