Dawn's Early Light

By

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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 over 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 meter – zero point two mach faster than her F-18C Hornet would do in low level flight but still a little slower than the Soviet missile on her tail.

"Commander that missile is a hundred feet behind you and gaining slowly – your last flares ignited behind it!" yelled Gator Two, McKensie's wingman. She dove a little steeper, the water was approaching fast, 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. Her hand had just reached the ejection handle when she heard Gator Two yell: "EJECT, EJECT, EJECT" - just before the missile flew up her starboard engine exhaust 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 to pretty much the entire South China Sea. The U.S., 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 – 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 1.5 seconds later when the shuttle released the aircraft now 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 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 (control of) to 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 flights 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 seen. "*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 - 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 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, imaging infrared seeker, air-to-ground (or tank, or ship) missiles – 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 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. 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, a little less than a mile from the boat she realized that it had no guns - then she saw three figures emerge from the aft cabin each holding a shoulder mounted weapon.

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

She had two choices; she could launch a Maverick which she had armed on the way down and take out the boat which would 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 (after-burners pump raw gas into the final compressor stage of each engine giving the aircraft an enormous boost in power and speed). The F/A-18 could reach mach 1.8 in about four and a half seconds in level flight at sea level. 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 missile that they were firing at her. She chose the run like hell option. 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 – then get the boat. We're not gonna leave even an oil slick out here. I'm gonna fire counter measures - call the hit quickly!."

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 and 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 two seconds between

launches to keep the missiles from shooting each other down. So when Gator Three called the explosion of the first missile it would be difficult to predict what the second missile would do. The 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.

Two seconds 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. The explosion was horrific and she immediately felt severe pain in her right thigh and buttock. Simultaneously she heard "EJECT, EJECT, EJECT" from Gator Two. So she did.

As she 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 then go take 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."

"Two, I'm also sending one now – that'll leave us with one 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 skirmish."

As Commander Ashleigh McKensie bobbed in the South China Sea she realized she was bleeding badly from the eight inch gash in her right thigh. The shrapnel 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 repellant 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 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 using an Automatic Landing System (ALS) to traverse up to sixty nautical miles from an aircraft at an altitude of up to forty five thousand feet to a target on the ground – each operator landing on a pre-programmed spot. In addition to the hi-tech parachute, the system consisted of a pressure suit with oxygen, a chest-pack computer with battery belt, a helmet with integrated

GPS receiver, classified infra-red (IR) night vision, a GPS driven location system that displayed the location of each member of the team, an intra-team secure communication system and a satellite communication system allowing secure communications to friendly forces anywhere in the world. Upon landing, the parachute and pressure suit could be abandoned, leaving the rest of the system completely operational with eighty hours of battery life remaining. 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 the 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 fifteen hundred 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 don't 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 1983 until 1987 this team was known as Seal Team Six. When formed there were only two other SEAL teams, one and two. Its

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

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 U.S. services. Bo joined the group as a three tour veteran A6 Intruder pilot in Viet Nam. Rob was the previous commander of SEAL Team Four. He and his team joined up with ours on several 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.

Bo Jameson was about six two, lean and rugged with sandy hair and intense blue eyes – didn't smile much. 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. 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-5E Tiger IIs and F/A-18 Hornets at the Navy Fighter Weapons School called Top Gun.

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 facemask 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 immediately see the blue colored dot on his facemask 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, it was a scheduled commercial aircraft headed for Beijing. . .

As I swung gently beneath my chute I could see a red dot (Rob) about a mile and a half ahead of my location (at the center of the screen), a green dot (Bo) about a mile and a half behind me and a blue dot 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 below us at fifteen thousand feet providing a surreal, almost unimaginable feeling of being suspended in an alien environment that became more intense as time elapsed. The clouds looked like a bed of dimly lit fluffy cotton candy into which we would eventually be consumed. I grew more familiar with this phenomenon with each mission and offset its weird effect by concentrating on thoughts that I seldom had time to engage.

I had almost two hours and a lot to think about: First things first; the love of my life, my wife Ashleigh. 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 Gold Team – My Uncle Bo is the current commander. We 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 and I was still involved in ASDS production and training. So we decided to put off the family thing for a while and go be fighter pilots – and it'd been fun. We could have done another tour, but after she had recovered 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. We had two days left in paradise when I got a hand delivered message – no phones in those little huts – giving me a week to report to home base in El Centro. At least we got to finish our vacation.

So I get back to my buddies at DEVGRU and we get all briefed and trained up for this down range mission to who 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 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 formally SEAL Team VI, the tip of the special forces spear which became responsible for helping develop and test early high-tech weapon systems for the Navy and then pushing them through the development cycle with defense companies like Texas Instruments and Lockheed or government organizations like DARPA, JPL or 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 included the President. How could I say no? All I really wanted to do was fly and have fun. Since then I've endured jungle and arctic training, all part of the grueling Navy SEAL BUD/S training – a six month B*asic* U*nderwater* D*emolition* / S*EAL* training program designed to wash out all but the mentally and physically toughest trainees. 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.

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.

In the starlight I could still see the cloud tops far below. I was cold but not uncomfortable. I seemed to be suspended in a time-warp. It was eerily quiet and 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 mission through heavy clouds. You'd think I'd have enough faith in a system that I helped design

and develop 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 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. 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 system 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 nagged me from the minute I was first briefed on location of this mission - yesterday.

At the target everything went well. Rob was clear when I landed and I was clear when Bo touched down. Watching the 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. The barely visible nine hundred pounds of equipment 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 meant everything was going according to plan – so far. Because they were in hostile territory their satellite communications were necessarily brief. The system used very low power sub carrier-encoded spread spectrum technology, making detection extremely difficult, if not impossible. Still, they 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 the Pentagon. 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 in-country CIA agent named Chen Duong-Ku. 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 Korean standards. They had been subversively anti-communist during the conflict and after the communist take-over they helped their son develop an occupation that allowed world-wide travel. Highly visible international athletic competition was a 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 had slowly turned 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 matching any on 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 one hundred 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, but 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 eight hundred million dollars U.S., a nice shot in the arm for an emerging nation.

Using the 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 causes the nuclear explosion. These cores looked and weighed exactly the same as the real ones – about the size of a large grapefruit. They even gave off the same level of residual 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, Stephens said, “Ok gentlemen, let’s stay close to our secure comms and we’ll reconvene as 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 Duong-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 stuff we brought with us will have to be destroyed. Glad 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 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

warheads to the nose of three Soviet R-17 VTO (Scud-D) missiles. While he was away Young-Ku, who floated into temporary PRK leadership roles when not on a mission or wrestling in the world circuit, was put 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 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 intelligence 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 during the swap and then to stand guard 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.

"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 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 7:30 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

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. . .

0730 hrs the next day, Home Room

We had just finished dinner - or was it breakfast, didn't matter, our Russian MREs (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 to see 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.. Tomorrow 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.

Chapter Five

PRK Ministry of Defense Building, P'yong-song
Tuesday, May 8, 1990, 1815 hrs, Local Time

Bo and Rob slept and since I was the third man tonight I woke at 1300 and watched the two commie technicians verify all the interface data they came to get using the warhead we "converted" last night. The A/V snooper Young-Ku placed in the lab worked great. I didn't speak Korean so I had no idea what they were talking about but they seemed to be doing what Young-Ku said they would.

They had just finished what they had come for and were in the process of leaving when I noticed they had left an oblong black case of some sort on the corner of the work bench. Just peachy! Now we've got another anomaly. Was leaving the case an accident or a reason to return later in the evening to retrieve it? I felt like opening the door and yelling: "Hey dumb-fucks, you left something behind." Yeah, I know, that would make me dumber than them. Did they know or suspect we were here? This meant my guard duty tonight was going to be tense, to say the least.

The alarm sounded on Bo's watch and Bo and Rob woke and joined me at the laptop. "Are they done yet?" Rob asked.

I responded, "Yeah, they're gone – now we've got another fucking problem. They left something behind.

"Looks like a vernier caliper case. Can you zoom in on it?" asked Bo.

"I can zoom, but I have no angle control and it's not in the center of the field of view so th-i-i-i-s is about as close as I can get. I think I can read the embossed label on the case, yeah . .looks like 'Chicago'. They're the same Chinese made tools you can buy in the States."

Bo stared at the screen deep in thought. This was the most dangerous and important mission of his career. Capture meant certain imprisonment and probable torture and death of his team, but the political implications could cause World War III. The North Koreans were not only hostile toward the U.S. and its allies, especially South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, they were totally unpredictable in their actions and reactions. The country's "Dear Father", Kim Il-Sung, was a narcissistic, megalomaniac hell bent on the PRK becoming a nuclear power and standing firmly against South Korea, Japan, the U.S. and most of the rest of the free world.

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The team had spent a day and a half with Admiral George Bennington, Commander of JSOC, William Conroy, Director of the CIA and various experts and specialists in their respective organizations analyzing potential threats and developing a decision tree that best suited the implicit absence of the U.S. in any conceived outcome of this mission. We were disguised as Russians. Rob was fluent in Russian and Bo and I had a (slow) conversational grasp of it. After our arrival Young-Ku incinerated all of our infil equipment including the expensive ASDS systems, parachutes and all. The gear we had left was made in either Russia or China. Our weapons were Russian AK-47s, our clothes were Russian and even the air mattresses we slept on were made in China. We carried cyanide pills and hybrid high explosive thermite grenades with Russian made timers adjustable from one to five minutes – just

enough time to take the edge off of life before the big-bang. If we made the wrong decision we would simply disappear into the ashes of the PRK Ministry of Defense building. The Ruskies would take the fall.

After the two day session with Bennington and Conroy, et al, we met with President Stevens and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Sterrett. Stevens - a past Navy SEAL, JSOC Commander, CIA Director and Senator from Texas - and Sterrett, also a past SEAL and JSOC Commander reviewed the mission plan and decision tree. With a few suggested changes the mission was approved and we were each asked separately if we wished to not participate.

"Master Chief Curtis?" the president asked.

"I'm in, sir," replied Rob Curtis.

"I'm in also, sir," I replied before the president had a chance to ask.

"We're all in, sir – we discussed this last night." Bo said, glaring at me sideways for interrupting the president.

"Very well then gentlemen, Godspeed and good hunting. And by the way, we have assets in the PRK other than Young-Ku. They are not aware of this mission nor any of the details leading to its requirement. But if needed we can rely on these assets to assist. Young-Ku is aware of this possibility so keep him in the loop on any deviations to plan."

Admiral Sterrett then reminded us of what of the mission's 'Top Secret Compartmentalized Need to Know' classification meant. Basically it meant that there were only seven of us that knew all of the mission data and objectives. All the rest knew only the details necessary to get their part of the job done and absolutely nothing additional.

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Every mission gets fucked up by Murphy's law, which in it's short form states: 'if anything can go wrong, it will'. Well Murphy's

here in his finest form. The implications of this piece of left behind equipment are not good. This was something obviously not envisioned in our pre-mission planning.

There were three possible outcomes to this little problem:

1. The guy who left the case could return to get it. He probably wouldn't have access to the building at night so he would most likely return in the morning. *Should we chance that*?

2. If the case was empty or if he didn't need the caliper right away he might not bother to return at all. He could have someone here hold it for him until he returned to transfer the warheads to Chong-Fal next week. *Is it empty*?

3. If, on the other hand the technician did have access to the building at night and returned to the lab (shop) to retrieve the caliper – that was a big problem for us. We'd have to play it safe and call off tonight's core swap - couldn't take the chance. This would put a crinkle in the exfil support logistics which were set for a night exit this Thursday and we'd be a day late.

The only capability we had to communicate with the outside world was our satellite phone. Bo climbed the stairs and stepped out onto the roof every morning just before sunrise at 0500 local time which is 1300 (yesterday) Miramar time. Satellite phones don't work in large buildings. This was also the only way we could communicate with Young-Ku. Young-Ku checked in with Miramar at 0600 every day so any changes in plans could be communicated to him then. His phone was kept in his 'office', a small closet in the basement of his family's restaurant behind the wine cellar. If he was caught with a CIA satellite phone he'd be shot within twenty four hours, world class athlete or not. One more day in this God-awful rat hole!

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So we used the time to get our gear straightened out, compose a brief message for tomorrow morning's report and discuss our egress

plan – looking for contingencies we hadn't envisioned like the one we had just encountered. After we'd gotten everything rearranged, sorted our gear into take and leave to be destroyed piles and spent a half hour refining our exfil plan, Bo woke up his lap top to look carefully at the shop for any other clues as to what was going on.

"Holy shit!" he muttered, "the fucking caliper's gone! What the hell's going on here?"

Sure enough the image on the laptop was zoomed in on the work bench just like it had been when we last looked at it four hours ago – no caliper case.

The micro miniature video bug was motion activated to conserve power and disc space on the recorder - Bo's laptop. It remained active for two minutes after its last detected motion. Bo didn't have to back up very far to find the culprit - Young-Ku! He had snuck in, retrieved the case and left.

Just as Bo was scrutinizing the time-stamp frame by frame we heard two knocks on our door followed two seconds later by a single knock. Glock in hand, I knocked once and before Young-Ku responded Bo said, "It's him, go ahead and open the door."

This young Korean CIA Agent who didn't look a day over eighteen years old and probably had one of the most dangerous jobs in the PRK, never quit smiling. At the other end of that spectrum Captain Bo Jameson, my uncle, never smiled until on his way home from a successful down range assignment. As Commander of Gold Team DEVGRU (the name given SEAL Team VI in 1987 to allow interface with the outside world; contractors, other military units, etc., without exposing the highly classified SEAL Team) he rarely took down range missions unless tagged by 'Higher' (up). 'Higher' meant Commander, JSOC or above.

The smiling Korean double agent told us that at dinner one of the technicians had mentioned that he'd left a tool in the lab and Young-Ku had promised he'd retrieve it for him before he left for Chong-Fal in the morning. He had waited until he was sure the building was empty before retrieving the caliper.

Then he asked, "Do you think you have enough time to complete tonight's core swap?

Bo replied, "yeah, I think so. Could you stay for a half hour and help us set up? Sam's on guard tonight – if we're not finished by 0500 he can handle the report to Langley. I don't think we'll have a problem with that. Thanks for handling this for us brother – that A/V bug is a lifesaver."

"Japanese technology - probably a U.S. copy. I brought a new one with a fresh battery. I'll swap it out and test it first thing," replied Young-Ku with an even bigger smile than usual. It occurred to me that maybe he was born with a built-in smile and I had just seen his real smile for the first time. Smile or no smile, for a CIA guy he was a damned good troop.

The second core swap went without a hitch. They got the swap completed before 0500 and I succeeded in not falling asleep while standing guard over our little soiree.

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The next day was uneventful. We got a great day's sleep. Bo and I actually made the last core swap that night without having to rely on our resident nuclear warhead expert, Master Chief Robin Curtis. We did, however get him to look over the job after we'd finished. Bo made the 0500 call into home base, we ate the last of our Russian MREs (God-awful), and retired for a good day's sleep before the most dangerous part of this mission – gettin' the hell out of the PRK – alive!#