

Dawn's Early Light

Don Candy

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ISBN: 978-0-9964409-2-9

DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT

This work is dedicated to the men and women of the United States Armed Services world wide and especially to our Special Forces, who work tirelessly to protect us and our freedom 24/7/52, most often without our knowledge of their heroic deeds. God Bless Them All!

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PROLOGUE

Three Hundred Miles Southwest of Taiwan

Tuesday, February 20, 1990 0720 hrs

Commander Ashleigh McKensie glanced at her mach meter after nosing her F/A-18 Hornet into a shallow dive with her burners lit. She was only 2400 feet above the water, not much room to dive, but she had to run that missile out of fuel before it got to her. Two point zero on the mach meter – zero point two mach faster than her F/A-18C Hornet should do in low level flight but still a little slower than the Soviet missile on her tail.

“Commander that missile is a hundred yards behind you and gaining slowly – your last flares ignited behind it!” yelled Gator Two, McKensie’s wingman. Her life had already begun flashing before her – there was nothing more she could do - other than eject and let that missile take her favorite Hornet into the deep blue. She heard Gator Two yell: “EJECT, EJECT, EJECT”. She yanked the throttles and the stick back in an effort to slow down enough to eject. This caused the missile to swing wide and then overcorrect She looked over her shoulder and saw the heat seeking missile re-converging on her vertical track and then the exhaust expired – the missile was out of fuel – but it was too late. It was too close. Before she could accelerate the missile flew into her starboard engine and exploded . . .

Three Hours Earlier

Night takeoff from an aircraft carrier has always been a hair-raising experience. On a Nimitz Class Carrier like the *USS Carl Vinson* in a fully loaded attack aircraft like the F/A-18C Hornet piloted tonight by Squadron Leader Ashleigh McKensie, the pucker factor, always present when operating from a carrier at night, was at least twice that of a normal training flight.

Commander McKensie was leading a flight of three Hornets on a face-off mission in response to the sinking of a Filipino fishing boat by a Chinese MiG-19 yesterday, fifteen miles off the coast of the Amphitrite Group of the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. Almost every country bordering the South China Sea had at one time or another laid claim to these islands but China currently occupied them and had also recently laid claim through the United Nations to pretty much the entire South China Sea. The United States, a friend to most of the local countries involved, defended the international maritime law limiting the sovereign authority of any country to twelve miles off its shore and countered, once again China's aggressive claims to international waters. Thus, this mission to remind China that there was no international legal precedent or mechanism for claiming ownership of international waters. This was the third mission of a similar nature executed by *Carl Vinson* Hornets in the last month – the second for Commander McKensie.

“They need to make these damned helmets lighter,” she thought to herself as her head was snapped backward when the catapult shuttle was released and then yanked forward again 5.5 seconds later when the shuttle released the aircraft so it was just getting airborne and doing a hundred sixty five knots. The flight formed up in a left echelon which they would hold loosely relying on exhaust light to maintain position until daybreak. They had launched four hundred miles northeast of their target and were cruising at two hundred twenty knots to preserve fuel while the *Carl Vinson* steamed toward them. The plan was to fly between two groups of tiny islands staying thirteen miles or more off shore. This would take them through a twenty eight mile wide channel between the Amphitrite Group and the Crescent Group of the

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Paracel Islands – something the Chinese didn't like very much. The crescent group lay to the southwest and the Amphitrite Group to the northeast. The entire Crescent Group and one Island in the Amphitrite Group were occupied by the Chinese but the Islands were claimed by four other South China Sea nations as well as China. In 1974 China tried to lay claim to (control of) the entire South China Sea – an action soundly rejected by members of the UN including those bordering that body of water.

The moon, just a sliver tonight, hung a little off kilter about forty degrees above the western horizon. The stars were brilliant at angels two zero – twenty thousand feet above the sea below.

They expected a visit by two or more MiG-19s from an Air Base on Hainan Dao Island north of the Paracels. So far these face-off missions had resulted in close-in passes where the pilots made faces at each other and the MiGs tried to force the Hornets inside the twelve mile limit. Things might be a little more difficult if the chinks were flying a real airplane – the MiG-19 was no match for the Hornet.

As first light spread over the glassy sea from the rear left, Commander McKensie pressed the mike button on her stick, “Gator Flight this is Gator One, follow me down to angels six and close up to attack formation. Watch your GPS track carefully and let me know if anything looks wrong. We don't want to start a war because of a malfunction. Acknowledge. One out.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

As the morning sunlight intensified behind them, the deep purple shadows gave way to dark red, orange and pale yellow striations in the stratus cloud layers to the west. Ashleigh couldn't avoid momentarily diverting her thoughts to the most beautiful sunrise she'd ever witnessed. “*Dawn's Early Light*,” she thought as she wondered if the sunrise that inspired Francis Scott Key to pen our National Anthem could have been nearly as spectacular as the one before her eyes at this very moment. “God made this beautiful planet among the billions of stars in the universe,” she thought, “and humankind is intently focused on fucking it up. Father,” she prayed, “let it last at least until I die, and, oh yeah -

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almost forgot, please let me die of old age with lots of grandchildren.”

While flying their route along the northern edge of the archipelago things seemed peaceful. Ordinarily the Chinese would have intercepted them on the north side. Maybe they weren't going to waste the fuel today. Nothing north on the radar, but they could be hugging the waves. Ashleigh began her wide turn south keeping the flight firmly glued to the pre-programmed GPS track. Still nothing. Then as she looked up from her HSD (Horizontal Situation Display) while rolling out onto a southeast course between the island groups she noticed what looked like a gunship about two thirds of the way down channel and a few miles off to the southwest, probably inside the Chinese claimed territorial waters.

“Gator Flight, this is One, let's keep our eyes peeled. I don't like that gunship lying in wait down channel. Look's like he's not in international waters – this could be an ambush. Look for others coming out low from one of the islands.” Then she saw them . . . “MiGs, two of 'em eleven o'clock low – on the deck. Arm your flares. Let's stay calm, we don't want to be party to an incident here. You guys watch the MiGs – they might separate. I'll watch the boat.”

“Flight, this is Three. The MiG to our port (left) is coming up, I'll take him”.

“Roger Three, this is Two, I've got the starboard MiG”.

“Flight, One. Arm your guns. Do NOT fire unless fired upon and target is clearly in international airspace. I'm going to move us to a parallel course two miles to the northeast.” McKensie was doing everything she could to avoid an incident.

The F/A-18 sported a six barrel 20 mm Gatling cannon. Today they were each carrying four AIM-120 AMRAAM, active radar guided, air-to-air missiles, two AIM-9 Sidewinder, infrared heat seeking, air-to-air missiles and two AGM-65D Maverick, air-to-ground (or tank, or ship) missiles, with imaging infrared seekers – an excellent choice of weapons for the threats they were now facing.

“OK guys they're still coming up to us – don't let them get

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behind you. This looks like a full blown ambush. I'm going to break off and make a run at the gunboat on the deck until I get to their airspace. We need to know what we're dealing with here. Sure glad we brought the Mavericks. Turn your cameras on."

Commander McKensie rolled over and headed straight for the water, rolled another one hundred eighty degrees on the way down and pulled out of the dive just a hundred feet above the surface headed straight for the gunboat. As she approached the twelve mile boundary, about two miles from the boat she realized that it had no guns - then she saw three figures standing on the bow, each holding a shoulder mounted weapon. One of the figures fired a missile at her!

"OH SHIT!" she yelled to the flight. "HSSMs (Heat Seeking Shoulder-mounted Missiles) - three of 'em. I'm gettin' the hell out of Dodge!"

She had three choices; she could launch a Maverick which she had armed on the way down and take out the boat which could cause an international incident because it was definitely inside the twelve mile limit. Or, she could execute an Immelmann (half vertical loop followed by a half roll to reverse direction), light her burners on the way up and run like hell. Or she could do both. She had to jettison her missiles if she was going to run. So she fired both her Mavericks at the gunboat, hauled her Hornet vertical and lit her burners as she jettisoned her sidewinders and AMRAAMs. The F/A-18 could reach mach 1.8 from sub-sonic flight in about four and a half seconds in low level flight. She was pretty sure she could outrun any shoulder fired missile the Chinese had but she was praying these guys didn't have the Soviet 9K38 ILGA missile. She recalled it could do mach two plus versus her maximum (unclassified) speed of mach 1.8.

It was, in fact, exactly that type of Soviet missile that they had fired at her. As she rolled out of the Immelmann, approaching mach 1.5, Gator Three called, "One, you've got a missile on your tail and it's gaining on you. We've been fired on - cuffs off?"

Ashleigh replied, "Yeah, take out the assholes in the MiGs - I got the boat already. We're not gonna leave even an oil slick out here. I'm gonna fire counter measures - call the hit quickly!."

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The problem she faced was the second and then the third missile. She was going to fire two thermite flares to fake out the first missile. These flares would fire upward, ignite and then spiral back toward the flight path of the F-18. Each would produce a tremendous heat signature. The missile processor would then have two converging primary heat signatures to choose from. To be sure the counter measures worked she would throttle her engines back out of after-burner briefly to reduce her heat signature. The missile shooters had to wait a second between launches to keep the missiles from shooting each other down. So when Gator Three called the explosion of the first missile in the flare it would be difficult to predict what the second missile would do. The slight loss of speed caused by retracting the throttles momentarily would put the second missile in fairly close proximity. She decided to fire two more flares immediately when Three called the first hit and then wait for the hit-call on the second one to fire a third set of flares.

Gator Three called, "First missile killed!"

She fired the flares.

A second later Gator Three called, "Second missile killed!"

She fired the third set of flares. Ashleigh couldn't believe it; the second missile went for the flares. Maybe the third. . . – but her elation didn't last long – just a split second. The third set of flares had ignited behind the missile, which now, having only one target, flew right into her starboard engine exhaust. Simultaneously she heard "EJECT, EJECT, EJECT" from Gator Two. The explosion of the engine was horrific and she immediately felt severe pain in her right thigh and buttock.

As McKensie floated toward the ocean after her chute opened she heard on her helmet VHF, "This is Two, splash one MiG."

"Two, this is Three - I'm gonna follow the commander down and check out the boat. Go get the other MiG, climb to angels ten and call for help."

"Roger Three, I've got an AMRAAM after him already, hold one. . . Splash that second MiG! I'm going up for help as soon as I send one of my Mavericks to the chink's boat."

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“Two, I’m also sending one now – that’ll leave us with one more each. We’ll go bingo in about twenty minutes (bingo meant just enough fuel to return to the carrier with minimum reserve). I’ll give you a sitrep on the Commander. Have ‘em send a couple of Hornets out here to guard her ‘til the chopper can get here.”

“Did you get everything on camera?” asked Gator Two.

“Roger that brother, got it all with GPS position and time tags. We’ll probably never hear from the Chinese about this little party.”

As Commander Ashleigh McKensie bobbed in the South China Sea under a beautiful crystal clear cloudless sky to the east, she realized she was bleeding badly from the eight inch gash in her right thigh. The shrapnel from her exploding engine had penetrated her ejection seat and she had been fortunate the ejection system had not malfunctioned. Now she had to find and disperse her shark repellent before her successful ejection became all for naught.

Chapter One

Forty Two Thousand Feet Above the Yellow Sea Sunday, May 6, 1990, 0015 Hrs, Local Time

“Okay Commander. We’re at Angels Four Two, ten minutes out, the ramp is yours,” barked the pilot of the CAPV-727.

Thank God for small favors - in this case a pretty large one. We were at Angels Four Two - 42,000 feet above sea level on a night as dark as they come. A new moon. My uncle Bo Jameson and I, now made brothers by the yet to be written Navy SEAL creed, and Master Chief Petty Officer Rob Curtis were ten minutes from our IP (Initial Position) on our most dangerous mission yet. We had a fifty two nautical mile traverse to our target, the last seven to ten miles of which would be through dense clouds. We were depending on a very complex *Airborne SEAL Delivery System* (ASDS); a computer/GPS controlled High Altitude High Opening (HAHO) parachute system that our SEAL team helped developed during the mid eighties. It allowed a team of six Special Operators to traverse up to sixty nautical miles from an aircraft at an altitude of up to forty five thousand feet to a specific target – each operator landing on a pre-programmed spot. It did this using a built in Automatic Landing System (ALS). In addition to the ALS and the hi-tech parachute, the system consisted of a pressure suit with oxygen, a chest-pack computer, battery belt, a helmet with integrated GPS receiver, classified infra-red (IR) night vision, a

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GPS driven visor display system that displayed the relative location of each member of the team, an intra-team secure communication system and a separate satellite communication system allowing secure communications to friendly forces anywhere in the world. Upon landing, the parachute and pressure suit could be discarded leaving the rest of the system completely operational with eighty hours of remaining battery life. If everything worked correctly we would arrive at our target a little less than two hours from now.

A new moon with thick cloud cover was important to this mission. The total darkness in the target area would greatly degrade any starlight night vision systems used by military, police and security organizations in countries other than the U.S. We, on the other hand, relied on our top secret infrared (IR) night vision technology with its own infrared illumination capability. It was a very powerful helmet integrated, wide angle un-cooled infrared camera projecting the user's visual IR image onto the helmet's visor. It also had a helmet integrated infrared light source and 3X optical zoom capability. So when we got to the target we could see anything clearly up to several thousand feet. Beyond that we could use the IR spotlight and 3x zoom, but no one could see us or our IR light source. We learned a while back that by staying ahead of our enemies in night vision technology we 'owned the night'. In any enemy engagement, we do not believe in a fair fight.

Bo, Master Chief Curtis, and I were already sealed up in our pressurized high altitude suits and communicating with the pilot through the ASDS team network. The pilot had just given us control of the ramp on the CAPV-727 (Covert Air Penetration Vehicle), a well equipped, highly modified Boeing 727 built for the CIA which was capable of passing for a commercial airline passenger or cargo plane in all phases of operation. It could land as a commercial flight at Los Angeles International, or even Beijing for that matter, and as long as the paperwork was done properly no one would be the wiser.

We were members of a SEAL team called DEVGRU, the Naval Special Warfare DEVELOPMENT GRoUp. From its inception in 1980 until 1987 this team was known as Seal Team Six. When formed there were only two other SEAL teams, one and two. Its

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founder, Richard Marcinko, wanted to keep the KGB guessing about SEAL Teams three, four and five, which, of course, didn't exist at that time.

We were the DEVGRU Black Angel Team (BAT), attached to the SEAL Black Assault Squadron. Our job was to introduce the latest technology into the development of Special Forces equipment, making it generations ahead of the current state-of-the-art. And then, to test those systems on combat missions before deployment to Special Ops units in all the services. So we were the development/test arm of DEVGRU located at El Centro NAF (Naval Air Facility, sort of like a junior Naval Air Station - NAS). The operational arm and headquarters were located at Dam Neck Virginia. We joked that our primary job was trying to spend all the gold in Fort Knox. Bo joined the group as a three tour veteran A6 Intruder pilot in Viet Nam with lots of post Viet Nam HAHO/HALO experience. Rob was the previous commander of SEAL Team Four. He and his team joined up with ours on several early missions using the new hi-tech equipment, after which he decided to move over to DEVGRU. I joined the team as a Lieutenant test pilot/engineer without the foggiest idea of what I was getting into. The BAT consisted of only twelve men, six SEAL operators and six very intelligent civilians.

Bo Jameson was about six two, lean and rugged with sandy hair and intense blue eyes – didn't smile much. He was an accomplished pilot with over twelve thousand hours most of which was as a Navy pilot. He also had more than twenty five hundred HALO/HALO jumps, possibly a record for all military forces. Bo owned an airport about thirty miles from downtown Manhattan, Kansas – *Jameson Flight Service*. (JFS). I actually owned ten percent of JFS. Oh yes, he's my uncle. More about that later.

Rob and I, each a little over six feet, could pass for brothers although he had nine years on me. We brought the humor and wise cracks to the team and we both kept short cropped brown hair and beards. Rob, A Master Chief Petty Officer with eighteen years experience in the Navy, eleven as a SEAL, came from a small farming community in central California. He had finished his degree in Language Arts at Cal State via Navy sponsored correspondence courses but decided he didn't want to do the

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officer thing. I bug him about that more often than I should. He's smarter and more capable than most Navy Lieutenants I know.

I'm Sam McKensie; engineer, test pilot, hornet driver, Navy SEAL and devoted husband to my wife Ashleigh, a former pursuit/instructor pilot flying disguised F-5Es and F/A-18 Hornets at the Navy's Fighter Weapons School known as 'Top Gun' at Miramar NAS, California.

Bo calmly asked, "ready?" over the ASDS network. Bo, Rob, Hal Nicholson and I were sealed in our pressure suits in the 'ready to pressurize' mode which the system automatically enters after passing all ready-to-fly self tests. After receiving a thumbs up from each of us he raised the safety shield and pressed the 'depressurize' button on the aircraft ramp control panel. As the ramp area of the aircraft depressurized our suits automatically pressurized keeping us at a comfortable ten thousand foot ambient pressure – no major ear popping. We were approaching a relatively small target on top of an eight story building so we timed our jumps at thirty second intervals to allow the person in front to clear the area before the next person arrived.

Rob was first to go so he took his place at the top of the ramp as it lowered waiting for the red blinking light on his right side to turn solid green. When it turned green, he jumped. My turn – my thirty second timer flashed on my visor screen and I jumped, then thirty seconds later Bo jumped.

Then Lt. Commander Hal Nicholson, also a DEVGRU SEAL sprang into action. He was suited up but not jumping. His job was to launch the nine hundred pound cargo pack, with all of our equipment in it, forty five seconds after Bo's exit. He pushed the button that collapsed the stairs on the 727 ramp, rolled the cargo pack to the top of the ramp/chute, attached the static-line ripcord to the ring provided on the left wall of the ramp and waited for his timer to flash. When it did he pulled a lever on the left wall of the ramp that opened a slot under the front wheels of the dolly supporting the cargo pack such that the surface of the dolly matched the slope of the cargo chute and the package slid gracefully down the chute into the dark void below.

Nicholson, who was wearing a full-up ASDS suit could

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immediately see the blue colored dot on his visor screen moving quickly rearward from the aircraft and he noted the three one second flashes of the blue dot that indicated a successful deployment. He announced over the net, “Good drop – Godspeed brothers.”

The CAPV-727 maintained course, speed and altitude; after all, to the rest of the world it was a scheduled commercial aircraft...

As I swung gently beneath my chute my visor displayed a red dot (Rob) about a mile and a half ahead of my location (center screen), a green dot (Bo) about a mile and a half behind me and a blue dot (the cargo) a couple of miles behind Bo. So we were all out and successfully and on our way. There was no moon but the starlight faintly illuminated the cloud deck far below us at fifteen thousand feet providing a surreal, almost unimaginable feeling of being suspended in an alien environment. The feeling became more intense as time elapsed. The clouds looked like a bed of dimly lit fluffy cotton candy into which we would eventually be enveloped. I grew more familiar with this phenomena with each mission and offset its weird effect by concentrating on thoughts that I seldom had time to ponder.

I had almost two hours and a lot to think about. First things first; the love of my life, my wife Ashleigh. When we met I was a test pilot testing High-speed Anti Radiation Missiles (HARM) variants, mostly for foreign allied aircraft. British, German, NATO, etc. She was a basic jet instructor at San Diego NAS flying T-38s. For me it was love at first sight – a beautiful five foot four blue eyed blonde jet flight instructor – what else could a guy ask for? Less than a year later we were married on the beach at White Bay, Jost Van Dyke – the most beautiful island in the British Virgin Islands.

Three months ago we finished our F/A-18 Hornet Squadron Commander tours aboard the USS *Carl Vinson* at the invitation of her Captain, Joe Garcia, the previous commander of the DEVGRU BAT – my Uncle Bo is the current commander. Ash and I had decided that we wanted to start a family. But things just didn’t turn out that way while she was employed as a Top Gun pursuit pilot

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and I was still involved in ASDS production, deployment and training. So we decided to put off the family thing for a while and go be fighter pilots – and it had been fun. We could have done another tour, but as she was recovering from her little incident in the South China Sea we decided to take the month's leave we'd accumulated to vacation in Tahiti and then take assignments back in the States. So we rented one of those little huts out over the water and had the first real vacation alone since our honeymoon, sailing in the BVI after our wedding almost five years ago. We had two days left in paradise when I got a hand delivered message – no phones in our little hut – giving me a week to report to home base at El Centro NAF. At least we got to finish our vacation.

So I get back to my buddies at DEVGRU and we got all briefed up and trained for yet another trip down range to God knows where and she calls me day before yesterday from Miramar saying she just left the base doctor's office and she's pregnant! So at last I'm going to be a father – if I live through this mission *and* make it back to the real world.

Sometimes, when I have time to think - like now - I wonder what the hell I'm doing here. I left college with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering, a lot of flight time and a high level understanding of complex systems to become a test pilot for the Navy. I didn't even really know what a SEAL was, nor did I know that my uncle *was* one. I went to work for DEVGRU before I knew that it was previously SEAL Team VI, the tip of the special forces spear which became responsible for helping develop and test early high-tech weapon systems like ASDS for the Navy and then pushing them through the development cycle with defense companies like Texas Instruments, Lockheed and Boeing or government organizations like DARPA, JPL and Aerospace Corporation for deployment to all special forces organizations. I became the lead design/development/test person on the ASDS program and helped TI, the lead contractor on the program, get the system into production. ASDS became very successful during its first few missions and caused a lot of visibility at the top of the command chain. I was then told what DEVGRU really was and asked if I would like to become a permanent member at a top secret meeting in front of a group of government dignitaries which

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included the President. How could I say no? All I really wanted to do was fly and have fun. Since then I've endured extensive water, jungle and arctic training, all part of the grueling Navy SEAL BUD/S training – a six month plus *Basic Underwater Demolition / SEAL* training program designed to wash out all but the mentally and physically toughest trainees (damned near got me). Down range I've been shot at a lot and hit a few times, wasted a bunch of bad guys and blown up myriad stuff – I think I'm getting to like this life as a SEAL – that's scary!

My problem was that 'this life' was beginning to define my being – I'm becoming addicted to the rush and excitement of the mission work and the camaraderie and brotherhood of my team. Part of my problem was my upbringing. Growing up in a relatively safe and comfortable environment. Never really seeing or knowing evil. Never understanding that there existed in this world radical elements that hide behind women and children to do their evil deeds or drug lords who routinely slaughtered innocent people as well as their enemies. The satisfaction of bringing these assholes to their own brand of justice grew with each down range assignment. As did my dedication to my brothers and love of my country and family. The average person just can't relate to the things we see and do and the resulting personal pride and honor we feel in what we do when we do it well. But then there's the personal sacrifice we endure from the social isolation associated with belonging to one of the world's most clandestine organizations.

In the starlight, the cloud tops far below, I was cold but not uncomfortable. I seemed suspended in a time-warp. It was eerily quiet. Nothing was moving except a shroud puller occasionally making a minor course correction at the command of the ASDS' Automatic Landing System (ALS) which was programmed to land me within an imaginary two foot circle on top of a building somewhere in no-mans-land.

This would be my fourth ASDS mission through heavy clouds. You'd think I'd have enough faith in a system that I helped design to be completely relaxed – not so. A thirty second delay between jumps put us a little over a mile and a half apart so I

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couldn't see Rob's IR locator on his helmet in the thick cloud. All I could see was the little colored locator dots from the GPS system. If my system failed I might have no way of knowing for sure which part failed and whether or not I was still heading for the target. On this mission if I missed the target it literally meant a sure and very unpleasant death. This always caused a mild state of uneasiness until I broke through the clouds and once again acquired visual reference to the jumper in front of me – but tonight the uneasiness was a little more than mild. I think I know a little too much about how complex this system really is and I know where the hell we're headed. Rob doesn't have the detailed technical understanding of ASDS that I do – that's why I always honor his request to go first.

Then just before I broke out of the clouds, the little green x, representing the two foot landing circle pre-programmed into the ASDS, came into view at the top of my visor. I could see the target, or at least its location, on my facemask display. The tension evaporated, replaced with a feeling of mild elation, only to be gradually replaced by the apprehension which had subconsciously nagged me from the minute I was first briefed on the location of this mission – three days ago.

At the target everything went well. Rob was clear when I landed and I was clear when Bo touched down. Watching the barely visible cargo pack s-turn and then turn into the light wind for a soft landing never ceased to amaze me even though I designed and tested that part of the system and had watched it work many times. The large nine hundred pound cushioned canvas equipment canister made just a slight thump as it settled on the roof of the Ministry of National Defense of The People's Republic of (North) Korea (PRK) in the center of P'yong-song, twenty miles north of P'yong-yang, North Korea's capital city; deep in enemy territory...

Chapter Two

CIA Headquarters, Langley, Virginia

Sunday, May 6, 1990, 0230 Hrs Mission Local Time

“They’re down, situation nominal”, said CIA Director Bill Conroy. A nominal situation report (sitrep) meant everything was going according to plan – so far. Because we were in hostile territory our satellite communications were necessarily brief. The system used a very low power subcarrier-encoded spread spectrum technology, making detection extremely difficult, if not impossible. Still, we couldn’t be too careful. The stateside members of the secure network mission team included CIA Director Bill Conroy; Wayne Hawkins, the CIA’s nuclear weapons expert at Langley and prior manager of ORNL (Oak Ridge National Laboratory); President Bradley Stevens; Admiral George Bennington, Commander, JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command); and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Gerald Sterett. All, except Stevens were gathered in the secure briefing room at CIA Headquarters, Langley, Virginia. The President had a secure video link in his secure briefing facility in the basement of the White House.

The fourth member of our down range mission team was an

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in-country CIA agent named Chen Duong-Ku. This in-country four man team and the four gathered at CIA, Langley plus the President were the only team members fully knowledgeable of the details of this mission. All others have only 'compartmental knowledge' – only the information necessary for them to successfully accomplish their part of the mission. All information regarding the mission was classified Top Secret.

Since Duong was somehow pronounced sort of like Young, we called him Young-Ku as did his fellow agents. Young-Ku was a twenty six year old Olympic wrestler. His parents had inherited a nice restaurant just prior to the Korean War in the early fifties and were very well to do by North Korean standards. They had been subversively anti-communist before, during and after the conflict. After the communist take-over they helped their son develop an occupation that allowed world-wide travel. International athletic competition was a highly visible well compensated occupation in North Korea as it was in all communist countries.

As Young-Ku gained athletic stature in the world circuit as a champion wrestler, he was approached by the PR(N)K (Peoples Republic of (North) Korea) government to take on a second job. Young-Ku then became an agent of North Korea's RGB (Reconnaissance General Bureau – the CIA of the PRK). On his third mission, a trip to Kazakhstan while competing in an international wrestling meet, he was approached by a local CIA agent and gladly signed up as a double agent for the U.S. His parents were delighted when he became an 'agent of the west', and they were, of course, sworn to secrecy by Young-Ku. Abdu Kamali, the CIA agent who recruited Young-Ku in Kazakhstan, was also an in-country double agent working for the Kazakhstan Intelligence Arm of the KGB (small world).

As the future of Kazakhstan was slowly turning toward independence while the Soviet Union crumbled as a result of the economic pressures from the cold war, it discovered that it's inventory of 1,410 nuclear warheads actually totaled 1,414. After an exhaustive search through the documentation, the responsible agency discovered that they had received an undocumented shipment of four MIRV (Multiple Independently-targetable Reentry Vehicle) nuclear warheads with serial numbers not

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matching any of the Russian documentation. These individual warheads, when disconnected from the MIRV guidance subsystem, weighed just under three hundred pounds each. Each warhead had the destructive power of just over ten times that of *Fat Man*, the plutonium bomb dropped on Nagasaki Japan on August 9, 1945.

This discovery was made after reconciliation of inventories with mother Russia at the resumption of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty negotiations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. in 1985. As time went by Kazakhstan found itself facing a number of dilemmas. At the top of the list were: How to economically survive their rapidly approaching independence and what to do with the four nuclear warheads that nobody knew they had. After much wringing of hands and gnashing of teeth they decided on the obvious solution; sell the nukes to the highest bidder. Their first potential customer was the North Korean RGB.

The PRK had barely enough money to maintain basic, fundamental governance, in fact thousands (some say millions) of their citizens had starved to death and millions more were barely surviving. And yet their military budget held funds earmarked for ‘buying technology’ – like nuclear weapons. Their baseline strategic defense plan called for three nuclear warheads and the necessary delivery systems for retaliation to a South Korean or Japanese attack. This was their need and they would push hard in negotiations to buy these three warheads – and they succeeded.

Fortunately for us, one of our CIA double agents acting as an agent for Iraq was able to buy the fourth warhead without the PRK’s knowledge that the fourth unit even existed – after all, they were a very poor country and had need for only three in their defense planning. Kazakhstan negotiated with North Korea for the three units until they had reached their financial limit and then more than doubled their income by selling the last unit to Iraq – they thought. The total sale netted Kazakhstan a little over the equivalent of nine hundred million dollars U.S., a nice financial shot in the arm for an emerging nation.

Using the single warhead procured from Kazakhstan, Wayne Hawkins and his team at Langley spent a month designing and building three fake nuclear cores – the part of the warhead that

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causes the nuclear explosion. These cores looked and weighed exactly the same as the real ones – about the size of a small grapefruit. They even gave off the same level of residual plutonium radiation. This mission was to covertly substitute the fake cores for the real ones in the three North Korean warheads thus rendering them nuclear duds – they would still explode but do minimal, non nuclear, damage.

After listening to the details of the infil (infiltration), Stephens said, “Ok gentlemen, let’s stay close to our secure comms and we’ll reconvene as necessary when we get updates. So far everything looks good . . . Stevens out.” Which meant the meeting was over, for now.

Chapter Three

PRK Ministry of Defense Building, P'yong-song

Sunday, May 6, 1990, 0230, Local Time

Master Chief Rob Curtis approached the roof access door and carefully knocked three times, waited two seconds and knocked once again. The door opened and a grinning Young-Ku greeted him in near perfect English. “You must be Chief Curtis. I’m Chen DOUNG-KU – just call me Young-Ku,” said the handsome five foot eight, muscle-bound young Korean. Rob handed him a pair of Infra-red goggles and after putting them on Young-Ku looked all around the roof top in amazement. “Can I keep these?” he asked.

“No way, man. This technology is top secret – if we’re compromised most of the tools we brought with us will have to be destroyed. Good to finally meet you Young-Ku. We’ve heard a lot of good stuff about your service – some day we’ll all have time to relax over a beer, but right now we need to get these nukes neutered. Lead the way,” whispered Curtis.

The nuclear warheads were currently stored in one of four limited access storage rooms in the basement of the building. The Deputy Chief of PRK Armament was preparing an assembly building and launch pad at the Chong-Fal Missile Site to mate the

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warheads to the nose of three Soviet R-17 VTO (Scud-D) missiles. Young-Ku was assigned temporary PRK leadership roles when not on a mission or wrestling in the world circuit. He was currently in charge of security at the PRK MOD Building.

Chong-Fal was located just north of the DMZ on the eastern coast of North Korea. The assembly building would be complete within weeks, at which time the warheads would be transported to that site. The Scuds had the necessary range to cover all of South Korea and eighty percent of Japan. A later model missile was promised that would include the rest of Japan and Taiwan in the kill radius.

One of the rooms in the basement was currently not in use. Young-Ku had reprogrammed the combination lock on that door so that our team could work nights in the warhead storage room and sleep days in the unused room with the reprogrammed lock. Master Chief Curtis had been to the CIA nuke school and was familiar with all Soviet and Chinese nuclear warheads. He also spent the last month working with Wayne Hawkins and his team creating and installing one of the fake nuclear cores into the identical warhead obtained by the CIA agent masquerading as an Iraqi agent. Replacing a core was a two man job using special equipment to disassemble, replace the core, and reassemble the warhead. The third man was necessary to assist with the timely movement of equipment from the roof down nine flights of stairs and between rooms in the basement twice a day to facilitate the swap and then to stand guard over the hallway, stairs and freight elevator during the swap. Also, the three SEALs planned to rotate in the close up core swap activity to minimize exposure to radiation even though Hawkins had assured them that the protective gear they brought with them, a large part of the 900 pound payload, would be entirely adequate.

Young-Ku would assist in the first night's transportation of equipment, recon of the warhead storage room and a dry run on the ingress, cleanup and egress operations to be executed for each core swap over the next three nights. After this first night the team wouldn't see him until the last swap was complete – unless there were problems.

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“Okay guys, it’s been a long night already and we’ve still got a good three hours to go. First we’ve got to get everything into the home room then do a dry run into and out of the shop,” whispered Captain Bo Jameson, “let’s get a move on!” ‘Home’ and ‘Shop’ were the names they had chosen for the room they would live in and the room (lab) in which the warheads were stored, respectfully.

* * * *

Bo felt a gentle vibration from his watch. A quick look told him it was already 1930 hrs local time (7:30 p.m.) He felt as if he’d slept only twenty minutes when in fact they’d slept for a little over nine hours. He rolled over and shook my shoulder, “Up & at ‘em Sam, it’s 1930 already.”

I’d had a restless sleep for about the last hour and was ready to get moving. Rob was already up getting things ready for the night’s effort. The Chinese self-inflating mattresses we used were amazingly comfortable.

Chapter Four

PRK Ministry of Defense Building, P'yong-song

Monday, May 7, 1990, 2130 hrs, Local Time

We successfully made the transfer of equipment from home to shop, had set up the disassembly holding fixture, placed the first warhead securely in the fixture, a three man job, and were ready to begin the core swap. The really important part of this operation was being sure the warhead didn't inadvertently fall. The Russians designed this warhead for an aerial detonation at twelve thousand feet for maximum area of destruction on the ground. They used an accelerometer to arm the warhead when the post-launch acceleration reached ten g's and a barometric altimeter to detonate it when it reached twelve thousand feet directly above the target. Dropping the unit on a concrete floor could actually arm the warhead leaving only the altimeter to keep the city of P'yong-song, including us, from vaporizing.

Disassembly and reassembly were relatively easy from a mechanical perspective, but electronically it was quite complex. The procedure had to be followed very carefully. A wrong move in this area could cause problems ranging anywhere from making the bomb totally useless to generating a mushroom cloud much larger than the one at Hiroshima. Rob and I handled the first swap in five

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and a half hours. The total time for the swap including move in, set up, tear down and move out was seven hours and fifteen minutes. We made sure the room looked exactly like the pictures we took during the dry run the first night. Rob and Bo were slated for the second core swap tomorrow night - but for now food and sleep were the order of business. So far all was well. . .

0715 hrs the next day, Home Room

We had just finished dinner - or was it breakfast, didn't matter, our Russian MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat) were all the same - when we heard two loud raps on our little hideaway door, followed two seconds later by a single loud rap. I grabbed my Glock and approached the door. I knocked softly once and received two soft knocks two seconds later. I carefully opened the door and saw the smiling face of Young-Ku. I let him in.

“A minor glitch in our plans has occurred,” said Young-Ku with a more serious look on his face. “Two technicians will arrive from the Chong-Fal Missile Site this afternoon at around 1300. They will re-examine the warheads; weight, dimensions, etc. so the marriage with the Scud-D missiles will go without surprise. It should only take a few hours. The message we received indicated that if there were no foreseen mating problems the warheads would be shipped to Chong-Fal next weekend – the site preparation is almost two weeks ahead of schedule. I brought you a receiver for the infrared AV (Audio/Video) bug I just planted in the Lab. The camera is in the ceiling vent near the far left corner of the room.. This afternoon you might choose to have the third man monitor their activity so you'll be sure when they leave and know what to expect. When they're gone and you re-enter the room, be sure to take a new set of pictures so you can restore the room to look exactly as they left it. I will report this to Home Base (Washington D.C.) tomorrow morning.”

Well there you go – nothing ever goes as planned in la-la land. Hope to hell one of those PRK idiots doesn't drop a warhead. I'd hate to depend on a Russian made altimeter to keep me here on earth a while longer.